

# DEVELOPMENT ADVOCATE PAKISTAN

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**DEVELOPMENT ADVOCATE**  
**PAKISTAN**



*Pakistan*



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*Development Advocate Pakistan* provides a platform for the exchange of ideas on key development issues and challenges in Pakistan. Focusing on a specific development theme in each edition, this quarterly publication fosters public discourse and presents varying perspectives from civil society, academia, government and development partners. The publication makes an explicit effort to include the voices of women and youth in the ongoing discourse. A combination of analysis and public opinion articles promote and inform debate on development ideas while presenting up-to-date information.

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# DEVELOPMENT ADVOCATE PAKISTAN

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5 GENDER  
EQUALITY



## Empowering *our* Women

In Pakistan, women account for almost 49 percent of the population. But while the gap between the number of men and women is small, the Global Gender Gap index—which captures the gap between men and women across a wide variety of socio-economic categories—placed Pakistan at 143 out of 144 countries in 2017. This means that there is a significant and broad unequal distribution of opportunities and resources between men and women. Though the recent trend is unchanged as the country stood at 143 in 2016 as well, it need not remain so, as national demographics and a host of factors, including education, employment, health and societal dynamics, are all drivers to reduce inequality and increase women's empowerment.

Education is the foundation upon which change is built. And change has the power to transform mindsets and create new dimensions of existence. A recent study<sup>1</sup> of 60 countries estimated that the economic loss from not educating girls at the same level as boys totals USD 90 billion. Indeed, Pakistan has shown progress on closing the gender gaps in basic literacy, improving from a global rank of 138 in 2016, to 127 in 2017, although the ranking for equality in primary and secondary enrolment ranks remained the same for both years, at 127 and 134, respectively.

If educating women is an important first step, the second would be translation of that education, via employment. Employment enables women to effectively channel their capacities and allows them to rise to their full potential.

At present, one out of every four women participate in the labor force in Pakistan. However, a majority of these are working in low paying, low-quality and low-security jobs, often under-appreciated and unaware of their rights. Within this female workforce, a large fragment of women exist in the 'informal sector'. At the moment, there exist 12 million home-based women workers in Pakistan, out of which 8.5 million are concentrated in rural areas. These home-based workers toil long hours at the cost of their health, and have little access to, and knowledge of the market. Their contribution to the economy and society continues to be unrecognized in national statistics and they have no minimum wage or health benefits.

There is also a need to make a significant impetus to improve working conditions. Such inequalities further widen labor inequality. Including gender sensitive budgeting in all fiscal policies is a requisite step in ensuring eradication of this inequality and promoting sustained economic development. Moreover, national policies legislating legal protection for these workers is also imperative. Eliminating gender gaps in economic participation can bring increases in per capita income, according to the UN, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund.

Providing and promoting equal opportunities is also an area that can feed into socio-economic empowerment and gender equality for women. This can be achieved through ensuring laws are non-discriminatory towards women and that policies and systems are pro-women. This can include quota systems for women, adequate and affordable childcare facilities, pro-family schemes, increasing social entrepreneurship opportunities, etc. Pakistan has important and good examples: the Benazir Income Support Programme, a social cash transfer programme with female leadership since its inception, is an internationally recognized example of progress in the advancement of poor women. Likewise, the Punjab government's 'Women on Wheels' Program works to remove a

significant barrier to women's economic and social empowerment—an overwhelming shortage of safe transport—by creating conditions where women can ride motorcycles without suffering stigma.

Pakistan continues to rank at 143 on economic participation and opportunity. In terms of estimated earned income, the male to female ratio has improved from 0.23 in 2016, to 0.19 in 2017. However, women continue to be paid less on similar positions and titles, with the country's ranking deteriorating from 114 to 115 in 2017.

This brings to another important question: the prevalence of women in leadership roles. Pakistan does appear to be making steady progress in this regard. For instance, the Punjab Fair Representation of Women Act 2014 mandates up to 33 percent of women in Boards and Committees of six statutory institutions and entities, including companies. This improves their management as women are generally less likely to engage in hasty 'risk-taking' decision making and instead, focus on inclusion, consensus, long-term sustainability and compassion. With the growing increase in social enterprises owned or led by women, they are discovering new opportunities to lead and govern. At the moment, 43 percent of social enterprises focus on women's empowerment in Pakistan, and 20 percent are completely led by women. These numbers delineate a promising trend towards women becoming leaders and initiators of change.

A country cannot witness any form of development unless its political sphere is stable and strong. Women constitute only one-fifth of parliamentary seats worldwide. Pakistan's rank in terms of political empowerment has dropped to 95 from 90 (in 2016). While women's representation at the federal level remains at 7.6 percent (2013-14), there is, however, a promising upward trend in the Civil Service, with women recruitment increasing from 9 percent in the year 2000, to 45 percent in 2015.

The key question is, if women are not included in the national development discourse, then how can policies and laws originating from this discourse be gender sensitive? Inclusivity and gender equality must not only be on paper, but in fact, also in practice. Therefore it is women's empowerment that holds the key to gender equality. Measures to ensure women's empowerment should include recognizing women's unpaid care and domestic work, bridging gender pay gaps and addressing gender gaps in leadership.

What really is required, is unity. More now than ever, integration of each member of humanity into all aspects of development is crucial to move forward. The world recognized in Agenda 2030 through the Sustainable Development Goals, that a more inclusive and integrated approach is needed.

The global economy continues to struggle in order to generate growth that can enable a better life to all, and yet, women remain blocked from contributing their true potential. This is where gender targets and gender inclusive development frameworks can make a difference at the macro level. At the micro-level, easy and affordable access and availability to basic services such as education, health, transport and security are pre requisites, if gender parity is to be achieved through positive empowerment of women, in all socio-economic and political forums. For people throughout the world to meet these challenges requires there to be more strength and more diversity in economy and society. The approach must not be for each his/her own, but rather "all for one and one for all!"

1. Global Campaign for Education-US, "Educate Girls, Change the World." Available at <http://campaignforeducationusa.org/topic/detail/whats-happening-with-girls-education>

## Gender Equality and Sustainable Development

**Note: The main analysis has been written with inputs from Aisha Mukhtar (Program Lead - Violence Against Women, Governance and Human Rights, UNWomen Pakistan).**

Comprised of 17 goals, 169 targets and 232 indicators, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were adopted by 193 Member States to tackle a broad spectrum of challenges. These challenges revolved around addressing environmental issues such as climate change, eradicating poverty and eliminating inequalities, and, enabling peace and sustaining justice. An important cross-cutting theme that stringed the goals together was their commitment towards achieving gender equality and women empowerment. Gender equality is an enabler and accelerator for all the SDGs. The gender-responsive implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development offers an opportunity to achieve not only SDG 5 (gender equality), but to contribute to progress on all 17 SDGs (Table 1).

The foundations laid from previous global commitments to gender equality set the basis for the framework of the SDGs (Table 2). The SDGs also target 'structural gender inequalities', which the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) failed to address. They therefore, provide a more robust framework for achieving gender equality and in particular, for combating gender based violence. One thing is clear: the rights of women will only be truly upheld if they are part of a bigger effort aimed to protect the planet. This would mean that their empowerment be incorporated into all sectors and all facets of development. And in the end, development can only be a sustainable construct if the benefits it yields add on equally to both women and men.

### Gender Equality and Women Empowerment

#### At the Global Level

Despite several global commitments and the adoption of the SDGs, gender inequalities continue to persist. *Gender inequality* is a result of unequal power distribution

between women and men, exacerbated by ongoing discrimination, weaknesses in laws, policies and institutions, and social relations that normalize inequality. *Gender equality*, on the other hand, calls for equal opportunities, rights and responsibilities for women and men, girls and boys.

Empowering women is an economic and social imperative. Of the 72 million children of primary-school age still excluded from school systems, two-thirds are girls. Of all the Millennium Development Goals, the one where least success was achieved was on maternal health. Each year, between 10 and 15 million women suffer long-term disability due to complications during pregnancy or childbirth. Only 18 percent of the seats in respective national parliaments are held by women. And throughout the world, too many women live in fear of violence. While there exist policies, legal frameworks and justice systems, the fact that gender based economic and social inequalities still persist, reflect that they are inadequate or weakly implemented.

Promoting gender equality is vital for creating a prosperous, safe, and peaceful world, where women have better access to health services, to education, to economic growth. As a result, economies flourish and societies are more peaceful. By contrast, where women and girls are treated as inferior, a vicious circle of limited education, poor employment opportunities, ill health, forced marriages and frequent violence and exploitation can be established and perpetuated. Focusing more support on girls offers an opportunity to replace that vicious cycle with a virtuous one that puts women at the heart of their families and their communities. Investing in women promises long-term social and economic benefits at the individual level, as well as at the global level. For instance, women who are educated will have the skills to make better decisions that will subsequently impact upon their ability to lift their families and their communities out of poverty.

### Pakistan: Factors and Challenges for Women Empowerment

Over the past several years, the country has witnessed tremendous improvement in the way its women have been able to showcase their competencies and intellect, and set new horizons to accomplish. Women's access to quality education and health services is a fundamental prerequisite for not just women empowerment, but in fact, overall development. Statistical trends delineate that women in Pakistan now have longer life expectancies, improved maternal health with a decline in maternal mortality, greater access to reproductive care and better education prospects. These advancements signify Pakistan's growing commitment towards women empowerment and increased efforts towards enhancing and channelizing their capacities.

Having said that, the global gender gap index-which tries to capture the gap between men and women across a wide variety of socio-economic categories-placed Pakistan at 143 out of 144 countries in 2017.<sup>1</sup> Pakistan bears a score of 0.726 in the Gender Development Index, which places Pakistan just right above Afghanistan, which has a score of 0.600, and right below India which has a score of 0.795 (Table 3).<sup>2</sup> This score delineates that Pakistan falls at the bottom spectrum when it comes to gender disparity.

National demographics and a host of factors, including education, employment, health and societal dynamics, that are discussed in following sections, are all part and parcel to this situation.

### Health

Several indicators for women's health have seen an upward trend in the past two decades. Female life expectancy has increased from 65 years in 2000, to 68 years in 2013, fertility rate has declined from 4.5 to 3.2 between 2000 and 2013, and the maternal mortality rate has also declined

1. World Economic Forum (2017), "Global gender gap report 2017." Available at [http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF\\_GGGR\\_2017.pdf](http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2017.pdf)

2. UNDP (2015), "Human Development Report 2015." Available at [http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/2015\\_human\\_development\\_report.pdf](http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/2015_human_development_report.pdf)

**Table 1: Gender Relevant SDG Goals**

SDG Goals	Gender Relevant Indicator
<p><b>Goal 1.</b> End poverty in all its forms, everywhere</p>	<p><b>1.1:</b> Eradicate extreme poverty for all; <b>1.2:</b> Reduce at least by half the proportion of men, women and children of all ages living in poverty; <b>1.3:</b> Implement nationally appropriate social protection systems and measures for all; <b>1.4:</b> Ensure that all men and women, in particular the poor and the vulnerable, have equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to basic services, ownership and control over land and other forms of property, inheritance, natural resources, appropriate new technology and financial services</p>
<p><b>Goal 2.</b> End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture</p>	<p><b>2.1:</b> End hunger and ensure access by all; <b>2.2:</b> End all forms of malnutrition... and address the nutritional needs of adolescent girls, pregnant and lactating women; <b>2.3:</b> Double the agricultural productivity and incomes of small-scale food producers, in particular women</p>
<p><b>Goal 3.</b> Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all, at all ages</p>	<p><b>3.1:</b> Reduce global maternal mortality; <b>3.2:</b> Reduce neonatal mortality; <b>3.3:</b> End the epidemics of AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria and neglected tropical diseases and combat hepatitis, water-borne diseases and other communicable diseases; <b>3.4:</b> Reduce by one third, premature mortality from non-communicable diseases; <b>3.7:</b> Ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health-care services</p>
<p><b>Goal 4.</b> Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all</p>	<p><b>4.1:</b> Ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education; <b>4.2:</b> Ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education; <b>4.3:</b> Ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university; <b>4.4:</b> Substantially increase the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment; <b>4.5:</b> Eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education; <b>4.6:</b> Ensure that all youth and a substantial proportion of adults, both men and women, achieve literacy and numeracy; <b>4.7:</b> Ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development; <b>4.a:</b> Build and upgrade education facilities that are child, disability and gender sensitive and provide safe, non-violent, inclusive and effective learning environments for all</p>
<p><b>Goal 5.</b> Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls</p>	<p><b>5.1:</b> End all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere; <b>5.2:</b> Eliminate all forms of violence against all women; <b>5.3:</b> Eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation; <b>5.4:</b> Recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work; <b>5.5:</b> Ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making; <b>5.6:</b> Ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights; <b>5.a:</b> Undertake reforms to give women equal rights; <b>5.b:</b> Enhance the use of enabling technology to promote the empowerment of women; <b>5.c:</b> Adopt and strengthen sound policies and enforceable legislation for the promotion of gender equality</p>
<p><b>Goal 8.</b> Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full productive employment and decent work for all</p>	<p><b>8.3:</b> Promote development-oriented policies that support productive activities, decent job creation, entrepreneurship, creativity and innovation, and encourage the formalization and growth of micro-, small- and medium-sized enterprises, including through access to financial services; <b>8.5:</b> Achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all; <b>8.6:</b> Substantially reduce the proportion of youth not in employment, education or training; <b>8.7:</b> Take immediate and effective measures to eradicate forced labor, end modern slavery and human trafficking and secure the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labor; <b>8.8:</b> Protect labor rights and promote safe and secure working environments for all; <b>8.10:</b> Strengthen the capacity of domestic financial institutions to encourage and expand access to banking, insurance and financial services for all</p>
<p><b>Goal 10.</b> Reduce inequalities within and among countries</p>	<p><b>10.2:</b> Empower and promote the social, economic and political inclusion of all; <b>10.3:</b> Ensure equal opportunity and reduce inequalities of outcome, by eliminating discriminatory laws, policies and practices and promoting appropriate legislation, policies and action in this regard; <b>10.4:</b> Adopt policies, especially fiscal, wage and social protection policies, and progressively achieve greater equality</p>
<p><b>Goal 11.</b> Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable</p>	<p><b>11.1:</b> Ensure access for all to adequate, safe and affordable housing and basic services; <b>11.2:</b> Provide access to safe, affordable, accessible and sustainable transport systems for all; <b>11.7:</b> Provide universal access to safe, inclusive and accessible, green and public spaces</p>
<p><b>Goal 13.</b> Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts</p>	<p><b>13.3:</b> Improve education, awareness-raising and human and institutional capacity on climate change mitigation, adaptation, impact reduction and early warning; <b>13.B:</b> Promote mechanisms for raising capacity for effective climate change-related planning and management in least developed countries and small island developing States, including focusing on women, youth and local and marginalized communities</p>
<p><b>Goal 16.</b> Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels</p>	<p><b>16.1:</b> Significantly reduce all forms of violence and related death rates everywhere; <b>16.7:</b> Ensure responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels; <b>16.10:</b> Ensure public access to information and protect fundamental freedoms, in accordance with national legislation and international agreements; <b>16.B:</b> Promote and enforce non-discriminatory laws and policies for sustainable development</p>



Table 2: Key Global Commitments to Gender Equality Adopted by Pakistan

International Convention	When	What it Entails
The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women	1979	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Calls for equality in outcomes rather than simply equality in opportunities</li> <li>-Defines discrimination and the range of steps that states must take to eliminate it, affirms women's rights in specific areas, and makes provisions for ratification, monitoring, reporting and other procedural matters</li> </ul>
The Beijing Platform for Action	1995	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Provides the first global commitment to gender mainstreaming as the methodology by which women's empowerment will be achieved</li> <li>-Includes gender analysis of problems and opportunities in 12 critical areas of concern, and clear and specific standards for actions to be implemented</li> </ul>
UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women	1993	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-First international human rights instrument to exclusively and explicitly address the issue of violence against women</li> <li>-Provides a definition of gender-based abuse, calling it "any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life"</li> </ul>
The International Conference on Population and Development	1994	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Milestone in terms of recognizing that the equality and empowerment of women is a global priority, an essential step towards eradicating poverty and stabilizing population growth</li> </ul>
Women, Peace and Security Framework and Commitments	Include Security Council Resolutions 1325 (yr. 2000) and 1889 (yr. 2009) on women, peace and security; and 1820 (yr. 2008), 1888 (yr. 2009), 2106 (yr. 2013) and 2122 (yr. 2013) on sexual violence in armed conflict	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Laid the foundation for the efforts of the UN community to expand the role of women in leadership positions in every aspect of prevention and resolution of conflicts, including peacekeeping and peacebuilding efforts, and to improve protection of women and girls within a framework of rule of law and respect for human rights</li> </ul>
UN Framework Convention for Climate Change - COP-18	2012	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Calls for mechanisms to track progress towards gender balance; the inclusion of gender equality and climate change as a standing item on future COP agendas; organization of a workshop on gender balance in the UNFCCC process at COP-19; and gender-sensitive climate policy and capacity building activities to promote the greater participation of women in the UNFCCC process.</li> </ul>
The Hyogo Framework for Action	2005	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Aims to substantially reduce disaster losses by 2015 by building the resilience of nations and communities to disasters</li> <li>-Provides a tool for integrating a gender perspective in all forms of disaster-risk management, including risk assessments and early warning mechanisms</li> </ul>
Accra Agenda for Action (AAA)	2008	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Developing countries and donors commit to ensure that their respective development policies and programmes are designed and implemented in ways consistent with their agreed international commitments on gender equality, human rights, disability and environmental sustainability</li> </ul>
Busan Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation	2011	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Recognizes that gender equality and women's empowerment are critical to achieving development results and agreed to accelerate and deepen efforts to (1) Improve information systems with disaggregating data by sex; (2) Integrate targets for gender equality and women's empowerment in accountability mechanisms; and, (3) Address gender equality and women's empowerment in all aspects of development efforts, including peacebuilding and state building</li> </ul>
Millennium Development Goals	2000-2015	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Consolidated previous agreements, including those on women's rights, women's empowerment and gender equality, into a single set of core goals, targets and benchmarks for the development community</li> <li>-Drawn from the Millennium Declaration, it has since been elaborated in multiple documents, that gender equality is both a right in itself and a driver of development</li> </ul>

Source: UNDP, "Gender Equality Strategy 2014-2017: The Future We Want: Rights and Empowerment", Annex 2: Key Global and Regional Commitments to Gender Equality.

