



Founded by Shahla Zia

Patron-in-Chief: Naem Ahmed Mirza

EDITORIAL

It is widely acknowledged that political participation is a fundamental right in a democratic society. Unfortunately, in Pakistan, women's political participation has been hindered by various socio-cultural and political factors. Although there have been some significant measures taken to address this issue, women still face numerous challenges in participating in the political process. According to the 2017 census, women in Pakistan constitute almost 49% of the population, yet women have struggled to gain a foothold in politics and have often been relegated to the sidelines. However, in recent years, there have been some positive developments that have given hope for a more equitable political system.

One of the most significant steps taken towards

increasing women's political participation has been the allocation of reserved seats for women in both the national and provincial assemblies. This has ensured that women have a voice in the legislative process and have a chance to shape policy decisions that affect their lives. Similarly, the Elections Act of 2017 has provisions to promote women's political participation as both voters and candidates.

Despite these efforts, there is still much work to be done to ensure that women are represented at all levels of government. Women continue to face various barriers in political participation, including cultural and societal norms, limited access to resources, and gender-based violence. These challenges have resulted in low voter turnout among women and fewer women running for office.

To address these challenges, there is a need for an electoral reform agenda that is focused on promoting women's political participation. This agenda should include measures such as increasing women's representation in political parties, providing training and support to women candidates, and creating a more inclusive and safe environment for women in politics.

Women's political participation is essential for building a more equitable and democratic society. The government and civil society organizations must work together to ensure that women have equal opportunities to participate in the political process. By doing so, we can create a more representative and inclusive political system that truly reflects the diversity of our society.

Democracy only way to save country: WPC

By Waqar Ahmed

This year Aurat Foundation in collaboration with Women's Parliamentary Caucus (WPC) observed the International Democracy Day (IDD) in Islamabad under the auspicious of JAZB Programme. The event was held a few days before the global celebration of International Day of Democracy (IDD), which takes place on September 15th every year. The purpose of the IDD is to promote and celebrate democracy worldwide and to raise awareness about the importance of democratic principle. The participation of various stakeholders, including political parties, civil society organizations, and marginalized communities, in the seminar demonstrates the significance of democracy as an inclusive and participatory system of governance. It also emphasizes the need for collective efforts to promote and protect democracy in Pakistan and around the world.

During the seminar, Mr. Raja Pervez Ashraf, Speaker of the National Assembly of Pakistan, made a statement emphasizing the importance of democracy. He said, "Democracy is the collective wisdom of the nation, and its respect lies in the democratic system as a whole." This statement highlights the fact that democracy is not just about elections but also about the overall functioning of a democratic system, which includes the rule of law, protection of human rights, and respect for democratic principles. He further highlighted the importance of democ-



Group photo of participants of the event on International Day of Democracy.

ocracy and encourage individuals and organizations to take action to promote and protect democratic values.

The welcome remarks at the opening of the seminar were given by Ms. Shahida Rehmani, secretary WPC. She said that no democracy can work without the meaningful role of women. Furthermore, she said that she pays her respect to the honorable speaker national assembly for supporting the WPC and thanked the support of the transgender and disabled community.

Mr. Naem Mirza, executive director

Aurat Foundation (AF), said that from 2008-2013 women legislators were very active in the parliament and this showed through their work since most of the legislation regarding women's rights was done during this period. He said that democracy has become a value in the modern age and further stated that out of the all 190+ countries put together, only Bangladesh and Pakistan have a clause inserted into their constitution which says that breaking the constitution itself is a criminal offence and carries the death penalty. He emphasises on Aurat Foundation's advocacy efforts to

increase women's representation in all tiers of government in Pakistan have been critical in promoting gender equality and empowering women. The organization's campaigns have played a significant role in raising awareness about the importance of women's political participation and advocating for policies that increase women's representation. It is essential that these efforts continue to ensure that women's voices are heard, and their rights are protected, leading to a more just and equitable society in Pakistan.

