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**Gender** equality

# Pushing on to reduce the gender gap

A national advisory forum launched to support women empowerment

OUR CORRESPONDENT  
 ISLAMABAD

Economic disparities among haves and have-nots in Pakistan have made life challenging for men, however, their plight cannot be compared to that of women, who are still unaware and deprived of their fundamental rights.

This concern was expressed by participants at the launch of the National Advisory Forum of Gender Equity Programme (GEP), held here at a local hotel on Saturday. A documentary titled "Main Safar Mein Hoon" (I am in a journey) was also screened on the occasion. The film focused on the past 100 years of women's struggle all over the world, while particularly highlighting the achievements and sacrifices of Pakistani women, from 1911 till 2011.

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Women's Parliamentary Caucus Secretary **Dr Nafisa Shah**

women, especially for hard-working, ordinary women who are the bedrock of our society," said Dr Marilyn Wyatt, the US ambassador's wife, while speaking on the occasion.

The five-year programme is an initiative by the Aurat Foundation and has been funded by United States Agency for International Development (USAID). It aims at closing the gender gap in Pakistan by proactively supporting development of women. The programme seeks to improve societal atti-

tudes towards women's rights issues and facilitate women's access to information, resources, and institutes.

"Giving them seeds to sow and cattle for farm will not empower them. Women need to be given land rights," said Women's Parliamentary Caucus Secretary Dr Nafisa Shah. Women of Pakistan are not lacking determination or leadership, but still a lot needs to be done to empower them, she added.

Sharing the findings of a survey for the Benazir Income Support Program (BISP), Sindh Provincial Minister Tauqeer Fatima Bhutto said that many women are aware of their right to education and healthcare.

Giving details of related surveys, Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa's Provincial Minister Sitara Ayaz said the women displaced due to floods in the province were the most affected.