**Table 3: Gender Development Index (GDI) and Human Development Index (HDI) by Gender**

	GHI	HDI		Life expectancy at birth (years)		Expected years of schooling		Mean years of schooling		Income per capita (2011 PPP \$)	
		Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male
Sri Lanka	0.948	0.730	0.769	78.2	71.5	14.2	13.3	10.7	10.9	5,452	14,307
Maldives	0.937	0.678	0.723	77.8	75.8	12.8	12.5	5.7	6.0	8,531	16,073
India	0.795	0.525	0.660	69.5	66.6	11.3	11.8	3.6	7.2	2,116	8,656
Bhutan	0.897	0.572	0.638	69.7	69.2	12.8	12.6	2.0	4.1	5,733	8,418
Bangladesh	0.917	0.541	0.590	72.9	70.4	10.3	9.7	4.5	5.5	2,278	4,083
Nepal	0.908	0.521	0.574	71.1	68.2	12.5	12.2	2.3	4.5	1,956	2,690
Pakistan	0.726	0.436	0.601	67.2	65.3	7.0	8.5	3.1	6.2	1,450	8,100
Afghanistan	0.600	0.328	0.546	61.6	59.2	7.2	11.3	1.2	5.1	506	3,227
South Asia	0.801	0.525	0.655	69.6	67.1	10.8	11.3	3.7	6.9	2,198	8,827
Arab States	0.849	0.611	0.719	72.7	68.8	11.6	12.3	4.9	6.9	5,686	24,985
East Asia and the pacific	0.948	0.692	0.730	76.0	72.2	13.0	12.8	6.9	8.0	9,017	13,780
Europe and Central Asia	0.945	0.719	0.760	76.1	68.5	13.5	13.8	9.0	10.0	8,238	17,780
Latin America and Caribbean	0.976	0.736	0.754	78.2	71.7	14.4	13.7	8.0	8.1	10,194	18,435
Sub-Saharan Africa	0.872	0.480	0.550	59.7	57.1	9.1	10.3	4.2	6.0	2,626	4,148
Developing countries	0.899	0.617	0.686	71.7	68.0	11.6	11.9	5.4	7.3	5,926	12,178
World	0.924	0.670	0.725	73.7	69.5	12.2	12.4	6.2	7.9	10,296	18,373

Source: UNDP (2015), "Human Development Report 2015." <sup>3</sup>

from 280 per 1000 live births in 2000, to 170 per 1000 live births in 2013.<sup>4</sup> All these facts point towards female health empowerment.

However, according to the Global Gender Gap Report 2017, women's health status has deteriorated, with Pakistan's ranking falling from 124 in 2016, to 140 in 2017.<sup>5</sup> While there are concerns with how these

to play in the health status of women in the country, with men taking decisions regarding where and when women seek health care. At other times, negligence on part of females to ignore a certain health condition or not taking steps to address a certain health problem also contribute to poor health outcomes for women. Issues such as mobility, distance from health facility, lack of female health personnel, lack

health outcomes for women is the persistent food insecurity faced by women. A direct consequence of poor financial, social and political empowerment, it bears severe consequences as it also impacts upon future generations. Pakistan is amongst the top three countries which houses 50 percent of the world's malnourished children. During pregnancy, only 22 percent of the women in the country

**Table 4: Issues in female access to health care (2012-13)**

	Poorest wealth quintile	Richest wealth quintile	No Education	Higher Education	Rural	Urban	Balochistan	Khyber Pakhtunkhwa	Punjab	Sindh
% of women facing problems in getting permission for seeking treatment	31.9	7.0	23.1	5.3	21.4	10.5	57.1	34.2	10.3	19.1
% of women facing problems in obtaining money for treatment	54.3	9.2	39.7	6.5	36.1	17.1	62.4	57.0	19.5	32.4
% of women facing distance as a problem money for treatment	65.1	14.1	46.5	12.6	47.1	17.0	60.7	63.0	25.7	43.5
% of women facing problems of not wanting to go alone for treatment	75.5	35.0	58.7	34.4	61.2	37.1	73.1	75.1	45.1	56.2
% of women who face management of transport as a problem for accessing healthcare	71.6	15.0	50.6	13.8	50.0	21.0	72.6	62.8	28.1	51.0
% of women facing at least one problem in accessing healthcare	87.0	39.7	70.7	38.9	72.3	45.3	81.3	85.2	55.3	66.5

Source: Government of Pakistan, National Institute of Population Studies, "Pakistan Demographic and Health Survey 2012-13."

indices are computed, women in Pakistan do face challenges in accessing quality healthcare. Among these, lack of female autonomy in households is a major reason. This implies that attitudes have a large part

of financial resources and lack of educational awareness, are major factors for the poor health status of women (Table 4).

Another contributing factor towards poor

receive iron supplements for 90 days or more;<sup>6</sup> 41.7 percent of women are malnourished (height for age); and, 51 percent of women suffer from anemia during pregnancy.

3. Ibid

4. Government of Pakistan, National Institute of Population Studies, "Pakistan Demographic and Health Survey 2012-13." Available at [http://www.nips.org.pk/abstract\\_files/PDHS%20Final%20Report%20as%20of%20Jan%202022-2014.pdf](http://www.nips.org.pk/abstract_files/PDHS%20Final%20Report%20as%20of%20Jan%202022-2014.pdf)

5. Supra note 1.

6. Supra note 1.

**Table 5: Disparities in Education by region and background (females)**

	Poorest wealth quintile	Richest wealth quintile	Rural	Urban	Islamabad	Balochistan	Punjab	Sindh	Khyber Pakhtunkhwa
Female adult literacy rate	...	...	...	...	...	18	50	45	30
Primary net enrolment rate (female)	...	...	...	...	...	35	60	48	48
Less than four years of schooling (% of girls of primary age who are not in school)	90	9	53	22	10	69	34	49	57
Out-of-school children (% of girls of primary age who are not in school)	64	5	36	16	10	54	19	47	34
Mean years of education (average number of years of schooling attained for the age group 20-24 years)	0.8	10.2	4.1	8.2	11.1	2.6	6.1	5.3	4.1
Youth literacy rate (% of young women aged 15-24 years who can read a simple sentence)	15	91	52	88	94	32	75	66	49
Learned basics in reading (% of girls taking part in an assessment who achieved an international minimum learning standard in reading)	48	64	...	...	57	48	67	40	38
Learned basics in mathematics (% of girls taking part in an assessment who achieved an international minimum learning standard in mathematics)	44	58	...	...	60	37	56	27	34

Source: UNESCO (2016), "World Inequality Database on Education."<sup>10</sup>

Over the past decade, public health expenditure has been less than 1.2 percent of GDP.<sup>7</sup> Hence, it comes as no surprise, that the amount invested on female health is even less. Investment in women's health has long term benefits. It improves health outcomes, reduces poverty and contributes in promoting economic growth. At the backdrop of this perspective, the federal as well as provincial governments, through several policies and programmes, have been keen on supporting women's health in the country. Some examples include the Lady Health Workers Programme at the federal level, Sindh and Punjab's extensive Health Sector strategies 2012-20, the 24-hour mother and child health services in KP etc. The private sector as well as development partners have also started a number of initiatives in collaboration with each other or the government, in order to accelerate the pace of women's health development and empowerment in the country.

### Education

Pakistan has shown reasonable progress on closing the basic literacy gender gap. Female literacy increased from 29 percent to 45 percent between 2001 and 2012. Female gross enrollment rate at the primary level stands at 81 percent, increasing from 61 percent in 2001. Despite this improvement, male education is still prioritized over female education, eventually leading to wider gaps in employment, income and political representation.<sup>8</sup> More than half of the 25.0 million out of school children are females.

Among the factors identified for the lack of girls attending school, geographical reasons (including distance and mobility), parental permission, a lack of financial resources and the common belief that the eventual economic output of educating males over females is greater, are the most common ones.<sup>9</sup>

Apart from the above gender based inequalities that females face, other factors such as wealth inequality and/or rural/urban divide also limit women's access to education. Girls from the poorest wealth quintile or from rural areas face limited access to education opportunities when compared to those from the upper wealth quintile and urban areas. This form of inequality also translates into weak academic performance. Table 5 depicts that girls from urban centers such as those in Punjab or Sindh, perform better as compared to girls from Balochistan.

This suggests that the economic situation and geographic locations play a pivotal role as determinants of performance. Such patterns of inequalities are often witnessed in Pakistan within these different social groups and set the pace for the lack of women empowerment and independence from an early age. Moreover, focus on empowering women through technical and vocational education and training, can also be an effective way to enhance their employment and entrepreneurial abilities.

Societal attitudes and cultural beliefs are also barriers that limit women's access to

quality education. It is therefore, important to change the perception that education of the male child over the female child will have more socio-economic benefits. Initiatives in Pakistan such as the Benazir Income Support Programme's 'Waseela-e-Taleem' programme aims to enhance demands for schooling by incentivizing parents through conditional cash transfers. Such incentives are important to encourage a positive shift in attitudes that will ultimately contribute at a macro level by promoting gender equality.

Moreover, focus on increasing the number of educational institutes that cater to females only, as well as increasing the proportion of female instructors, are also crucial support mechanisms for enhancing female education.

The lack of financial allocations is also a contributing factor: Pakistan spends less than three percent of its GDP on education.<sup>11</sup> Post the 18th Amendment, provinces have been more active in expanding girls' education. Several initiatives and policies such as Education Sector Plans for each province, government scholarship schemes or other incentive schemes such as providing laptops etc, the introduction of distance learning education programmes such as the Northern Areas Education Project (1998-2003), establishment of Community Support Process Schools, distribution of free resource materials and so on and so forth, are being initiated with a clear focus on the gender aspect.

7. Supra note 2.

8. Murtaza, K. F. (2013). "Female education in Pakistan". International Journal of Management Sciences, 1(8), 266-271. Available at <http://www.rassweb.com/wp-content/uploads/PDF/IJMS/Vol-1/Issue-8/Paper1.pdf>

9. Government of Pakistan, Bureau of Statistics, "Pakistan Social and Living Standards Measurement Survey 2013-14. Available at [http://www.pbs.gov.pk/sites/default/files/pslm/publications/pslm2013\\_14/A%20report%2013-14%28%2012-05-15%29\\_Final\\_1.pdf](http://www.pbs.gov.pk/sites/default/files/pslm/publications/pslm2013_14/A%20report%2013-14%28%2012-05-15%29_Final_1.pdf)

10. UNESCO (2016), "World Inequality Database on Education." Available at <http://www.education-inequalities.org/countries/pakistan/#?dimension=all&group=all&year=latest>

11. UNDP and UNWomen (2018), "Gender Equality in Public Administration: Pakistan Case study 2017." Available at <http://www.pk.undp.org/content/dam/pakistan/docs/Democratic%20Governance/GEPA%20Report%202017.pdf>

## Have Promises Translated into Action so Far?



Source: UNWomen (2018), 'Turning Promises into Action: Gender Equality in The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development'

### Economic participation

At present, one out of every four women participate in the labor force in Pakistan.<sup>12</sup> Their employment options remain limited owing to certain cultural and societal beliefs and attitudes that restrict them to other roles. These domestic responsibilities, whether by choice or by default, render women more likely to enter and exit the workforce more frequently.

Majority of those employed are working in low paying, low-quality and low-security jobs, often under-appreciated and unaware of their rights. Within this female workforce, a large segment of women exist in the 'informal sector'. At the moment, there are 12 million home-based women workers in Pakistan, out of which 8.5 million are concentrated in rural areas. The latter do 4.9 hours of unpaid care and domestic work per day, compared to only 0.5 hours for men.<sup>13</sup> These home-based workers toil long

hours at the cost of their health, and have little access to and knowledge of the market. They continue to fare unrecognized in national statistics and have no minimum wage or health benefits. A reason for the under representation of women in the workforce is the data collection method and survey methodology where women's economic participation is poorly captured.

Improvement in working conditions, especially for women in the informal sector, needs urgent attention. Ignoring it any further will further reduce the economic participation of women. Other initiatives such as gender sensitive budgeting in all fiscal policies is a requisite step in ensuring eradication of gender inequality and promoting sustained economic development. Moreover, national policies legislating legal protection for these workers is also imperative. Eliminating gender gaps in economic participation will also increase

per capita income.<sup>14</sup>

Providing and promoting equal opportunities is also an area that can feed into socio-economic empowerment and gender equality for women. This can be achieved through ensuring laws are non-discriminatory towards women and that policies and systems are pro-women. This can include quota systems for women, adequate and affordable childcare facilities, flexible working hours, increasing social entrepreneurship opportunities etc. Likewise, women participation is also linked to mobility and a safe working environment. Sexual harassment at workplace continues to affect women's employment and career progression.

Gender gaps in payment structures are also a barrier in women's economic empowerment. Men receive 33 percent higher wages than women for the same amount, nature

12. Ministry of Planning, Development and Reform. "Pakistan Vision 2025." Available at <http://fics.seecs.edu.pk/Vision/Vision-2025/Pakistan-Vision-2025.pdf>

13. Government of Pakistan, Pakistan Bureau of Statistics. "Time Use Survey 2007." Available at <http://www.pbs.gov.pk/sites/default/files/other/tus2007/tus2007.pdf>

14. International Monetary Fund (2013), "Women, Work and the Economy: Macroeconomic Gains from Gender Equity." Available at <https://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/sdn/2013/sdn1310.pdf>

**Table 6: Nominal Monthly Wages in Pakistan by Gender and Area, 2012-13**

	(PKR)		
	Total	Rural	Urban
Total	12,118.1	10,239.9	14,500.8
Male	12,804.5	11,073.8	14,894.8
Female	7,868.9	5,789.1	11,478.5
Female as a % of male	61.5	52.3	77.1

Source: Govt. of Pakistan, Labor Force Survey 2012-13.

and quantity of work.<sup>15</sup> These gaps vary across rural and urban areas and persist at all levels of employment (Table 6).