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Achieving Gender Equality through Implementation of SDG - 5

National and Provincial Actions towards Attainment of Agenda 2030 Shared

By Nowsheen Khurram

On December 28, 2022, a national forum was held at the Best Western Hotel in Islamabad to discuss achieving gender equality through the implementation of SDG-5. The event was attended by various stakeholders including government officials, civil society organizations, and members of the public. The agenda for the event was focused on sharing national and provincial actions towards Agenda 2030.

The convention was being held under the project 'Jazba - Democracy and Empowered Women', being implemented by Aurat Foundation (AF) and South Asia Partnership-Pakistan (SAP-PK) with the support of Global Affairs Canada (GAC). The guests and participants of the event included community leaders, media personnel, academia, civil society representatives, and parliamentarians of national assemblies and all four provinces of Pakistan including Gilgit-Baltistan.

Syed Amjad Ali Zaidi, speaker of the Gilgit-Baltistan assembly and convener, SDG Taskforce GB, said that GB they are going to start a first-ever cadet college for girls. This will further help in empowering the women of the region. He said that buses and other public transport are free for women and he further added that vocational training centres are spending a large amount on training and equipping the women and girls of the region with technical skills.

Rahila Durrani, the former speaker of the Balochistan assembly, said that we are lacking implementation of the laws due to our poor political and reading culture. She said that she broke the barrier and became Pakistan's first-ever female speaker of the Balochistan assembly. She further said that women have to stand together and be free of all political ties. She said that her political counterparts should consider women members as chairpersons of the provincial standing committees since their work is better. At the end of her brief comments, she said that we need to improve our understanding of legislative processes such as legislation drafting and writing since several members of the assembly are not knowledgeable about these topics.

Mangla Sharma, member provincial assembly of Sindh, spoke about the legislative weaknesses in Pakistan and said that the women are not trained in legislative matters and a majority of the first-time members do not understand and have poor capaci-



Speakers of the events are responding to queries of participants

ty in this regard. She said that Sindh has passed pro-women legislation in recent times such as anti-dowry act, acid-throwing law and domestic violence prevention act. She further added that such laws are a positive sign from the Sindh assembly and that it is doing good work on women's rights. Furthermore, she said that the Sindh women caucus should improve its work in Sindh and said that as a suggestion they also need to draft bills and laws in the local language for better understanding of the masses.

Sabrina Javed, member provincial assembly Punjab, said that when we talk about gender, people instantly assume that we are only talking about women whereas it also includes men and transgenders, PWDs as well. She said that woman is still seen as a burden in rural areas. Citing an example, she said that in the recent floods several families conducted the 'Nikkah' of their minor girls and sent them away to their new families in order to get rid of an additional member's burden from their family. She said that it is shocking that Punjab province still does not have a women's caucus in Punjab assembly. In the end, she said that female members should remain united and be together regardless of political party affiliation.

Uzma Kardar, member provincial assembly Punjab, said that she remained the head of gender mainstreaming committees for three years in Punjab. Highlighting some of her work, she said that during her tenure she with the help of the Punjab Information Technology Board (PITB) formed an integrated system in order to become aware of the work done by other departments on gender mainstreaming. She said that they held female cyclethons in the city to increase awareness regarding female

issues. Ms. Kardar said that we already have a very low female labour force participation in Pakistan and we need to accelerate the work on an emergency basis.

Madiha Nisar, member provincial assembly KP and chairperson of standing committee on higher education, archives and libraries department, said that in the recent past several pro-women laws and bills such as the acid and burn crime act, Hindu and Kailash marriage act, have been brought to the fore and all of these are a good sign of progress. She said that a domestic violence against women act has been passed after a struggle of 22 years. She further added that these are all baby steps towards progress and work is currently being done to further empower the provincial Dar-ul-Amans of KP and establish them in more neglected areas.

Zeenat Shahwani, member provincial assembly of Balochistan, said that Balochi women have shown tremendous courage in recent times. She

cited the example of a female MPA of Balochistan who was not allowed to sit in the assembly session as she was with her infant child and was asked to leave the assembly premises. After hue and cry on the media, Balochistan assembly now has a child day care centre on its premises.

