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Govt fails to produce data on budget spending for women

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Islamabad

Despite efforts for gender responsive budgeting in the past, the government has failed to produce segregated data on budget spending for women's welfare and rights.

The issue was discussed at large in a study circle on 'Women's Development Agenda in Next Federal Budget 2015-16 in Line with UN MDGs/SDGs' with Parliamentarians and civil society representatives organised by Aurat Foundation on Tuesday.

Expert and Consultant Public Financial Management Nohman Ishtiaq delivered a detailed lecture on the topic which led to the discussion on the role of Parliamentarians and civil society moderated by Aurat Foundation Director Programmes Uzma Zarin.

Nohman Ishtiaq said that Pakistan's project planning, budgeting and monitoring processes are mostly gender blind. He urged Parliamentarians to raise vital questions in the Parliament including how much budget is being allocated for women and girls, how much budget was actually spent and what improvement it brought in the lives of women and girls?

The participants of the study circle suggested the Parliamentarians to lobby and recommend to the government to present 'Gender Budget Statement' as part of the Budget Books, which shall highlight the amounts allocated for women development.

They talked about the limitations of the Parliamentarians in suggesting and change in the budget and discussed ways to exercise influence in the process of budget making. They said that local government bodies would be in a better position to implement and ensure gender responsive budgeting.

Highlighting the stages of budget making and implementation where Parliamentarians can play major role, Nohman Ishtiaq said that at the budget implementation stage, the Standing Committee could review gender specific initiatives and their implementation.

"At the federal level, there is no Standing Committee of women development. One option could be to create an informal group of members from other Standing Committees and interact with them on regular basis on issues related to women or an informal group of federal and provincial members can be created to formulate National Action Plan on women develop-

ment — including required legislation, specific actions, etc.," he said.

He gave an example of the report published by the federal level Standing Committee on women in 2009. 'Such work can be continued in the Provincial Assemblies,' he recommended.

Mr Ishtiaq also linked the budget allocations for women's development with Pakistan's commitments which it made to UN through conventions and treaties signed e.g. Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD), International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), Convention against Torture (CAT), International Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (ICRPD) etc.

He said that the government and women's rights organizations should analyze the situation of women and girls in a sector such as health, education, and assess in order to implement gender-responsive policies. "This must be followed by an as-

essment of the outputs of these allocations in order to evaluate how resources are actually spent, and policies and programmes implemented," he added.

Speaking on this occasion, Nafeesa Khattak from PTI, gave the examples of foreign countries where local governments generate their own revenue from car parking etc. She suggested the same practice for revenue generation base for local governments instead of depending solely on federal and provincial governments.

Naseema from Pakhtunkhwa Mili Awami Party (PKMAP) said that legislators from Balochistan need such information and training to enhance their involvement in the budget making process at provincial and federal level.

Chief Operating Officer Aurat Foundation Naeem Mirza, in his closing remarks, emphasized that government institutions and civil society organizations shall focus more on resource allocations rather than direct but isolated service delivery at village level like road construction etc.

Pointing to women's centuries old deprivation from, he said that equal access of men and women to natural resources is essential for national development and progress.