Another important question regarding women's economic participation is their presence in leadership roles. Pakistan does appear to be making steady progress in this regard. One fifth of the total senior civil service positions at the federal level are held by women. However, the case is not the same in the judiciary, with only 7 of the total 131 judges in higher courts being women. Legislations such as 'The Punjab Fair Representation of Women Act 2014' that mandates 33 percent women representation for all selection and recruitment committees and 33 percent quota for women in decision making bodies in public sector organizations, have enhanced female participation in decision making bodies. Supplementary amenities such as day-care facilities for children of working women and establishment of women crises centres in the country have also been prioritized. Several women-friendly initiatives such as the National Plan of Action, Gender Reform Action Programmes, Benazir Income Support

tional Amendment. These departments take initiatives for the establishment of working women hostels, day care centres, women crises centres, shelter homes, etc.

The government recognizes that women's economic participation is crucial to achieving sustainable development and economic gains. With this objective in mind, the Gender Responsive Budgeting Initiative was launched in 2005 aiming to integrate gender sensitive budgeting into all stages of the budget. The Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper was also an attempt in the same direction. It recognizes women as the most vulnerable group and suggests ways to empower them by focusing on education and skills development, health, employment and access to resources. The Labor Policy of 2010 also focuses on women's empowerment and gender equality in the labor market, as does the recent Vision 2025 document. Lack of implementation and monitoring mechanisms are challenges curtailing progress.

#### Political participation

Women representation in political institutions in Pakistan has increased

**Table 7: Women Representation in Pakistan's Legislature (2015)**

Assemblies	Female members	Total	Female %age of the total
Overall	228	1,170	19.5
National assembly	70	342	20.5
Senate	17	100	17
Punjab Assembly	76	371	20.5
Sindh Assembly	31	168	18.5
Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly	22	124	17.7
Balochistan Assembly	12	65	18.5

Source: Aurat Foundation, Legislative Watch, Issue No. 41 (March-November).<sup>16</sup>

Programme (BISP), National Rural Support Programme (NRSP), First Women Development Bank and National Commission on the Status of Women all remain active precursors of women empowerment. Women development departments have been established in provinces, which have been empowered under the 18th Constitu-

tion significantly over the years. A greater number of women are becoming part of national/provincial assemblies and the senate, and political parties are allocating more tickets to women candidates for elections. The proportion of women holding seats in the national and provincial assemblies at 19.5 percent is amongst the

highest in South Asia. At the provincial level, Punjab Assembly bears the greatest female representation with 76 out of 371 members being women. Women representation is equally satisfactory for other provinces (Table 7).

While women representation in the parliament has improved over the years, women still find it difficult to garner the needed political power and party support to win elections on general seats. This is where the quota system bears fruit. Currently, 17 percent of the seats of the senate and the national and provincial assemblies in Pakistan are reserved for women. While this promises seats, however, it does not promise real political empowerment. The nomination system allows the political party leadership complete control over selection and deprives the women candidates from directly interacting with their constituencies.

Women's participation in the voting process has fluctuated over time. In absolute terms, the number of women on electoral roles increased from 33.2 million to 38.2 million between 2002 and 2013. However, in percentage terms, women amongst registered voters decreased from 46.1 in the 2008 elections, to 43.6 in the 2013 elections.<sup>17</sup> The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) undertook concentrated and concerted efforts to increase the registration of women as voters, especially in less developed areas. The ECP partnered with the National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA) to work towards this goal, using the Computerized National Identity Card (CNIC). This effort yielded positive results with a higher number of registered female voters. Alongside civil society initiatives, the ECP and NADRA also implemented a temporary, semi-automatic voter registration process when citizens register for their CNICs. However, despite these efforts, reportedly, 10 million eligible Pakistani women remained unregistered and unable to vote. Societal pressure, low level of female literacy, lack of understanding of electoral process, limited numbers of female polling stations and presence of male staff at female polling stations, are some of the factors that still restrict female political participation.

#### Violence against women

Violence Against Women (VAW) in Pakistan takes multiple forms including physical, psychological, emotional, verbal and economic abuse. All harmful traditions and customary practices, which limit women's decision making and freedom, are also implicit acts of violence and need to be addressed properly. Other overt forms of

15. Social Policy and Development Centre, "Social Development in Pakistan: Annual Review 2007-08 (Women at Work)." Available at <http://www.spdc.org.pk/Data/Publication/PDF/AR-9.pdf> women at work link

16. Aurat Foundation (2013), "Legislative Watch," Issue No. 41 (March-November). Available at <https://www.af.org.pk/news/1390295273.pdf>

17. UNDP Pakistan (2015), "Political and Legislative Participation of Women in Pakistan: Issues and Perspectives." Available at <http://www.mumkinalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/POL-legislative-OF-Women-UN-Report.pdf>

violence, like restrictions on mobility, work, intimidation, threats and humiliation, severely affect the self-esteem and dignity of women. Despite the recent legislation, there has been an alarming increase in cases of violence, which is often justified in the name of culture or religion.

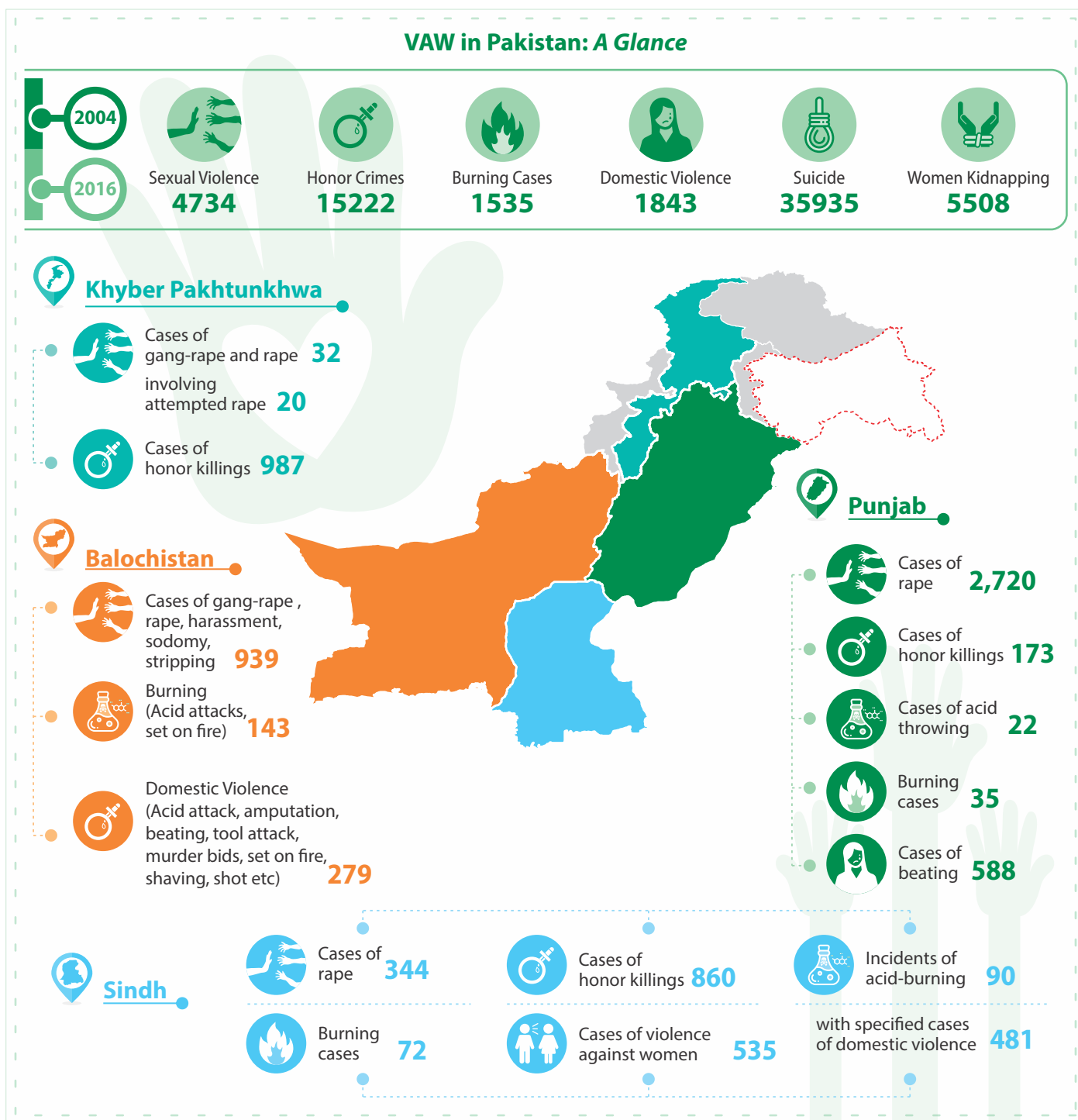
While efforts being made to document the scale and prevalence of VAW include qualitative studies, media reports and annual reports by civil society such as the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan and Aurat Foundation, there is still a massive dearth and miscalculation as far as VAW statistics are concerned. Provincial initiatives like VAW Centre in Multan - which

is Pakistan's first one stop centre for survivors of Gender Based Violence, aims to address the critical gap in the lack of coordination amongst key sectors including health, justice, police and social service providers-by providing coordinated services under one roof - are all concerted efforts to contain gender based crimes.

### Way Ahead

Despite renewed commitments as a result of the SDGs, progress remains uneven. What needs to be done is to have gender needs streamlined in all areas of policy making and planning so women's needs are met, their capabilities are enhanced and opportunities for them are enlarged.

Four areas of interventions would be 1) Investing in building women capabilities through investment in their education; 2) Enhancing economic empowerment opportunities for women by providing them skills and through legislations to ensure their equal representation in workforce; 3) Ensuring access to legal justice; and, 4) Developing robust monitoring mechanisms and strengthening institutional capacities for adopting and implementing gender inclusive plans and policies. All of these, of course, cannot foster unless positive attitudinal change and cultural shift take place.



Source: Benazir Income Support Programme (2017), "Women Empowerment: Status and Challenges"

## Advancing Women Empowerment in the Public Sector - A Case Study of PCSW



Fauzia Viqar<sup>1</sup>

Chairperson/Chief Executive  
Punjab Commission on the  
Status of Women (PCSW)

The demand of women's rights activists and international human rights institutions for independent and autonomous women's machineries has been long standing. In Pakistan, this demand gained momentum after the devolution of all social subjects, including women's development to the provinces, under the 18th Amendment in 2010. Establishment of the Punjab Commission on the Status of Women in 2014 was a step in that direction and reflected the commitment of the government of Punjab to dedicated institutions for advancing women's empowerment. The Commission was tasked with promoting gender equality and eliminating all forms of gender based discrimination and violence. It has grown from a single person with zero infrastructure, to a staff of over 90, operating from two separate offices with a presence in all nine divisions of Punjab.

Today, three years since its inception, the Commission is not only recognized as a vibrant institution with a clear directive and action plan, but in fact, its initiatives are being adopted by other provinces, including Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) and Sindh, as well. In hindsight, it seems like an arduous journey that required a great deal of perseverance to convince people that women are differently impacted by issues

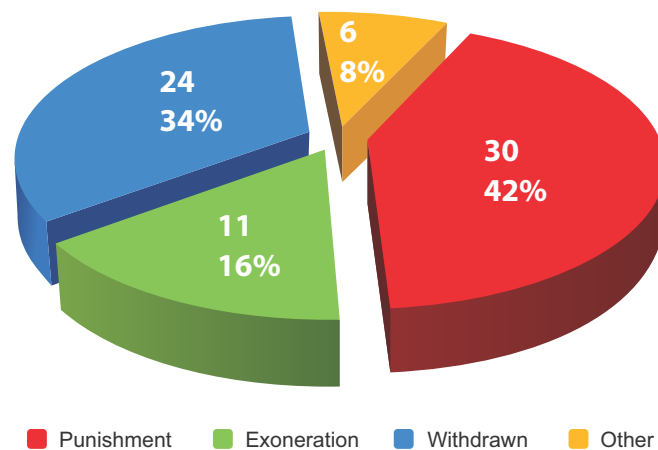
and that empowerment needs to be done differently to work for women. It was also a journey in terms of mainstreaming women's perspective in public policy, where decision makers did not see the connection between grave issues such as security and women's needs or, how women were differentially impacted by environmental degradation.

The Commission undertook a strategic planning exercise to understand key issues confronting women in Punjab and to determine priority strategies for dealing with these issues. Violence against women, lack of knowledge of rights and redressal mechanisms, lack of reliable public data, education and health related disparities, and near absence of women in leadership positions, were identified as major impediments to women's status and access to rights. Based on these preliminary discussions, PCSW began measures for improvement, like the **Punjab Gender Management Information System (GMIS)**<sup>2</sup> established in 2015, to understand the landscape of women's status. It is the first gender-disaggregated, publically available, official database of its kind, in the entire South Asian region. In 2014, in line

with the Punjab Women Empowerment Package, a **24/7 Helpline** was also established to provide redressal against individual grievances of women within their domestic, professional and public spheres of life. This helpline has addressed over 64,000 queries since its establishment and has followed up on close to 1500 complaints to-date. In terms of the types of complaints, violence and other criminal offences against women account for the majority of complaints, followed by complaints relating to property matters and harassment at the workplace. Public awareness about women's rights is raised through helpline awareness calls. As of January 2018, 330,035 awareness calls have been made. The Office of the Ombudsman Punjab was also established in 2013, serving a similar purpose i.e. to receive complaints regarding women harassment. Since its inception, the office has received 89 complaints, out of which 71 have been decided and 30 accused have been penalized (Figure 1). Its effectiveness continues to grow.

Most recently, the Commission has also piloted a large-scale project; 'Training of *Nikah* Registrars', to train 48,000 *Nikah*

Figure 1: Outcomes of Complaints Received by the Ombudsman's Office in Punjab (2014-2016)



Source: PCSW, "Punjab Gender Parity Report 2017." <sup>3</sup>

1. The writer was appointed Chairperson of PCSW in Feb 2014.

2. Read more at, The Punjab Commission on the Status of Women, Gender Management Information System. Available at <https://pcsw.punjab.gov.pk/gmis>

3. PCSW, "Punjab Gender Parity Report 2017." Available at [http://pcsw.punjab.gov.pk/system/files/PGPR-2017%20Final\\_Compressed.pdf](http://pcsw.punjab.gov.pk/system/files/PGPR-2017%20Final_Compressed.pdf)

(marriage) Registrars and local government officials, on the rights of women in marriage, divorce, custody and maintenance, as well as proper filling of the *Nikah Nama* (Marriage contract). Though these public officials are responsible for accurately recording terms of the marriage contract, in most instances they either take away important rights such as the 'delegated right of divorce' of a woman, or provide incorrect and incomplete details of the groom's marital history, dower and terms/conditions of marriage. Interaction with these officials revealed a woeful lack of knowledge of legislative amendments and deep-seated biases towards women, resulting in a denial of rights. Hence, there was a dire need seen for the project.

Women's near absence from decision making forums and the consequent absence of women's perspective in decision making prompted the Commission to launch a systematic "Women in Leadership" project in 2017, to connect accomplished women from the private sector with senior positions in public sector Boards and Committees.

### Information is Key

At the Commission, we believe in research for evidence based decision-making and the primacy of knowledge sharing to enhance access to rights. To this end, we provide tailored and localized input to policy-makers and bureaucrats at the national and subnational levels, and raise public awareness regarding laws, policies, and other mechanisms developed by the government for the benefit of women and girls. Our dedicated team of researchers and human rights professionals at the Commission is fostering this quintessential culture of evidence-based and responsive policy-making that has come to define the Commission's work. The GMIS was developed to fill the information gap in public sector decision making, after an intensive series of consultations with gender experts and development specialists. The end product, made possible through the forthcoming response of over 1,000 provincial and local government offices, is an extensive and intensive database of sex-disaggregated information divided into broad thematic areas (*Demographics, Governance, Health, Education, Economic Opportunities and Participation and Justice*). The GMIS framework contains 325 indicators that seek to measure the relative status of men and women across sectors, fields and industries. GMIS demonstrates transparency by making information publically accessible, is easy-to-use, and has an

interactive and user-friendly interface. Data is regularly updated, analyzed by year and district in the form of downloadable graphs, charts and spreadsheets. Every year, this data is analyzed and compiled into the Punjab Gender Parity Report (PGPR) disseminated widely to stakeholders in the government, civil society and academia. An elaborate advocacy plan is consequently developed by the Commission to address the most pressing gaps by taking forward the most important recommendations from the report. It results in varied interventions, from simple but crucial steps, such as self-defense classes for college-going girls, to longer term gender sensitivity trainings for police and public officials.<sup>4</sup>

Besides the GMIS, in collaboration with educational institutes and independent policy think-tanks, the Commission has spearheaded a number of research studies and impact assessments on women related issues such as inheritance rights, conditions of prisoners, assessment of women's shelters and evaluation of public services such as police help desks for women.