Naeem Mirza, executive director Aurat Foundation, spoke about the significance of pro-women legislative agenda in Pakistan. In his brief remarks, he thanked all the participants of the consultation and said that in the modern era even in corporate feminism women have become the heads of organisations such as the international monetary fund (IMF) and the central intelligence agency (CIA). He further said that the first procession for women's rights in Pakistan was taken out by Begum Jehan Ara Shahnawaz who was also the member of Pakistan's first constituent assembly. Also, the first inheritance law for women came in 1948 in Pakistan and this a 600-700 year struggle of women for their rights.



Participants present in the seminar under the Jazba project.

Key Recommendations for Electoral Reforms for Strengthening Democracy and Ensuring Inclusion

Democracy and Empowered Women (JAZBA) Programme
(Aurat Foundation and South Asia Partnership - Pakistan)

Suggestions for constitutional Amendments

Amendments in the Constitution in the existing articles as given below or new articles are required for the following purposes:

Article 7

1. The following Article 7 of the Constitution of Pakistan (Part II: Fundamental Rights and Principles of Policy) may be substituted with:

7 Definition of the State

In this Part, unless the context otherwise requires, "the State" means the Federal Government [Majlis-e-Shoora (Parliament)], a Provincial Government, a Provincial Assembly, and such local **governments** or other authorities in Pakistan as are by law empowered to impose any tax or cess.

Amendment: The word "governments" (in bold letters) is added after the word "local".

Article 25(2)

2. The following Article 25(2) of the Constitution of Pakistan (Chapter 1: Fundamental Rights and) may be substituted with:

25 Equality of citizens (2)

(2) There shall be no discrimination on the basis of sex, **colour, race, religion or religious sect, caste, ethnic or social origin, sexual orientation, age, disability, language, maternity and birth.**

Amendment: The words "colour, race, religion or religious sect, caste, ethnic or social origin, sexual orientation, age, disability, language, pregnancy and birth" (in bold letters) are added after the word "sex".

Article 25(3)

3. The following Article 25(3) of the Constitution of Pakistan (Chapter 1: Fundamental Rights and) may be substituted with:

25 Equality of citizens (3)

Nothing in this Article shall prevent the State from making any special provision for the protection of women **and children, religious or ethnic minorities, persons with disabilities and transgender people.**

Amendment: The words "and children, religious or ethnic minorities, persons with disabilities and transgender people." (in bold letters) are added after the word "women".

Article 27 (1)

4. The following Article 27 (1) of the Constitution of Pakistan (Chapter 1: Fundamental Rights and) may be substituted with:

27(1) Safeguard against discrimination in services.

No citizen otherwise qualified for appointment in the service of Pakistan shall be discriminated against in respect of any such appointment on the ground only of race, religion, caste, sex, residence or place of birth, **colour, ethnic or social origin, sexual orientation, pregnancy, age, disability and language.**

Amendment: The words "colour, ethnic or social origin, sexual orientation, pregnancy, age, disability and language." (in bold letters) are added after the word "birth".



Sunset Clause for Reserved Seats

5. A sunset clause will be added in the constitution to ensure that the provision of reservation of seats for women in all legislatures should be for a period of 30 years with effect from next general elections, which may be reviewed by parliament every 10 years with a view to gradually reducing the proportion of reserved seats for women and increasing the proportion of tickets on general seats to women by political parties if there is sufficient evidence to indicate that more women are coming and winning in on general seats;

Amendment: A new federal amendment in constitution is required.

Policy of Reservation and Representation for Marginalized People

6. A "Policy of Reservation and Representation for Marginalized People" should be made part of the constitution to ensure certain uniform principles for all "Provincial Local Government Acts" to at ensure the following:

- 33% proportion of representation for women, inclusive of PWD and transgender people;
- 5% proportion of representation for "Peasants" and 5% for "Labourers"
- Elections through direct modality on all tiers of local governments;
- Determination of basic tiers with Neighbourhood and Village Council as the primary unit;
- Timely elections as per the law after expiry of term.

