

■ GCI PRELIMINARY REPORT

# ECP appreciated for its effort in reaching out to female voters

Myra Imran  
Islamabad

Although terming the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) an 'all men's club,' the Gender Concerns International (GCI), in its preliminary report, has appreciated the enormous effort of ECP in reaching out to female voters and setting up as many polling stations so that women did not have to cover great distances.

The GCI representatives called upon the ECP to declare elections in constituencies where women were not allowed to use their constitutional right of voting as null and void. In Upper Dir and Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa, women were barred from voting through political party agreements or under threatening circumstances.

In Upper Dir, it was the case in the entire district and only one woman was able to cast her vote in UC

Darora. In Lower Dir, women were stopped from voting in seven constituencies, and in Buner district women were not allowed to vote in 17 UCs. Women were also barred to vote in several constituencies in Mardan, D I Khan, Nowshera, Batagram and Malakand. The constituencies where women were stopped from casting vote en masse are: (See Table)

On the May 11 elections, the observation mission from Gender Concerns International in partnership with the Aurat Foundation sent out 110 observers in Pakistan, to monitor election activities from gender perspective throughout the day at 555 women's polling stations all over Pakistan.

Election monitoring was undertaken in Islamabad, Rawalpindi, Lahore, Karachi, Peshawar, Swabi, Kohat, Swat, Abbottabad, Mardan, Lower Dir, Hyderabad, Thatta, Sar-

godha, Bhakkar, Vehari and Gujranwala. Due to the presence of a wide network of the Aurat Foundation at grassroots level, the mission succeeded in reaching out far into the country.

The report, presented by head of the Mission Sabra Bano, was highly appreciative of the high women turnout. "Despite pre-election times threats and attacks, female voters turned out in big numbers often present from the beginning, very enthusiastic, including old age, middle age, youth, mothers with babies and children, disabled women, women carers coming along with their families, neighbours, relatives or friends," says the report. In Sargodha, women voted for the first time in history in union councils Lilliani and Moazamabad.

The report mentions while in some polling stations political agents seemed to have taken over the task

of the administrative staff and have been found to 'guide' the female voters, in others campaigning was going on inside polling stations.

It says that although there were more polling stations closer to the women's homes, the facility itself often was not up to mark: too small polling stations, burning hot inside, no privacy for the voters. In another place several mixed polling stations were all in one room which led to complete chaos. No washrooms were available for female polling staff as well as female voters at most of the stations. Water was not provided. In some polling stations material was very late and also lacking. No sitting areas were foreseen for older, disabled or pregnant women. As cueing often took many hours in the sun, this led to fainting, sickness, throwing up.

It says that for security, often male police was found in female

S.No	District	NA	PA	UC/Poling station	Status
1	Upper Dir	33	91-93	All UCs	women were barred in all UCs, only one woman cast her vote in UC Darora
2	Lower Dir	34	91	Nafasa	Women were not allowed to cast their vote
				Kamangarah	Women were not allowed to cast their vote
				Bajwaro	Women were not allowed to cast their vote
				Pato	Women were not allowed to cast their vote
				Bankot	Women were not allowed to cast their vote
				Sari	Women were not allowed to cast their vote
				Ouch	Nusrat Begum (a candidate) cast her vote
				17 Ucs	Among 17 UCs women didn't cast their vote in 17 UCs
3	Buner	28	77-79	Kotki	Women were not allowed to cast their vote
				Katlung	Women were not allowed to cast their vote
4	Mardan	10	28	Garah Essa Khail	Women were not allowed to cast their vote
5	D.I. Khan	25	67	Choki mumraiz	Women were not allowed to cast their vote
				Ajmera	Women were not allowed to cast their vote
6	Nowshera	5	12	Govt Degree College, Govt High School Dargai	Women were not allowed to cast their vote
				Heroshah, Haryan Kot	Women did not allowed to cast their vote
				Primary school Nary Obo	Women were not allowed to cast their vote
7	Batagram	22	59		
8	Malakand	35	98		

polling stations, not always aware of exact procedures for instance, the fact that the observers could enter before opening or they could assist counting, etc. In some cases security did not allow women with kids to enter which caused a lot of trouble.

It says that female voters' knowl-

edge about vote-casting procedure was of average nature in urban centres, however, in rural areas and in rural suburbs of cities women generally lacked information about voting. Often many political party agents have been found taking advantage of this.