In an increasingly digital age, where Pakistan boasts the second highest internet growth rate in the region according to some estimates,<sup>5</sup> the Commission has also been capitalizing on social media to create and raise awareness among internet users, especially the youth. The popularity of the Commission, highlighted through its increasing social media presence, is a testament to its effectiveness in spreading awareness, and speaks volumes about the efficacy of its several initiatives.

However, recognizing that only a fraction of the total population has access to the internet, the Commission also conducted 122 awareness sessions with students, and members of local communities at the grassroots level, in 2017. Similarly, a rigorous electronic, print and social campaign is launched every year to promote awareness of laws and redressal mechanisms.

### Redress, Relief and Rehabilitation

It is highly unfortunate that despite being a signatory to numerous international human rights treaties and pro-women frameworks, scores of women and girls continue to fall prey to patriarchal control and gender-based discrimination in the country. Over the past few years, Punjab has witnessed an unabated increase in the number of reported cases of violence against women and girls (6,505 in 2016 and 7,313 in 2017).<sup>6</sup> Besides these numbers, one

must be wary of the mental and physical trauma experienced by victims of violence. With this conscious realization, the PCSW team is devoted to helping women help themselves.

Rebuilding the lives of women affected by violence was a task filled with challenges. In the Commission's experience, some of the key challenges were the regrettable lack of legal awareness, unsupportive families/local communities, and lack of financial independence. PCSW pioneered a model for rehabilitation at a local shelter of the government, where apart from being provided food and shelter, women are counseled by psycho-social experts and professionally trained under certified government and non-governmental vocational training institutes to prepare them for an independent and self reliant existence.

### Building Partnerships

One of the core elements of the Commission's strategy is to build partnerships with public and private sector entities and that has helped us achieve much better results.

One such example was a partnership with the Local Government and Community Development Department in the 'Training of *Nikah* Registrars' project. This initiative divulged that the performance and accountability of public officials rests on effective capacity building and monitoring. Likewise, the Commission has partnered with Technical and Vocational Training Authority (TEVTA) to provide legal and human rights awareness to all TEVTA trainees across Punjab. TEVTA has also graciously provided a professional training platform for the Commission's shelter residents. The Commission has also developed strong inter-departmental linkages with the Punjab Police and the Judiciary, to increase gender mainstreaming in these institutions and develop stronger trainings for their staff.

The Commission engages actively with non-governmental and charitable organizations, as well as independent policy think tanks and service providers. For example, the Commission has entered into a partnership with the Centre for Economic Research Pakistan (CERP), to help gauge the impact of the training of *Nikah* Registrars through pre and post-training exams. Moreover, a number of charitable and philanthropic organizations have donated in cash and kind to improve transitional housing, most notably, the Bali Memorial Trust. Women's rights organizations provide regular input in the Commission's

4. For further reading, please visit the GMIS Website at <http://www.gmis.gov.pk/>

5. Yasir Ameen, "Pakistan has highest growth rate of internet users in the region." Available at <http://www.aboardthedemocracytrain.com/pakistan-has-highest-growth-rate-of-internet-users-in-region>

6. PCSW, GMIS: Violence Against Women Database. Available at <http://www.gmis.gov.pk/ChartType1.aspx?id=24>



work for policy/legislative reform and for reporting on Pakistan's international commitments.

### **Transforming Challenges into Opportunities**

The Commission's journey so far has been interesting but challenging, with its ups and downs. A significant challenge has been the orthodox and socially conservative mindsets and attitudes of people who are likely to perceive the discourse on women's rights as an exclusively western agenda and an un-Islamic mission. PCSW is countering this social mindset through media and in government decision-making forums. Challenges of the bureaucratic 'red tape' and those of inter-departmental coordination pose a whole

different contest for the work of the Commission. Such 'red tape' tends to affect social subjects more than any other issue. This particular challenge requires perseverance of the utmost kind and to keep at it despite being faced with an attitude that is devoid of any empathy towards understanding the work of women's rights. Often times, unavailability of data or lack of sex-disaggregated data, limits the scope and depth of data analysis. Gradually, there has been an increased realization of the need to have gender disaggregated data at the public and private level. Availability of data will promote research and analysis of issues from a gendered perspective and will help design gender sensitive policies. Perhaps the biggest challenge, has been finding ways to maximize the impact of PCSW's

work at the district level given the limited financial and human resources; a problem that is particularly acute in a province that accounts for over 50 percent of Pakistan's total population. Support from civil society organizations is instrumental in maintaining an autonomous and independent voice on women's rights.

Despite these challenges, the Commission has achieved important milestones and has created a momentum towards mainstreaming gender discourse in Punjab. The work of human rights relies on a 'never give up' approach and teaches one to make as many allies as possible. Even the setbacks and barriers to sustainable change encountered along the way, have only motivated the Commission to do more.





10 REDUCED  
INEQUALITIES



## Women 'Social' Empowerment: The Nexus Between Education and Health



**Prof. Dr. Khalida Ghaus**

Ex-Officio Member  
Social Policy and Development Center

The Social Action Plan (SAP), an effort to improve basic social services in Pakistan over the five year period from 1993/94-1997/98, delineated a commitment on part of Pakistani decision makers towards national social development. Covering three basic social sectors of elementary education; primary health care and reproductive health (population included); and, rural water supply and sanitation, the government committed itself to sectoral-based policy reforms. During the era of the nineties, approximately thirty-four percent of the population was living below the poverty line, with poverty in urban areas 1.7 times higher than that in rural.<sup>1</sup> Around the same time, the demographic change made poverty multifaceted<sup>2</sup>-Karachi alone then, was sustaining around five million people living in slums-deprived of education and health or any other basic facility or social network arrangement. Pakistan's literacy rate stood at almost 40 percent in 1995, which increased to 46 percent by the year 1999.<sup>3</sup> While the male literacy rate fared fine-51 percent in 1995 and 58 percent by 1999, it was the female literacy rate that was unsatisfactory-28 percent in 1995 to 34

percent in 1999 in comparison to the male literacy rate. Health indicators remained stagnant during the same period thereby indicating poor performance of the sector. Life expectancy was 62 years in 1994, while in 1999, it came down to 61 years.<sup>4</sup>

The focus of SAP was not on gender, however, post the nineties, gender took center stage. Despite this and the commitment towards the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) in 2000, no significant improvement was witnessed in the lives of the poor in general, or in the lives of women, in specific. Literacy rate was skewed towards males, as only 47 percent females were literate against 70 percent males, in 2011-12. Most health indicators were off track, for instance, the total fertility rate remained high at 3.8 percent against the target of 2.1 percent. A few indicators, for example maternal mortality ratio, was on track with the target of 140 per 100,000 live births.<sup>5</sup> Similarly, the target against the indicator 'proportion of children under 5 who suffered from Diarrhea (in the last 30 Days)' was also achieved. The rest of the targets set for goals regarding reduced child mortality or improved maternal health, remained off track.<sup>6</sup> The latest Gender Ranking for Pakistan also echoes

the same flavor, with Pakistan remaining at the bottom end of the spectrum, ranking at 143, just above Yemen (Table 1).

The social development approach being followed in Pakistan has not helped in developing a social and political narrative which can help facilitate the empowerment of women. Women in Pakistan continue to face discrimination and depravity in all spheres of life. Mainstreaming gender in true spirit, despite the presence of 21 percent of female parliamentarians, continues to be a challenge.

Pakistan's ranking in Gender Empowerment Measures, Gender Development Index and Human Development Index has consistently been alarming. The country has been spending 0.7 percent and 2.3 percent of GDP on health and education sectors respectively. Despite vertical program expenditures such as the Family Planning and Primary Health care or the Maternal and Child Health Program, women continue to be disadvantaged when it comes to accessing decent social services. A large number of women, even today, are treated through traditional methods instead of being taken to a health clinic or hospital: 71 percent of

**Table 1: Pakistan's Global Gender Gap Ranking 2017**

Indicator Ranking	Year-2006	Year-2017
Global Gender Gap Score	112	143
Economic Participation and Opportunity	112	143
Educational Attainment	110	136
Health and Survival	112	140
Political Empowerment	37	95
(Rank out of)	115	144

Source: World Economic Forum (2017), "Global gender gap report 2017."

1. Nuzhat Ahmad (1998), "Poverty in Pakistan," Pakistan Journal of Applied Economics, Applied Economics Research Centre, vol. 14, pages 1-26  
 2. Dilani Gunewardena (1999), "Urban Poverty in South Asia: What do we know? What do we need to know?" Available at <http://www.rojasedatabank.info/wpover/gunewardena.pdf>  
 3. Social Policy and Development Centre (2001), "Social Development in Pakistan: SPDC Annual Review 2001." Available at <http://www.spdc.org.pk/Data/Publication/PDF/AR-3.pdf>  
 4. Ibid.  
 5. Government of Pakistan, Ministry of Planning, Development and Reform and UNDP (2013). "Pakistan Millennium Development Goals Report 2013." Available at <http://www.pk.undp.org/content/dam/pakistan/docs/MDGs/MDG2013Report/final%20report.pdf>  
 6. Ibid

live births delivered in urban areas and 44.4 percent in rural areas are attended by skilled providers; whereas, anaemia among women of reproductive age (15-49 age) is slightly over fifty percent.<sup>7</sup> Apart from

witnessed.

Despite the incentive of free and compulsory education (5-16 years) in government schools, female enrolment has

**Table 2: Female Education and Health Indicators of Pakistan**

Education	Female %age
Literacy rate	44
Primary enrollment	68
Secondary enrollment	39
Tertiary enrollment	9
Out of School Children	32
Out of School Youth	68

Source: World Economic Forum (2017), "Global gender gap report 2017."

physical health indicators, mental health indicators in women, such as depression and anxiety, are rarely documented. The average overall healthy life expectancy of females stands at 58 years.<sup>8</sup>

Stunting in children is also an alarming phenomena in the country. Pakistan is rated high in the under-5 stunting rate (44 percent). It is more pronounced among males at 48 percent and females at 42 percent. Prominent factors include mothers' education and household wealth. Mothers with higher education have only 21 percent stunted children, as opposed to mothers with no education who have 55 percent stunted children. Similarly, 62 percent stunted children belong to poor household whereas 23 percent belong to the wealthiest households.<sup>9</sup>

Health related policies and programs announced during the last couple of decades have focused on increasing the availability of female health staff without much focus into improving the existing facilities in rural areas. The Lady Health Workers Program, supported through female fieldworkers, whilst making medical services accessible and portable, did little to change the culture of *not* visiting a hospital for deliveries. The program lacks the component on community education of females on the importance of antenatal, post-natal visits and natal care. Creating awareness on these issues is needed before a visible change in health indicators can be

seen no substantive improvement. Enrolment for females at the primary level stands at 68 percent; 39 percent at the secondary level, and 9 percent at the tertiary level (Table 2).<sup>10</sup> The disadvantaged situation of women coupled with their marginalization, is extremely evident with the number of the 'out-of-school' females at 32 percent. But the most striking fact is

#### Barriers and Challenges Faced by Women

- Socio-traditional barriers
- Poor infrastructure (rural/periphery areas)
- Lack of healthcare facilities (rural)
- Geographic accessibility-long distances and poor mobility.

observed among the youth population, where 58 percent male youth and a striking 68 percent female youth are not going to school. The most common reasons attributed for either not enrolling or dropping-out include, distance, poverty, work-at-home, lack of parents' permission, mobility issues etc. Despite the fact that in developing countries like Pakistan, where low-income households require additional income earners, yet females are either discouraged, or entirely not allowed to work or acquire education. Moreover, even

though education attainment leads to improvement in income, there is a weak link between education and employment.<sup>11</sup> Apparently, several women who acquire education do not end up pursuing careers to translate that education into productive engagement. Such dynamics continue to compel the phenomena that the economic integration of women is an area that requires further study and analysis.

Pakistan society is largely characterized by its geography and social diversity, but also its gender inequality. Women are mainly recognized within domestic spheres, without much value attributed to their education, health and/or employment. Patriarchal norms continue to impact the lives of women belonging to all social classes. The change is occurring, however, it is yet to influence all segments of society. Equally important is to target and influence the female youth population of both the rural (6.3 percent) and urban areas (3.6 percent). The current diversity in socio-economic challenges being confronted by the women of the rural and urban regions, needs to be addressed by expanding the base of formal education, alongside community education being taken to their neighborhood that would help in improving the employment ratio among females. Equally important is to address both physical and mental health related issues, as well as issues of violence against women and girls.

Improvement in the education and health sectors in principle, have a causal link with the empowerment of an 'individual human being'. However, Pakistan being a traditional society with increasing intolerance and social regression, it is important that the provincial governments focus on bringing an improvement in the two social sectors primarily by increasing the share to at-least three percent in the GDP; improving access of women to health services; and in the education sector, benefitting from the experiences of South East Asian Countries such as Malaysia. However, it will not translate into women empowerment at various echelons of income distribution; simultaneous measure would be needed to create conditions conducive for the 'social empowerment' of women and girls - which is a pre-requisite for change to take place.

7. National Institute of Population Studies (Pakistan) and ICF International (2013). "Pakistan Demographic and Health Survey 2012-13". Calverton, Maryland, USA: National Institute of Population Studies and ICF International. Available at [http://www.nips.org.pk/abstract\\_files/PDHS%20Key%20Findings%20FINAL%201.24.14.pdf](http://www.nips.org.pk/abstract_files/PDHS%20Key%20Findings%20FINAL%201.24.14.pdf)

8. World Economic Forum (2017), "Global gender gap report 2017." Available at [http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF\\_GGGR\\_2017.pdf](http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2017.pdf)

9. National Institute of Population Studies -NIPS (2013), "Pakistan Demographic and Health Survey 2012-13." Available at [http://www.nips.org.pk/abstract\\_files/PDHS%20Final%20Report%20as%20of%20Jan%202022-2014.pdf](http://www.nips.org.pk/abstract_files/PDHS%20Final%20Report%20as%20of%20Jan%202022-2014.pdf)

10. Supra note 8.

11. Social Policy and Development Centre (2008), "Women at Work, Annual Review 2007-08." Available at <http://www.spdc.org.pk/Data/Publication/PDF/AR-9.pdf>

## Social Entrepreneurship and Women Economic Empowerment



**Dr. Viqar Ahmed**

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The global gender gap index – which tries to capture the gap between men and women across a wide variety of socio-economic categories, placed Pakistan 143 out of 144 countries in 2017.<sup>1</sup> For the world's sixth largest population, having such statistics could imply an expected future social disorder. According to the official estimates, the female literacy rate stands at 48 percent compared to male literacy rate at 70 percent.<sup>2</sup> The primary school enrolment rate for females is only 51 percent. Today, less than 30 percent of women are found in the paid labour force of Pakistan.<sup>3</sup>

While the statistics on women's participation in wage and self-employment are certainly not encouraging, a silent development has been the recent rise of social enterprises in Pakistan – many of which are owned and managed by enterprising women. A recent report published by the Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI) shows that around twenty percent of total social enterprises

across the country are owned or led by women.<sup>4</sup> This percentage is high compared to the traditional private enterprise in Pakistan where only five percent are owned or led by women. Confirming these findings, a study conducted by British Council found that Pakistan has experienced a recent spike in the number of new social enterprise start-ups, and most social enterprises are led by people under 35.<sup>5</sup> Within these social enterprises, just over a fifth are led by women. Women led social enterprises have positive implications on women empowerment. Social enterprises hire nearly four times as many women as mainstream Small and Medium Sized Enterprises (SMEs). Female-led social enterprises are also more likely to recruit women. The survey conducted by SDPI reveals that 71 percent of women in the social enterprise sector reported increased confidence. Around 62 percent stated that starting a social business led to increased self-worth.

However, women face challenges managing these social enterprises. Most women reported that balancing work and family responsibilities remains an unsurmountable challenge. Furthermore, there were substantial barriers to expanding their business including; lack of business advice or government support at the local level; difficulties in compliance with tax, environment and labour regime; complexities in dealing with regulatory burden (e.g. getting permits and licenses from municipal authorities); dearth of finances through formal channels; weak mentorship by women or mainstream business associations; and lack of support in marketing the output locally and abroad. There are also certain gender-specific barriers to trade which are rarely discussed at government or non-government platforms.<sup>6</sup>

If Pakistan wishes to make social entrepreneurship a key instrument for women empowerment, legislative, policy, regulatory and procedural bottlenecks need to be addressed. SDPI report recommends setting up a national level social enterprise working group. This group should have official representation from federal and provincial governments, Federal Board of Revenue as well as regulatory bodies such as Competition Commission of Pakistan, Securities and Exchange Commission of Pakistan and State Bank of Pakistan. The working group should invite members of the private sector and think tanks who can then help the government in formulating a vision and policy framework for social enterprises in Pakistan.

Second, the establishment of the Centre for Social Entrepreneurship at the Planning Commission is a welcome sign. This center should act as a secretariat for the national working group. The center should ultimately make an effort to come up with a clear definition of social enterprises in Pakistan. Such a definition is of course required to design interventions for social businesses in various regulatory frameworks and prudential regulations of the central bank. Furthermore, a clear identity for social enterprises will pave way for provincial growth strategies to also carry specific programmes to act as enablers for the development of the social enterprise sector.

Third, the country will require a tax regime which values social impact and encourages young minds to come towards (social) entrepreneurship. There are numerous examples across the world which explain how tax systems have been simplified for such enterprises. Innovative tax regimes also enable this sector to access certain tax

1. World Economic Forum (2017), "The Global Gender Gap Report 2017." Available at [http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF\\_GGGR\\_2017.pdf](http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2017.pdf)

2. Government of Pakistan, Finance Division (2017), "Pakistan Economic Survey 2016-17." Available at [http://www.finance.gov.pk/survey/chapters\\_17/Pakistan\\_ES\\_2016\\_17\\_pdf.pdf](http://www.finance.gov.pk/survey/chapters_17/Pakistan_ES_2016_17_pdf.pdf)

3. Ibid.

4. British Council (2017), "Activist to Entrepreneur." Written in collaboration with UNESCAP, SDPI and Social Impact Consulting. Available at <https://www.sdpi.org/publications/files/Activist%20to%20Entrepreneur-22%20Dec%202017.pdf>

5. British Council, "The State of Social Enterprise in Bangladesh, Ghana, India and Pakistan." Available at [https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/bc-report-ch5-pakistan-digital\\_0.pdf](https://www.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/bc-report-ch5-pakistan-digital_0.pdf)

6. Gender-specific barriers are discussed in SDPI's Draft Economic Agenda 2018 (pp-15), Available at [https://www.sdpi.org/research\\_programme/uploads/Draft%20Economic%20Agenda%202018.pdf](https://www.sdpi.org/research_programme/uploads/Draft%20Economic%20Agenda%202018.pdf)

exemptions against the value contributed to the society. Such reduction in tax liability is calculated using different methods including jobs generated by a social enterprise, education and health facilities provided at the local level etc.

It is important to mention that post the 18th Constitutional Amendment, the provincial governments have also set up their own tax authorities. It has therefore become difficult for social enterprises, not only to settle tax related dues with FBR, but also with the provincial revenue authorities which range from 3 to 5 in number depending upon which province the enterprise is operating in. The emergence of multiple tax authorities is resulting in double taxation in case of several goods and services, and has also increased the compliance cost for genuine social enterprises.<sup>7</sup>

Fourth, the 'exit strategies' and sustainability considerations in institutions responsible for social safety nets and social protection programmes can be helped through graduation of beneficiaries to the social enterprise sector. Institutions like the Benazir Income Support Programme or provincial rural support organizations can join hands with organizations such as Small and Medium Enterprise Development Authority and women chambers of commerce and industries to expand outreach and provide capacity building to beneficiaries who could in turn become micro and small scale social entrepreneurs.

Fifth, the goods and services of women-led social enterprises can be encouraged through public procurement rules at the federal and provincial government levels.<sup>8</sup> Appropriate amendments in the regulations overseen by the Public Procurement Regulatory Authority can encourage preferred purchase by the public sector from these enterprises. This can be a game changer for the newly incorporated enterprises who would have certainty regarding long term purchase orders and cash flow stream.

Sixth, several women-led social enterprises also have substantial trade potential. The exports of goods and services produced by social enterprises can be facilitated by the Trade Development Authority of Pakistan (TDAP). In collaboration with the provincial governments' industries departments, TDAP can help social enterprises in regional and global integration through facilitation in marketing and visibility at exhibitions locally and abroad. For the next Strategy Trade Policy Framework, 'trade in services' should be considered a key instrument for export promotion. All future negotiations of free trade agreements with partner economies should promote Pakistan's trade in services.<sup>9</sup>

The Ministry of Commerce also needs to convene a national working group to assess gender-specific non-tariff barriers faced by the social enterprises. Such barriers include the lack of essential amenities for women in border areas where trade via land routes takes place. Likewise, it may not be possible for micro and small scale women entrepreneurs to physically visit tax departments and offices dealing with international trade. It is therefore suggested that all processes required for regulatory compliance including tax, trade, labour and environment, may be allowed through online or phone facilities.

The rural enterprises, particularly those in the agriculture sector, can be integrated in (agriculture) supply and value chains. This will contribute to increase in overall value addition. To meet this objective, Ministry of National Food Security and Research in collaboration with TDAP and the agriculture departments in the provincial governments, will need to design support services which are customized for rural agricultural (social) enterprise. This could include market information systems, access to urban markets, certainty of price of inputs and output etc.

Seventh, while the central bank has come up with a new SME finance policy, it is still important to conduct a detailed assess-

ment which may explain as to why formal funding is still not reaching the micro and small social enterprises. The banks are particularly not keen to take a risk on small scale women-led enterprises, as recently observed in the findings by SDPI survey. The financial framework and prudential regulations that govern the funding for micro and small enterprises will require appropriate modification which in turn can incentivize the formal lending institutions to take risk on the ventures by social enterprises.

Equally important is to customize the credit instruments for social enterprises and allow a simplified application process along with relatively flexible options for payback. This customization can also include partial or full government guarantees which in turn will help those micro and small enterprises which have a solid business feasibility but, lack the capacity to meet any requirements towards collateral. A neglected area in the training of conventional bank staff is that of gender-sensitive lending operations. This gap can be filled by the central bank through mandatory training on this subject for all staff working in the scheduled banking sector.

Finally, it is important that provincial governments should help the women chambers of commerce and industries to set up physical and online training hubs which can run a quarterly training cycle for potential women (social) entrepreneurs. Having the online training option available can greatly help stay-at-home women as well as those currently seeking to train themselves while in education or any other occupation. This is also an important option for women from areas hit by local violence or conflict.<sup>10</sup> In this case, public-private partnerships can help in penetration of training services. Local private sector can be helped by district administration and development partners to deliver such services.

7. For example, see Jamali, S. and V. Ahmed (2016). "Tax Reforms in Sindh. Policy Brief #54", Sustainable Development Policy Institute. See also, chapter on tax reforms in: Ahmed, V. (2017), "Pakistan's Agenda for Economic Reforms", Oxford University Press.

8. For details, see Yaseen, F. and V. Ahmed (2016). "Trade Winds of Change - Women Entrepreneurs on the rise in South Asia - Background country study - Pakistan", UNDP Bangkok. Available at <http://www.asia-pacific.undp.org/content/dam/rbap/docs/Research%20&%20Publications/poverty/RBAP-IG-2016-TWoC-Pakistan-Country-Study.pdf>

9. For details see: pp-27 in Khan, A. et al. (2016). "The role of youth in Sustainable Development." Overseas Development Institute. Available at [http://southernvoice.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/sdpi\\_paper\\_The-role-of-youth-in-sustainable-development.pdf](http://southernvoice.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/sdpi_paper_The-role-of-youth-in-sustainable-development.pdf)

10. See: Khan, S A and Ahmed V 2014 Peaceful Economies: Assessing the Role of the Private Sector in Conflict Prevention in Pakistan. Stability: International Journal of Security & Development, 3(1): 24, pp. 1-9, DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5334/sta.dv>.

## Gender, Tolerance and Violence Against Women



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Pakistan has been struggling hard to counter violence against women for at least three decades. Deep rooted patriarchal norms, poverty, weak rule of law and inequality are key factors exacerbating violent extremism. All these factors have a direct relationship with the exploitation of women and girls. The country was ranked at 147 in the Human Development Index<sup>1</sup> with serious gender gaps in education and economic opportunities. The mean years of schooling for women and girls was 3.7 as compared to men and boys, being 6.5. The estimated gross national income for women remained 1498 per capita as compared to that of men at 8376 per capita.<sup>2</sup> The World Economic Forum places Pakistan at the second last rank as far as women's economic development is concerned, in its Global Gender Gap Index.<sup>3</sup> The participation of women in the electoral

process has apparently been well recognized in recent electoral reforms including local government acts passed by provincial assemblies in 2014 and the election rules 2017, however their role in decision making remained low.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, women represented only 2.9 percent of the total candidates during general elections 2013.<sup>5</sup>

Empowerment of women and girls is directly related to a society where an effective rule of law prevails, where all citizens are treated equally, and where diversity is appreciated. Unfortunately, all these factors are missing in Pakistan, thus creating a strong hindrance for women to contribute effectively. Religious extremism along with strong patriarchal norms have become entrenched. This is the stumbling block for effective women empowerment in Pakistan. The recent reaction by religious groups against the Punjab Women Protection Act (which boldly addresses domestic violence) is an example. This merger of extremist and patriarchal mindsets is also evident from the recent by-elections in Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, where candidates of these religious extremists received considerable votes.<sup>6,7</sup> Although these candidates did not win the election, however, the number of availed votes for a newly registered political party of these religious extremists is of serious concern for actors working for women empowerment. Barring women from voting<sup>8</sup> in many areas of KP<sup>9</sup> and Punjab<sup>10,11</sup> is another manifestation of this merger. The relationship between religious extremism and the patriarchal mindset, is manifested through the issue of forced

conversions of young Christian and Hindu girls, mostly in Sindh and Punjab.<sup>12</sup> A recent report launched by the MSP (Movement for Solidarity and Peace) revealed that 1,000 Christian and Hindu girls, aged between 12 and 25, are forced to convert to Islam every year. It is estimated that Christian girls make up 70 per cent of this number, while Hindus make up the remainder.<sup>13</sup> Why is it that only young women and girls are forced to convert? The answer is simple: patriarchal norms support, or at least do not condemn, the kidnapping/forcing of young girls for marriage purposes.

The country continues to witness shrinking spaces for women in the public sphere. Despite the existence of progressive and pro women legislation ensuring the safety and security of women in political, social and economic spheres, the implementation of these legislations is a big question mark. One of the reasons for the lack of implementation could be little or no willingness by the executive, which predominantly is dominated by men, while the other could be strong conservative social norms.

The social fabric of the country has become more and more conservative towards women and girls. There are areas where women are not allowed to vote. Thousands of women are killed in the name of honor every year and a rape occurs every two hours in Pakistan, according to the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan. The conviction rate of rape cases is extremely low.<sup>14</sup>

1. Pakistan Today (2017), "Pakistan ranked 147 on the Human Development Index." Available at <https://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2017/03/23/pakistan-ranked-147th-on-human-development-index-un-report/>
2. United Nations Development Programme (2016), "Human Development Report 2016." Available at [http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/2016\\_human\\_development\\_report.pdf](http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/2016_human_development_report.pdf)
3. World Economic Forum (2017), "The Global Gender Gap Report 2017." Available at [http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF\\_GGGR\\_2017.pdf](http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2017.pdf)
4. National Assembly of Pakistan, Elections Act 2017. Available at [http://www.na.gov.pk/uploads/documents/1506961151\\_781.pdf](http://www.na.gov.pk/uploads/documents/1506961151_781.pdf)
5. NDI and ANFREL (2013), "The 2013 National and Provincial Elections in Pakistan." Available at <https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/NDI-ANFREL-Pakistan-EOM-Final-Report.pdf>
6. FAFEN (2017), "FAFEN to observe Chakwal By-Election with 48 Trained Citizen Observers." Available at <http://fafen.org/fafen-to-observe-chakwal-by-election-with-48-trained-citizen-observers/>
7. ECP Website- Election results of By-elections in Chakwal PP 20 and NA 120
8. Uelect (2012), "Female Voter Turnout and Women Voting in Pakistan." Available at <http://uelect.org.pk/blog/female-voter-turnout-and-women-voting-in-pakistan/>
9. Zia-ur-rehman, "Women barred from elections in Pakistan." Available at <https://ziaurrehman.net/tag/women-barred-from-elections-in-pakistan/>
10. Roze TV (2015), "Punjab LB Polls: Women reportedly barred from voting in Khushab." Available at <https://rozetv.com/punjab-lb-polls-women-reportedly-barred-voting-khushab/>
11. Supra note 6.
12. Hindus of Sindh (2012), "Ethnic Cleansing of Hindus of Sindh." Available at <https://hindusofsindh.wordpress.com/tag/ethnic-cleansing-of-hindus-of-sindh/>
13. Christian Today (2014), "Girls are being forced to convert to Islam in Pakistan, but because they are Christian nobody cares." Available at <https://www.christiantoday.com/article/girls-are-being-forced-to-convert-to-islam-in-pakistan-but-because-they-are-christian-nobody-cares/36776.htm>
14. National Commission on the Status of Women. "Assessment of Women Protection Act". Available at <http://www.ncsw.gov.pk/publicationslist#ResReport>

Women are also important contributors to the economy. Violence against women impacts upon their utility and effectiveness in the economy value chain. According to a study in Brazil,<sup>15</sup> 25 percent of working days lost by women tend to be caused by violence, which reduces their financial gains between 3 and 20 percent. Children of mothers experiencing violence are three times more likely to become ill and 63 percent of these children repeat at least one year in school or abandon their studies.<sup>16</sup>

Moreover, domestic violence against women can contribute to increase in militancy and extremism. The children, especially boys of women facing violence, face a psychological disconnect with their families and are easy target for militants to engage in violent extremist activities. This is evident from the suicide attacks in Pakistan, where most of the attackers were as young as 18 years, hailing from poor and neglected families.

Responses to violent extremism in Pakistan have mostly taken the shape of counter terrorism operations. Since 2001, the army has conducted twelve such operations across the country.<sup>17</sup> Millions of rupees were spent and thousands of people, including women and children, got internally displaced. While such counter terrorism measures have achieved partial success, they need to be supplemented by preventive measures such as providing economic opportunities to the poor youth, training children to appreciate diversity right from the beginning at primary levels, and bringing Madrassa reforms. In order to

create a tolerant society, it is not enough to 'counter' violent extremism. There have to be strong long term preventative mechanisms which aim at the very roots of this menace. These should focus on fostering a culture of tolerance, acceptance and appreciation of differences. The media is an important tool in this regard, which if used wisely, can expedite towards making a difference.

Likewise, efforts at preventing violent extremism cannot work if women are not engaged. Women constitute 48 percent of the country. They carry with them a huge potential to play their role in creating tolerance. Women can become an effective part of efforts to develop early warning signs of violent conflict right from their homes, and can lead local initiatives to counter and prevent violent extremism. However, a strong initiative to take effective measures for their empowerment and inclusion is the need of the hour.

Women in Pakistan are consistently being discriminated, sidelined and suppressed from participating in the public sphere. Nevertheless, they persist in advocating and demanding for their rights and more participative inclusion in the economic and social fabric of society. Women human rights' activists have formed alliances and networks to address issues related to violence against women and girls. The Alliance on Ending Violence against Women and Girls (EVAWG), Hazara Women Network, and Mumkin Alliance are some examples. Such networks and alliances are

addressing violence against women and girls through advocacy and lobbying with the government for effective policies and budget allocations for women's participation in the peace building process, electoral processes and decision making.

Other essentials for preventing violent extremism and ensuring women empowerment include a robust and diverse civil society, encompassing women's organizations, women human rights defenders, activists and women leaders. The State needs to create an enabling environment for women civil society leaders through ensuring legislation and a non-discriminatory justice system built on the rule of law, equality and human rights. Furthermore, it is crucial to conduct a 'gender-lens' scrutiny of both existing and upcoming political parties. Their agenda must encompass women empowerment and equality as a priority while getting registered. Inclusion of women in implementation of the national action plan to counter violent extremism is crucial. The dialogue on countering violent extremism and inclusion of women in policy making and implementation, must remain alive in parliamentary sessions. The parliamentary committees related to violent extremism must include women as chairs as well as members, so that their participation must be ensured in letter and spirit. Finally, close monitoring of organizations who exploit religion for the preaching of personal ideologies, is imperative through the executive and through parliamentary oversight.

15. Subordination of gender: reflecting on the vulnerability to domestic violence against women; Laura Christina Macedo Piosiadlo, Rosa Maria Godoy Serpa da Fonseca and Rafaela Gessner Federal University of Paraná. Curitiba - PR, Brazil. University of São Paulo. São Paulo - SP, Brazil

16. Ibid

17. Development Advocate Pakistan, Volume 3, Issue 1 (2016). "Preventing Violent Extremism." Available at [http://www.pk.undp.org/content/pakistan/en/home/library/hiv\\_aids/dap-preventing-violent-extremism.html](http://www.pk.undp.org/content/pakistan/en/home/library/hiv_aids/dap-preventing-violent-extremism.html)



# Interview



## Rabiya Javeri Agha

Secretary  
Ministry of Human Rights

**Despite considerable improvement in women's opportunities, choices and capabilities, Pakistan still holds one of the lowest values in the Female Gender Development Index (GDI) in the world. What structural changes are required to overcome this?**

First of all, we have to accept that the index does not take into account the whole gambit of women that work in Pakistan. For instance, home based women workers, women who work in the agriculture field etc. are not even documented when it comes to the number of workers in the informal sector. So, to begin with, these workers in the informal sector need to be documented and accounted for and once they are accounted for, the ranking will automatically go up.

There is no question that women in Pakistan are not achieving their economic and social potential. However, we need to look more internally and less towards such indexes in order to understand the factors that disempower women.

There are two main factors that need consideration when looking at women empowerment. One is capital investment in women, and second is the institutional and social structures that support that capital. In terms of capital, we have to look at the social capital invested in the woman in terms of the provision of education, and then financial capital in terms of for instance, access to a bank account or microfinance-this has now gone up to 54 percent through the Zarai Taraqiati Bank. Then, come the social structures and networks that offer support to the women in the community at large that are also important foundations of empowerment. Finally, physical capital in terms of land and property are also important links in the entire chain.

It is important to understand that while the government is indeed actively working towards provision of all these capitals, however, a change cannot come overnight. But if inputs are plugged into all these and women are mainstreamed into financial inclusion- which is gradually happening through schemes such as the Benazir Income Support Programme, for example-then the change shall be witnessed soon. An increase in budgetary expenditures for women in the health and education sectors is also important in order to mainstream women into the development discourse. These are the inputs a woman needs to be able to stand on her feet.

Simultaneously, supporting mechanisms are required for these inputs to actualize. These supporting mechanisms come in the form of pillars. These pillars include culture, norms and institutions.

The government is enacting laws that would prohibit any kind of

## say that again

*"...There has been a very paramount shift in Pakistan which is realizing that rights exist."*

abuse to women, such as laws against gender based violence, sexual harassment etc., and all provinces have been very active in this regard. There are also legislations being devised that are empowering women in terms of access to loans, quota policies, fair representation etc.

In terms of cultures and norms, we see that at present, people are gradually getting keener in sending their girls to acquire education or pursue non-traditional careers, especially in families that are more progressive. For instance, at present, just in civil service, women account for nearly 50-55 percent of new recruits. Therefore, attitudes have evolved over time. Hence, the positive support of norms, society and culture are equally important for the uplift of women.

**In your opinion, is women empowerment catered to sufficiently in existing policies and national frameworks? If so, what restricts implementation of these policies and if not, what actions needs to be taken?**

Yes it is dealt with sufficiently. In the past, everything that was related to human or women rights was a concession. There has been a very paramount shift in Pakistan which is realizing that rights exist. There is a growing awareness that when a vulnerable woman asks for something, they are not asking for a concession; in fact, they are asking for their inherent right. The idea of rights has come in. This momentum is coming in Pakistan and is translating into policies.

In this, a very positive role has been played by the civil society and by the media. It is the pressure built by these forces that main stakeholders are going down to the grassroots level to address the root causes.

In terms of legislation, there have been innumerable laws and acts passed. There is a full-fledge Ministry of Human Rights. Pakistan has ratified a number of conventions on women. Moreover, there is a human rights cell in the Supreme Court of Pakistan. The National Action Plan also caters well to women empowerment. Recently, a Federal Treaty Implementation Cell was also set up in Islamabad headed by the Attorney General of Pakistan. This has also been replicated at the provincial level. Such cells follow up on the commitments that the country has agreed to. Hence, laws and implementation bodies exist and are actively playing their roles.

Nonetheless, challenges exist. The first is awareness. Even if someone might be aware of the law, not everyone is aware of how to access the law. Access to the law, access to the available resources, access to the institutions and how to make the best use of the available resources and institutions, are facets that everyone needs

to be educated on. Media, civil society and women parliamentarians all have to play a role in creating awareness and providing access.

Second is intolerance and a lack of unity. One of our biggest problems is that we work in silos. There has to be a common platform. If we want to find success then we have to partner and this battle cannot be done alone. And partnering together can only be achieved once there is tolerance.

Third, is financial limitations. Sufficient allocation of financial resources and appropriating sufficient budgets in all national policy and planning is crucial in taking the momentum forward.

Finally, the lack of intellectual and human capacity. A big question is, if there exist sufficient capacities capable of playing their role in delivering on the gender question.

**While women's representation has improved considerably in legislative institutions (parliament/provincial assemblies), they remain under-represented in other institutions of governance such as judiciary, police and civil services etc. In your opinion what is the cause of this discrepancy and what actions are required?**

In addition to increased women participation in legislative institutions, their representation in other public institutions is gradually increasing. Large number of women are gradually entering the civil services. However, for them to climb up the ranks it will take some time. The reason for that is the gestation period, which is around 30 years. If there is a lack of women in the Supreme Court, or Judiciary etc., then that is because there was no women presence in that field around 15-20 years ago. Hence, the gestation period is the factor behind the not very high visibility of women in some of these fields.

**In Pakistan, the particular interaction of economics, politics and law on one hand, and culture, patriarchy and religion on the other, creates unique challenges that are precarious to tread on. How can these binary dynamics be juxtaposed into achieving uniformity in terms of the treatment of women?**

Cultures and traditions are pillars which supplement laws and regulations. So while laws for women empowerment and protection exist, unless attitudes and cultures do not support women, their true potential and strength cannot be channelized.

**The SDGs endeavor to integrate gender dimensions into all sectors of the economy. In your opinion, what sustainable working models can be replicated from other countries in order to achieve this goal?**

The SDGs are being exclusively handled by the Ministry of Planning, Development and Reform and hence under their forte. However, they have already set up a Gender Cell and are actively working towards gender rights.

# Interview



## Jamshed Kazi

Country Representative  
UN Women Pakistan

**Despite considerable improvement in women's opportunities, choices and capabilities, Pakistan still holds one of the lowest values in the Female Gender Development Index (GDI) in the world. What structural changes are required to overcome this?**

There are several regularly cited indices that measure human development and gender dynamics based on education, health and other indicators. In addition to the GDI, for example, there is also the Global Gender Gap Report generated by the World Economic Forum which has consistently ranked Pakistan second to last in terms of gender equality for three years in a row. There is no doubt that structural, legislative and normative changes are required to effectively root out gender discrimination, but it is equally important to first understand the parameters that constitute some of these indices so that we can make better informed policy choices.

In my opinion, Pakistan should not be ranked so low in the index since it is performing quite well in some dimensions and in other areas the national statistical data does not do justice to capturing women's full contribution to society and the economy. When we look at political participation where gender indicators rank Pakistan fairly well, we see that Pakistan has indeed improved in that indicator over the years and in fact has more women in parliament as a percentage (21 percent) than many OECD countries. The issues where Pakistan is really struggling include the high number of out-of-school girls and low women's economic participation, which is largely responsible for Pakistan's unenviable ranking. On the other hand, when we compare this data with a country like Nepal, we find that it fares better on the gender front, despite being classified as a Least Developed Country (LDC). The reasons for this include the facts that it has a much larger women's labor force participation at 80 percent, with greater women's mobility in public spaces and a relatively less rigid patriarchal set up. A large proportion of the women in this labor force are part of the informal sector and critical household tasks such as fetching of water and firewood by rural women, for instance, are also officially counted and defined as 'work'. Similarly, if women in Pakistan's rural areas and home-based workers (HBWs) who are predominantly women, were added to the labor force statistics, then the numbers would get an appreciable boost up from the current 25 percent. Just as an example, in Sindh and Punjab, we know for a fact that there are approximately 12 million women working in the informal set-up from the confines of their homes in economic activities such as stitching, weaving, bangle-making and handicrafts, and yet, most of these are not counted in the workforce or accorded the full rights and protections by their employers. The encouraging news is that both Sindh and Punjab have passed the Home-Based Workers Policy which addresses this lacuna, but this now needs to be implemented in letter and spirit.

## say that again

*"...It is not about adding the word 'gender' or 'women' in every document ...but, in fact, actually thinking through policy design, project implementation, monitoring and evaluation of any intervention affecting populations and recognizing that men and women have different needs, priorities and therefore ensuring that women do not get left out or denied equal opportunities to benefit from societal progress."*

Having discussed at length the methodological basis of the global gender indices and Pakistan's low ranking, we know that this alone will not favorably alter the gender dynamics for women and girls in Pakistan. At a structural level, mobility or lack thereof constitutes one of the major impediments restricting women from going to school, college, markets, places of work, or even partaking in leisure activities, including sports or simply enjoying a cup of tea with friends at a local 'dhaba'. UN Women is working with the Governments of Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) in an effort to ease that impediment and ensure new and safe avenues of public transport for women are made available. Together with civil society partners such as the Aurat Foundation, Women's Development Department and with funding support from the Australian Government, we conducted the first Women's Safety Audit of the public transportation system in Lahore. Not surprisingly, our survey findings revealed that almost 90 percent of women travelling by public transportation in Lahore have experienced some form of sexual harassment. The audit therefore pointed to strong deterrents for many women to safely access public spaces and limitations on their mobility, and concrete recommendations were made to make the city a safer place for women, including low-cost measures such as better lighting at bus stops and gender-sensitive training for bus drivers and conductors, for instance. In KP, we are working with the Transport Department and partner UN agencies such as UNOPS, with support from the Government of Japan, to provide women-only buses for the cities of Mardan and Abbotabad to promote greater mobility which in turn should result in more women going to college/university and to seek employment. I should say that while I am not a proponent of gender-segregation, in the context of KP, the women only buses are meant to be a temporary measure with a view to eventually progress towards a mutually respectful society where interaction between and among the sexes is no longer seen through the binary lens of morality/immorality.

In addition to mobility, gender parity at the workplace is also integral not only to achieve women's empowerment but also spur robust economic growth. According to a 2015 report by the McKinsey Global Institute, closing the gender parity gap in the workforce will result in an additional USD 12 trillion to global GDP by 2025. Although the government has constituted quotas for women in public service ranging from 10-20 percent depending on the province, it is important to focus more on strategies for women's retention as opposed to recruitment only. Both, within certain sectors in the government and especially the private sector in Pakistan, there are best practices in terms of policies and strategies to attract and retain more women and a diverse workforce and there needs to be more sharing of such experiences and learning what works and what does not. It is a historic accomplishment for the UN

to have achieved a 50:50 parity at the highest tier of the organization (global heads of departments and UN agencies) which is a commitment fulfilled by the current UN Secretary-General. Here in Pakistan, however, while our gender parity figures are better than most organizations in both the public and private sector, we still have a long way to go to attain gender parity and to ensure that once women are recruited, there is a subsequent pathway for career progression and a supportive environment.

**In your opinion, is women empowerment catered to sufficiently in existing policies and national frameworks? If so, what restricts implementation of these policies and if not, what actions need to be taken?**

In Pakistan, there is no shortage of policies and laws which address gender equality, beginning from Constitution Article 25, the Vision 2025 document, and numerous laws at the federal and provincial level on domestic violence, sexual harassment at the workplace, acid crimes, and establishment of institutional mechanisms such as Commissions on the Status of Women. One of the most recent and progressive Women's Empowerment Policies has been approved by the Government of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, which has committed to increasing the quota for women in public service to 20 percent, and establishing a Gender Steering Committee to be chaired by the Chief Minister. If implemented, this is where exciting change will take place at a faster pace, when women become part of actual policy discussions in mainstream decisions about politics and development and not only confined to 'women related issues'. Gender equality is not something that can be addressed in silos. All departments and stakeholders have to work together since there is a gender dimension to virtually every discussion, policy or action.

In the Vision 2025 document developed by the Planning Ministry, it is envisaged in one of the indicators that by 2025, Pakistan aspires to raise the women's labor force participation from the current 25 percent, to 45 percent. If all of us work towards achieving this one single goal, a monumental task would be achieved, not only in terms of the progress on SDG-5, but multiple SDGs. Global experience has demonstrated that women's financial independence and economic empowerment is one of the most powerful driving forces for greater investments in education and health at the community level and this also translates into increased mobility, self-awareness of rights and breaking down harmful societal norms, values and practices restricting women's empowerment.

Gender mainstreaming is complex-it is hard work and often poorly understood. It is not about adding the word 'gender' or 'women' in every document or just about counting the number of women present at a workshop or panel, but, in fact, actually thinking through policy design, project implementation, monitoring and evaluation of any intervention affecting populations and recognizing that men and women have different needs, priorities and therefore ensuring that women do not get left out or denied equal opportunities to benefit from societal progress.

**While women's representation has improved considerably in legislative institutions (parliament/provincial assemblies), they remain under-represented in other institutions of governance such as judiciary, police and civil services etc. In your opinion what is the cause of this discrepancy and what actions are required?**

There is no easy answer to this question. In part, this goes back to a social condition that girls are communicated in school in terms of the type of professions that they should choose when they grow up. Hence, at the outset, it is the school teachers and educators who have to help widen the possibilities of career horizons in the minds of the young boys and girls. Changing gender roles for both men and

women at a young age is very important. In Pakistan, I have seen women bomb disposal experts as well as male nurses-both are quite rare professional choices which defy gender stereotypes, but this should be encouraged as it is about expanding opportunities for both men and women to be able to enjoy and excel at what they do best, thereby optimizing their contributions to Pakistani society.

Some of the impediments to women's participation in fields such as the police force, for example, are quite shockingly basic. There are many reasons why Pakistan only has less than two percent women's representation in the police force nationwide. One of these includes the lack of access to toilet facilities in certain areas, and understandably this causes some of the women officers to leave their jobs as the workplace was designed by men, primarily for men, without due consideration of women's needs, and not because they are scared or fearful of their duties, which women execute with as much, if not more, dedication and competence as their male counterparts.

Finally, male attitudes towards women achieving senior roles and pursuing careers also need to change. There are many young men becoming disgruntled because there is a slow, but seismic shift underway that they perceive as a threat to their historic privilege. We need to reinvent and reimagine notions of masculinity which allows men to be vulnerable and not always have the burden of being the sole protector or provider for the family. Traditional roles of men and women are being redrawn gradually and as with any change, it can be unsettling and even scary. Gender equality is not a cricket match: if one side wins, it does not mean that the other side loses. When women and girls thrive and prosper socially, politically and economically, it is a collective victory for all of humanity.

**In Pakistan, the particular interaction of economics, politics and law on one hand, and culture, patriarchy and religion on the other, creates unique challenges that are precarious to tread on. How can these binary dynamics be juxtaposed into achieving uniformity in terms of the treatment of women?**

Legislations are binding. However, religion and cultural norms hold tremendous sway over the lives of people, especially in deeply conservative or tribal areas. Countries such as Turkey or Indonesia, who have been able to well balance both ends, are perhaps good examples to learn from.

We have to begin to find moderate, enlightened clerics and voices in the community who understand both culture and religion as well as laws and conventions, in order to build bridges. To get to them on board, we need to reach out to individuals who are from conservative groups, but who understand the bigger picture as well, and try to reason with them, not necessarily on religion, but on practicality. On my field missions, I have come across a few men who firmly believe that their faith does not permit women to work outside the house. However, they also believe that only women doctors should be treating women patients. They begin to realize the impracticality of these two conflicting convictions when someone asks, "If women shouldn't work, how do you expect your wife or daughter to receive medical attention from a female doctor or attendant during childbirth, for instance?" They may then make exceptions for women to work only if they train to be doctors-far from an ideal outcome in terms of gender equality, but it is the beginning of an important dialogue and process of changing mindsets.

**The SDGs endeavor to integrate gender dimensions into all sectors of the economy. In your opinion, what sustainable working models can be replicated from other countries in order to achieve this goal?**

Pakistan has been a leader when it comes to the early adoption of the SDGs, including through a unanimous resolution in the parliament,

so I think it does not need to follow any countries in that regard. The Government has also set up SDG support units embedded within the Planning Ministry and Planning and Development Departments in all the provinces, so the supporting institutional structures are also being put in place. For UN Women, we are particularly interested and will be following the progress of achievement of SDG-5 and its indicators, but also progress of indicators across some of the other SDGs. The importance of gender equality and sex disaggregated data is evident by the fact that almost 25 percent of all the 167 SDG indicators contain a gender dimension which needs to be tracked and monitored so there will be a continued need for greater investments in data collection at regular intervals across all key development sectors.

We see that all provinces have begun to integrate the gender dimension in their programming, although at a different pace and scale. As the most populous province and one where there are relatively stronger institutional structures and state capacities, the province of Punjab has a bit of an edge when it comes to gender-responsive programming and testing innovative models. This includes the introduction of the Gender Management Information System (GMIS) and the Gender Parity Report, both of which are leading examples in the South Asia region. Development of Women's Safety Apps, Women's Safety Audit, 'Women on Wheels' (WoW) initiative and the establishment of the One-Stop Violence Against Women Center (VAWC) led by the Punjab Government, are all noteworthy models of gender-sensitive development interventions which other provinces should also consider adopting. On the other hand, the province of Sindh for instance has been more proactive over the years with legislation that protects the interests of women and girls-at present, they are still the only province where child marriage (below 18) is not permitted.

In looking at successful models from other countries, it is useful to look at countries who have done well economically by harnessing the other half of their population-the women. These include the Nordic countries such as Iceland and Norway, who not only are among the richest countries, but also score the highest on the gender equality indicators. There are also good examples from middle income countries such as Morocco, Indonesia, and Malaysia, and even LDCs such as Nepal where women's economic empowerment and inclusion in development planning processes has benefitted women and their communities. At the same time, I feel that there are strong examples of gender-sensitive development work being done among provinces in Pakistan and there is much more under-utilized opportunity to learn from one another.

As an early adopter, Pakistan has a headstart in the journey towards meeting its SDG commitments, but this also means that it needs to continue to stay on track and keep the momentum going, which UN Women and the wider UN system will rally behind, since Pakistan's success is in our collective best interests and the women and girls of Pakistan are counting on us.

## say that again

*"...Women should be seen as agents of intermediation in the relationship between sustainable development and the environment, such as population growth, migration, family organization of labor, patterns of production and consumption, and unequal distribution of economic, political and social power."*



## Meraj Hamayun Khan

Member of Provincial Assembly, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa  
Chairperson, Women Parliamentary Caucus  
Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Assembly

**Despite considerable improvement in women's opportunities, choices and capabilities, Pakistan still holds one of the lowest values in the Female Gender Development Index (GDI) in the world. What structural changes are required to overcome this?**

It is an unfortunate fact that Pakistan still faces severe criticism due to its ranking on gender empowerment and achievement of crucial social sectoral goals such as literacy and maternal mortality rate. It is also a fact that in the recent past, the government has intensified efforts to reach up to at least the minimum international standards in all areas of gender development. However, the results continue to fall short of the desired goal. Reasons are multifarious and complicated. Addressing them all need careful and deep thinking and planning, for bringing positive changes in the whole development cycle and the processes involved in it. The issue of low funding needs serious consideration as it is linked with the government's political goals and priorities. Low funding shows disinterest and lack of political will. It also impacts the performance of the department/s responsible for implementing laws and policies. For quicker but lasting results, these departments require the best trained and well qualified officials and personnel, who believe in what they are doing, understand all the impediments which block women's participation and work on the removal of these obstacles.

**In your opinion, is women empowerment catered to sufficiently in existing policies and national frameworks? If so, what restricts implementation of these policies and if not, what actions need to be taken?**

In recent years, gender empowerment figures have appeared quite prominently in the national discourse, giving the impression that biases against the participation of women at different levels have been removed and women are now included in the development goals of the government. In practice, however, there is not much to show. Women continue to suffer due to overwork, lack of resources and impediments to their mobility. Public institutions, both political and civil, have yet to recognize the importance of equity in resource distribution and balance in social responsibilities between the two genders. Lack of available data proves the indifference of the government. Legislation is still weak, gender empowerment policies are non-existent in public institutions and systems are still resistant to the inclusion of women in decision making. A great deal of capacity building for gender sensitizing is required to enable decision makers and caregivers to design and implement a gender empowerment plan. Mass awareness raising is also needed to address the religious-cultural barriers blocking all efforts to bring changes.

**While women's representation has improved considerably in legislative institutions (parliament/provincial assemblies), they remain under-represented in other institutions of governance such as judiciary, police and civil services etc. In your opinion what is the cause of this discrepancy and what actions are required?**

It is only in recent years that as a result of pressures from civil society and international agencies, the government has begun attributing attention to women and their rights. In the past, women have been invisible and completely subjugated to their male family members. Due to illiteracy and the lack of exposure to other cultures, women themselves also lacked the awareness of injustices inflicted upon them. But all this is changing. Opportunities, even though they are still quite less, have succeeded in creating pockets of rapid development growth. With institutional strengthening of key departments, development will speed up further. Constitutional amendments may be needed in order to make institutions more responsive to gender needs and human rights. Through constitutional amendments, political parties, which are the window to the political empowerment of women, will include women in decision making.

**In Pakistan, the particular interaction of economics, politics and law on one hand, and culture, patriarchy and religion on the other, creates unique challenges that are precarious to tread on. How can these binary dynamics be juxtaposed into achieving uniformity in terms of the treatment of women?**

Pakistani society is unique in the sense that it is governed by three laws; that of the state, those guided by religion and those dictated by the culture specific to each province. Kinship and '*biradari*' (fraternity) play a major role in decision making and people seem to be reluctant to give up this system, even if they migrate to an urban centre in search of better opportunities for improving their standard of living. Girls are kept out of school because of the constant fear instilled by the community that 'educated girls become too independent and will not be able to find men to marry'. Honor is held supreme even if it costs the life of a dear family member, most often the wife, daughter or a sister. Development slows down in the face of confrontation from families and influence of the community.

Strict implementation of state law (which must take into account, the essentials of religion and culture) will bring about the desired result.

**The SDGs endeavor to integrate gender dimensions into all sectors of the economy. In your opinion, what sustainable working models can be replicated from other countries in order to achieve this goal?**

Sustainable development involves a bid for social and cultural change with distribution of resources, procedures and objectives that favor both men and women. In this, the role of women is important. Women should be seen as agents of intermediation in the relationship between sustainable development and the environment, such as population growth, migration, family organization of labor, patterns of production and consumption, and unequal distribution of economic, political and social power.

Every country has its own cultural and traditional beliefs. A pattern of life has to be understood through proper research and collection of disaggregated statistics. This should form the basis of an integrated sustainable development pathway which bears an explicit commitment to gender equality and seeks to enhance women's capabilities, respect and protect their rights, and reduce and redistribute their unpaid care work. Women must have full and equal participation in decision making and policy development to create this pathway. Women are ignored and left out from power structures, especially in our rural areas where they are responsible for 60 to 80 percent of food production as well as fuel and water provision, yet have little access or control over natural assets such as land, water and ecological conditions that create opportunities for a better life. The cause of female poverty is gender bias and conventional approaches to development do not address this bias. In fact, they reinforce and formalize the biases.

Pakistan's development program needs to fully enter into the sustainable gender development discourse and tune its parliamentary, legal and executive structures to fully benefit from data and expertise available globally.

## say that again

*"...legislation is not enough as the law needs to be implemented strictly in letter and spirit, for it to be truly effective."*



## Justice (R) Majida Razvi

Chairperson  
Sindh Human Rights Commission

**Despite considerable improvement in women's opportunities, choices and capabilities, Pakistan still holds one of the lowest values in the Female Gender Development Index (GDI) in the world. What structural changes are required to overcome this?**

I think the most important structural changes required for improvement in the Female Gender Development Index (GDI) are not only strictly ensuring that the different quotas already fixed under different laws are met, but also increasing the quota, especially in all government departments at the upper level as well in all decision making posts. There should be at least a 30 percent increase in quota for women. There should be special institutions where women can be trained to develop their skills so that they are well equipped to handle all administrative issues at the public and private level. All such institutions/commissions must be made autonomous.

**In your opinion, is women empowerment catered to sufficiently in existing policies and national frameworks? If so, what restricts implementation of these policies and if not, what actions need to be taken?**

Despite all encouraging steps in the national policy domain, a multitude of challenges still exist in the implementation of state policies. First, is the biased attitude of people in general when it comes to working women. Our patriarchal social setup restricts the implementation of these policies because a large number of men are still hesitant to accept women as their working colleague or as a superior. Where there is a married couple, the husbands consider it a threat to their male dominance. Experience has shown many homes broken due to such 'superiority/inferiority complexes' between husband and wives in such cases.

The absence of political will is a very important factor as well. This restricts structuralization and implementation of women empowerment policies. There is no doubt that the Government of Sindh has taken lead in the sector of legislation in respect to women protection and empowerment as a whole. But legislation is not enough as the law needs to be implemented strictly in letter and spirit, for it to be truly effective.

**While women's representation has improved considerably in legislative institutions (parliament/provincial assemblies), they remain under-represented in other institutions of governance such as judiciary, police and civil services etc. In your opinion what is the cause of this discrepancy and what actions are required?**

Women are underrepresented in many fields, for example, the Judiciary in superior courts. In legislative bodies, they are selected on the party's representation in the assemblies and very few come on general seats. Political parties do not have internal elections nor do they financially support their female candidates. Many a times, the female candidates are not even provided a level playing field to compete with men who have greater social freedom, exposure and economic orientation which delineates them as being more competent in comparison to females. To tackle this issue and equalize women's representation, it is essential that maximum attempts are made to remove socio-political-religious and economic barriers which are hurdles for women empowerment.

This disparity can be reconciled through structural changes as pointed above. Women must be made financially independent to give them a status in the family. This will give them the confidence to overcome the barriers of patriarchy, culture and religion. In addition, female entrepreneurs should be encouraged through financing and technical assistance to actualize their entrepreneurial ideas which will boost their confidence and help them in dealing with social conservative values. Moreover, protection of women against violence can usher a big boost to women's participation in economic activities.

All in all, the state must have a will to truly follow and implement laws and the policies, in order to succeed.



# Interview



## Dr. Yasmin Zaidi

Director  
Centre of Gender and Policy Studies

**Despite considerable improvement in women's opportunities, choices and capabilities, Pakistan still holds one of the lowest values in the Female Gender Development Index (GDI) in the world. What structural changes are required to overcome this?**

There has to be a fundamental shift in how women are perceived and addressed, whether it is through laws, policies or simply the media. As half the population, women's health, education, work, politics etc. are all critical in shaping progress in Pakistan. I think education and economic empowerment are very important in improving women's lives. Pakistan needs to invest in education and health substantially to address the gaps.

A major impediment to women's ability to realize their potential is the fear or threat of violence—whether at home, in the street or at the workplace. A zero tolerance policy for violence against women is critical for women to access opportunities.

Women's contribution to the economy—primarily as unpaid family labor—has to be recognized and addressed by government policies. Their economic contribution in agriculture and livestock needs to be supported with policies and interventions that enhance this role. As subsistence farmers, women are the key to food security. Regulatory frameworks that protect small farmers and livestock owners from predatory corporate agriculture and businesses, are essential. Asset transfers, especially land ownership, is needed.

**In your opinion, is women empowerment catered to sufficiently in existing policies and national frameworks? If so, what restricts implementation of these policies and if not, what actions need to be taken?**

Yes and no, to whether existing policies address women's empowerment sufficiently. Even before the women friendly legislative and policy actions of the last decade, there wasn't a vacuum in the policy arena. What is problematic is the understanding and implementation of these policies. The Constitution for example does not discriminate based on sex, and this should be the guiding principle for all policy and national frameworks. Yet, there is a need for affirmative action to supplement gender blind or gender neutral policies.

On the other hand, there is a lot to be done, precisely because there is this gender blindness in policymaking. Our economic policies are a case in point— as there is hardly any analysis of how women and marginalized groups are affected or excluded from these policies. The Five Year Plans, a national policy document for planning, has

## say that again

*"...A clear eyed vision of human rights and women's rights should guide understanding and action rather than labelling it as a religious or customary practice. "*

included a chapter on women's empowerment or gender and development, since the early 90's after much lobbying by women's groups to address the lack of such focus in this important document. However, it has been relegated to a chapter, and women do not feature anywhere else in the document.

Implementation is restricted by lack of resources. The best policies sans material and human resources are just ink on paper. And tied to resources too, is the element of awareness among duty bearers and citizens of how these laws and policies can be operationalized and translated into actions.

**While women's representation has improved considerably in legislative institutions (parliament/provincial assemblies), they remain under-represented in other institutions of governance such as judiciary, police and civil services etc. In your opinion what is the cause of this discrepancy and what actions are required?**

It is very simple. All recruitments in the public sector should be on merit and include a quota for women. For example why does every police station in the country not have at least 2-3 female police officers? This would not only increase the number of women in 'thana's' (police stations) but also make them more accessible to women. The same holds true for the judiciary and the civil service. The recruitment processes, the training and the promotion criteria, as well as the work environment, all are male oriented.

**In Pakistan, the particular interaction of economics, politics and law on one hand, and culture, patriarchy and religion on the other, creates unique challenges that are precarious to tread on. How can these binary dynamics be juxtaposed into achieving uniformity in terms of the treatment of women?**

Institutions everywhere are steeped in patriarchal norms. This is a global phenomenon. In Pakistan, it acquires additional validity because of the cultural understanding of women's role as a home maker and mother. This seeps into how laws and policies are interpreted and implemented. The token policies to improve women's economic participation reflect this role. Skill training institutions for women continue to offer sewing and embroidery courses to women. Women's immense role in agriculture, in livestock, is overlooked and very little, if any, attention is paid on how to strengthen and enhance this role. Efforts to separate the myths of women's work and lives, and their actual realities, are needed through a sustained campaign at all levels to educate civil servants, policy makers and duty bearers about this reality.

One more thing. We need to understand that the strands of patriarchy, culture and religion in Pakistan are all knotted together and cultural practices are often justified as religious ones. A clear eyed vision of human rights and women's rights should guide understanding and action rather than labelling it as a religious or customary practice.

**The SDGs endeavor to integrate gender dimensions into all sectors of the economy. In your opinion, what sustainable working models can be replicated from other countries in order to achieve this goal?**

The implementation of the SDGs against targets and indicators will be a major challenge for Pakistan. To begin with, the current process of identifying priority areas does not adequately reflect inclusion of women and their concerns. We can identify initiatives that relate to the different SDG goals that have successfully addressed gender concerns in Pakistan. A scan of what has worked regionally in South Asia and globally can provide models for Pakistan as well. In terms of SDG 5 that specifically addresses women's empowerment, there should be attention given to game changing interventions to ensure economic empowerment and address violence against women. Public sector spending must reflect the priorities of enhancing women's work potential, and their social wellbeing.

# Interview



## Dr Farzana Bari

Human Rights Activist

**Despite considerable improvement in women's opportunities, choices and capabilities, Pakistan still holds one of the lowest values in the Female Gender Development Index (GDI) in the world. What structural changes are required to overcome this?**

Pakistan is a huge country that harnesses a huge population. Within this population, there is a certain section of the society that has had opportunities and spaces open to them over the years, specifically the educated upper middle class women, who have made many gains. However, a large population of the country is essentially residing in rural areas and we see no improvement in these areas. Owing to increasing levels of poverty, unemployment etc in rural and underdeveloped areas, the entire population in these areas is being impacted. However, women suffer the most due to their social vulnerabilities. Women lack access to even the basic essential facilities such as education, health, clean drinking water etc. As a result of these, there is an impact upon women's overall well-being which thereby contributes to the overall poor female development indicators in the country.

The most important structural change to improve GDI is the pro-people approach of the state that should deliver on its social contract- provide its citizens with essential amenities and services and security. Unless the state delivers on these essentials, socio-economic development indicators cannot improve. The question here really is, how to ensure that the state delivers? Here comes the attribute of active citizenship and people's accountability. At every level, people's ability to hold their governments accountable matters. Public pressure on institutions prompts them to action. However, people activism in Pakistan is very weak. While there are a few active NGOs in the country, they mostly function in urban areas. Labor movements have weakened, less than two percent labor is unionized. A majority of people are working in the "grey economy" in Pakistan i.e. the informal economy and 70 percent of the labor force in the informal sector consists of women. However, their working conditions bear no reflection of their labor rights. Hence, trade unionism and labor rights have certainly deteriorated over time. Likewise, there is also fragmentation within the ranks of labor movement activists.

As a result, the state institutions have become negligent of their responsibility and accountability towards its citizens. It is a paradox that at one level, the Pakistani state is very strong and powerful in terms of its defence capability and its repressive measures to counter contesting voices in the society, whilst, on the other, it is becoming fragile, owing to a lack of delivery and a loss of people's support.

## say that again

*"...The concept of 'glass ceiling' has to be shattered which restricts women to reach superior positions."*

**In your opinion, is women empowerment catered to sufficiently in existing policies and national frameworks? If so, what restricts implementation of these policies and if not, what actions needs to be taken?**

If we look at the empowerment frameworks and constitutional rights of the state, it is a fact that we are not there 100 percent. There are still discriminatory provisions present in the legal framework of the country, such as the Haddood Ordinance, Law of Evidence or Citizenship Act etc. Pakistan is a signatory to 27 international human right conventions. However, the problem arises when you try to superimpose these very high level of legal standards onto a extremely under developed society that is not yet ready to absorb or cannot match up to these very high human rights standards. As the state is unable to enforce these laws across the country, consequently parallel justice systems based on feudal, tribal and decadent social norms are functioning across Pakistan. These cultural and tribal frameworks are not in line with the constitution of Pakistan or the international standards set by the international conventions. This disconnect is a major impediment in the implementation and enforcement of laws. Hence, first off, the state is under an obligation to enforce standards of human rights all over the country, irrespective of local culture or tradition.

Second, state institutions are not geared to deliver on gender rights. They lack capacity and resources to implement policies of women's empowerment. Unless adequate capacities are provided, there will exist loopholes in the entire process, beginning from improper planning whereby gender sensitive planning, programing, budgeting and other factors will be ignored; to execution and implementation, whereby the lack of female personnel will not be able to cater to the huge female population in the country. And finally, it goes without saying, that the whole process requires financial investment, which is yet again, missing.

**While women's representation has improved considerably in legislative institutions (parliament/provincial assemblies), they remain under-represented in other institutions of governance such as judiciary, police and civil services etc. In your opinion what is the cause of this discrepancy and what actions are required?**

The reason why representation of women in the legislature has increased is because of the provision of quota seats. Prior to gender quota, there was never more than three percent representation of women in the parliament. As far as other state institutions are

concerned, despite the fact that women in Pakistan have higher education endowment as compared to men, they face vertical and horizontal segregation within public and private sector institutions. There is 10 percent quota for women in the public sector but it is either not filled or women are employed at a lower level. The critical mass of women exists in society. The gender gap at the higher level of education is almost bridged, however, opportunities are not available to them owing to social norms and gender biases of labor markets. The concept of 'glass ceiling' has to be shattered which restricts women to reach superior positions. Hence, the need for a quota system to be introduced in all professions and fields, and across all levels, so that women can have access to opportunities.

**In Pakistan, the particular interaction of economics, politics and law on one hand, and culture, patriarchy and religion on the other, creates unique challenges that are precarious to tread on. How can these binary dynamics be juxtaposed into achieving uniformity in terms of the treatment of women?**

This divide should be bridged as most forms of patriarchal expression have been criminalized by the state. For example, child marriages or domestic abuse, though common occurrences in the society, are liable to lawful punishment by the state. Hence, again we come to the issue of implementation. Unless the state and law enforcement agencies do not enforce state laws and charge the offenders, these patriarchal, feudal, cultural and other decadent traditions and practices will continue to foster. Even if the state sets one bold, solid example, that should be enough to prompt a change in attitudes. State laws should be given precedence over any other practices.

**The SDGs endeavor to integrate gender dimensions into all sectors of the economy. In your opinion, what sustainable working models can be replicated from other countries in order to achieve this goal?**

Gender equality is a fundamental right, but also a development imperative. Gender equality directly links to all other development goals. Hence, gender equality is also 'smart economics' as investing in women will bring benefits in achieving all the sustainable development goals and targets as adopted at the national level. Scandinavian countries fall on the highest spectrum of development and it is because they have prioritized gender equality in their national agenda. These countries also provide social support to women in terms of aiding their domestic roles and share the burden of care economy. For instance, there are adequately equipped nurseries or day care centres for working mothers in order to support work-life balance. Hence, the state needs to share the burden of the care economy in order for women to be active in the development discourse of the country.

# Interview



*say that again*

*"...It is not just jobs, but in fact, female entrepreneurship needs to be encouraged."*

## Dr. Mobina Agboatwala

Chief Paediatrician and Head of Department, Sindh Government Hospital

Chairperson, HOPE Foundation

Assistant Professor, Dept. of Community Health Sciences, Aga Khan University Hospital

**Despite considerable improvement in women's opportunities, choices and capabilities, Pakistan still holds one of the lowest values in the Female Gender Development Index (GDI) in the world. What structural changes are required to overcome this?**

Over the years there has definitely been an improvement in opportunities and choices available to women. However, a closer look at the ground situation shows a different picture. This needs to be looked through the urban and rural perspective. Starting from the basic facts, school enrollment of girls in rural areas is extremely low. Overall in Pakistan, 55 percent girls are out of school. School drop outs in girls are more common after class 5, as secondary schools are far away to access. As a result, girls do not even complete high school. When looked over a decade, this whole population of girls remains uneducated and cannot become part of any female development force. Skill development centres can help women gain skills that can supplement in economic empowerment. These vocational skills are mainly traditional and do not provide women with clear skills on income generation and entrepreneurship. Even in urban areas, though the female workforce has increased, it is more so in the upper strata of the society. Even then, only 18 percent of females are part of the professional work force. The capability in women clearly exists and is recognized, however, attitudes of apprehension from male counterparts are seen. It is the middle class which can bring about a change. But job opportunities for the middle class are not diverse; they have to face a hostile environment and there is great disparity in the pay structure. Female professionals are not taken as seriously as male professionals.

**In your opinion, is women empowerment catered to sufficiently in existing policies and national frameworks? If so, what restricts implementation of these policies and if not, what actions need to be taken?**

If I may say, on paper, policies and commissions supposedly cater to women empowerment. However, we are far behind in implementation. The feudal and patriarchal mind set, still impedes implementation. Hence, bureaucratic hurdles and red tapism delay implementation. Policies and recommendations of standing committees take years to implement and even then, are not fully implemented. Half hearted efforts and those not in a true spirit will never yield desired results. Development is considered a male dominated field, whereby even policies and decisions concerning women's development are designed by males without any female consultation. Of course, an overall change in the patriarchal attitude will take a long time to come, but one thing should certainly be done: there should be a 'third party' monitoring or accountability body, which oversees that actions are implemented during the prescribed time period,

implementation is done in letter and spirit most importantly, there is follow up of actions by measuring indicators via true statistics, including the quantitative and qualitative impact of indicators. Simple verbal rhetoric does not serve the cause.

**While women's representation has improved considerably in legislative institutions (parliament/provincial assemblies), they remain under-represented in other institutions of governance such as judiciary, police and civil services etc. In your opinion what is the cause of this discrepancy and what actions are required?**

Though the reserved number of seats has increased in the legislative assemblies, yet, many of these women are in some way connected to the political, influential and feudal set ups. While there have been some outspoken women individuals within these as well, but overall, they have a muted performance. They can certainly make a much more positive contribution in formulations of policies, implementing and overseeing increased involvement of women in economic development. In other institutions of governance like the judiciary, police etc, gradually, a change is coming. Acceptance of women in these roles is slowly and gradually taking place. It is a good sign. But our patriarchal society does not allow them to climb the ladder. You may find female judicial magistrates but very few female high court judges. Likewise, there is a prevalence of women in the lower cadres of the police force, but rarely at the DIG level. Civil service shows a promising trend, with many females seen as senior DMG officers. Women are also seen in the technology sector and the traditional role of teachers. However, in decision making roles, fewer women are seen. Even in the private sector, where there is a much higher representation of females and they are found in senior leading roles, yet, the proportion is less than desired. A policy of assigning a specific percentage of jobs in the government and private sector to females might be helpful, along the lines of the urban-rural quota system.

**In Pakistan, the particular interaction of economics, politics and law on one hand, and culture, patriarchy and religion on the other, creates unique challenges that are precarious to tread on. How can these binary dynamics be juxtaposed into achieving uniformity in terms of the treatment of women?**

Unfortunately, culture, patriarchal attitudes and misuse in the name of religion have created an environment which is non-conducive to promoting gender equity. It is a very complex and sensitive area to tread on. And to meet this challenge, all sectors of the society, including parents, teachers, law makers, councilors, judiciary, and politicians, have to play a part whereby a positive role of females is

shown and taught to a male child right from infancy. The male child, when he sees a patriarchal attitude all around, and sees the family giving him preferential treatment as compared to his sister, grows up with a superiority complex and then becomes part of this patriarchal set up himself. Religious leaders with the misinterpretation of religion add fire to the fuel. Main stream media as well as social media, has a much more responsible role to play. People look up to the media to see prevailing trends. The woman is generally portrayed either as an oppressed inferior person or as a modern, outgoing female with a slightly negative twist to her character. In addition, we need female role models, who are contributing to society, to look up to. These role models need to be less glamorous and serious contributors to society. There is less exposure in the media to positive, serious contributors to society. A multidimensional approach, carefully treaded over a period of time, can contribute to our goals.

**The SDGs endeavor to integrate gender dimensions into all sectors of the economy. In your opinion, what sustainable working models can be replicated from other countries in order to achieve this goal?**

Unless education indicators improve, female contribution in the economy will not come in. Western models will not work in our society. It is countries like Sri Lanka, Indonesia, Malaysia and many African countries, where conditions are similar to ours, but intellectually and culturally, they are far ahead from us. Many of these countries share the same religious values but have a more forward looking outlook. Women are given the more traditional jobs of working as laborers in factories, or traditional skill development roles, or in the agricultural field. Some fields, mainly technology and entrepreneurship, are considered male 'sectors'. Uganda through the BRAC NGO has come up with the ELA (Employment and Livelihood for Adolescents) program, concentrating on self-employment opportunities for women. This concentrates on vocational and 'life skills' training. Many other developing countries are focusing on increasing school enrollment for girls. The need is to come up with models promoting specialized skill development leading to economic self sufficiency. It is not just jobs, but in fact, female entrepreneurship needs to be encouraged.

# Interview



## Shad Begum

Executive Director

Association for Behaviour & Knowledge Transformation (ABKT)

### say that again

*"...For a real shift in women's lives, their economic and political empowerment is key to bringing a shift in gender roles by enabling them to exercise a respectable social status and attributing a value to them through their presence in leadership roles. "*

**Despite considerable improvement in women's opportunities, choices and capabilities, Pakistan still holds one of the lowest values in the Female Gender Development Index (GDI) in the world. What structural changes are required to overcome this?**

I do not think there is considerable improvement in women's opportunities and choices when we compare it with the needs and issues of women across Pakistan. Although there are some programs and interventions, however, women from rural and remote regions cannot access these programs. To ensure progress and move above in the Female Gender Development Index, the following structural changes are suggested:

- There is a need to focus on the real needs of women while designing and implementing programs for women empowerment;
- Interventions for women empowerment must be long-term and strategic; and,
- Women in Pakistan have a number of issues and needs. However, for maximum impact, focus needs to be on areas that can help mainstream women into development. Here I believe that economic empowerment is the key to women development. Therefore, the major aim should be to create employment opportunities, provide mobility services and offer training in technical, trade, business development, information technology, marketing and promotion skills.

**In your opinion, is women empowerment catered to sufficiently in existing policies and national frameworks? If so, what restricts implementation of these policies and if not, what actions need to be taken?**

Being mindful of the issues and women's rights situation in the country, I would say that there should be more legislation. Further, lack of awareness about existing laws, policies and frameworks among the public, especially among women, is itself a big hurdle in making the best use of the existing legislations. There is a need to educate the public, especially women, regarding laws and policies in their native languages, keeping in mind the high illiteracy rate among women around the country. Then comes the implementation part, which has always been ignored. Lack of attention to the

implementation and allocating sufficient resources to relevant institutions to support this implementation, are missing.

**While women's representation has improved considerably in legislative institutions (parliament/provincial assemblies), they remain under-represented in other institutions of governance such as judiciary, police and civil services etc. In your opinion what is the cause of this discrepancy and what actions are required?**

Women's representation may have improved, but in terms of quantity and not quality. Women in these institutions are still not granted the authority to take decisions. As a result, majority of the planning and programming comes in the hands of male members, who are more in number. And when it comes to women-focused programs, men and most of our institutions have always been validating women related interventions with culture and religion. Keeping in mind the need of the hour and the required efforts for women interventions, women in all institutions must be given the full right to decision making. Second, gender-sensitive planning and budgeting should be declared compulsory in every institution and initiative, in order to bridge the gender gap.

**In Pakistan, the particular interaction of economics, politics, and law on one hand, and culture, patriarchy and religion on the other, creates unique challenges that are precarious to tread on. How can these binary dynamics be juxtaposed into achieving uniformity in terms of the treatment of women?**

This unique challenge is very critical in achieving uniformity in terms of the treatment of women. Culture and patriarchy are the basic hurdles, whereas religion has been misinterpreted to support patriarchy and a culture where women have been treated as second-class citizens and commodities. Institutions whose work focuses around women empowerment, need to work on initiatives that can ensure women empowerment in real terms, by bringing a shift in gender roles and authorities. Most of the interventions do not aim at changing the decision-making and power dynamics; which are based on gender roles in our society. For a real shift in women's lives, their economic and political empowerment is key to bringing a shift in gender roles by enabling them to exercise a respectable social status and attributing a value to them through their presence in leadership roles.

**The SDGs endeavor to integrate gender dimensions into all sectors of the economy. In your opinion, what sustainable working models can be replicated from other countries in order to achieve this goal?**

Due to socio-political uncertainty, the country has a long way to go in democratizing institutions. There is a need to analyze and then strategize accordingly, keeping in mind our dynamics and realities. A big challenge in achieving the SDGs is that many institutions are just aware of the basics; there exists a big gap in understanding the SDGs. Only then can implementation and adaptation be addressed, and interventions made accordingly.



# Women Voices



What does Women Empowerment meant to you?



**DEVELOPMENT ADVOCATE**  
**PAKISTAN**