Amendment: A new federal amendment in constitution is required.

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Key Recommendations for Electoral Reforms for Strengthening Democracy and Ensuring Inclusion

Suggestions for Amendments in Election Act 2017

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II. To increase women's representation in legislatures:

1. Current 17% proportion of reservation of seats for women will be increased to 33% proportion of reservation for women across all federal and provincial legislatures. Within this quota, 33% reservation will be fixed for ethnic minorities, PWD and transgender people and the Islamabad Capital Territory (through a Constitutional Amendment in Article 106 or a possibility is probed whether this could be done through amendment in Election Act 2017);
2. The ceiling of 5 percent allotment of tickets to women on general seats in national and provincial elections as per Section 206 in Election Act 2017 will be increased from a minimum of 5 percent to a maximum of 15 percent in the following manner:
 - Party awarding 75 to 100 percent tickets of the total number of general seats of the respective national or provincial assembly will award a minimum of 15pc tickets to women on general seats, in winnable constituencies.
 - Party awarding 35 to 74 percent tickets of the total number of general seats of the respective national or provincial assembly will award a minimum of 10pc tickets to women on general seats, in winnable constituencies,
 - Party awarding 15 percent to 34 tickets of the total number of general seats of the respective national or provincial assembly will award a minimum of 5pc tickets to women on general seats, in winnable constituencies. [The formula will apply to all parties in each assembly separately on the basis of tickets they award in that assembly. Both the increase in proportion of representation for women and the applying the formula to each assembly require amendment in Section 206 in Election Act 2017

III. To enhance women's effectiveness as legislators and public representatives:

1. Women legislators will be appointed as chairperson of a minimum of one-third standing committees of each legislature including the Senate. For example, if a legislature has 30 standing committees, 9 or 10 will be headed by women; in turn, this one-third women representation will include 33% (one-third) from religious and ethnic minorities, PWD and transgender people, i.e. 3 out of 9 or 10 members (may be included in Election Act 2017);
2. Governments/Legislatures will provide financial, secretariat and logistic support to the respective intra-party parliamentary and cross-party parliamentary forums or caucuses to discuss and develop common positions on critical issues relating to women (may be included in Election Act 2017; the budget may be included in federal and provincial budgets);
3. Legislatures and their secretariats will provide technical assistance and research input support to their respective political parties, their Members as well as Independent Members for preparation of bills and legislative inputs and interventions (may be included in Election Act 2017; the budget may be included in federal and provincial budgets);
4. Women legislators will ensure regular and structured interaction with their own women's wings and women party cadres through well-placed mechanisms within parties, such as local provincial and national women's conventions (may be included in Election Act 2017, and/or political parties' constitutions);
5. All Periodic Reports of International Human Rights Treaties, ratified by the GoP, will be presented in the federal cabinet, federal legislature and relevant standing committees by the relevant line machinery or statutory commissions for review and approval. The National Commission on the Status of Women will be the responsible for preparation, consultation with different stakeholders and approval of the CEDAW (Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women) Country Report (may be included in Assembly Rules, cabinet notification (SRO) etc.);
6. Women legislators will participate in national, regional and international conferences and workshops on women's rights issues as well to actively become part of the Beijing follow-up, the CEDAW, CRC and UPR monitoring processes (may be included in Assembly Rules and the budget in Assemblies' budgets);

IV. To ensure meaningful participation of women in political parties:

1. Political parties will maintain and update membership lists, and regular intra-party elections are held on the basis of these lists; women's wings are responsible for female membership, which may be a joint exercise with the party; and the lists of female membership are maintained and regularly updated by the women's wings (may be included in Election Act 2017, and/or political parties' constitutions);
2. No political party is allowed to contest 30% or more seats in the national or provincial elections unless it has at least 30% female membership and at least 10% of its policy-making body are women; and no party is allowed to contest 15-29% seats unless it has at least 15% membership and at least 5% of its policy-making body are women (may be included, amended in Election Act 2017);
3. All positions in women's wings are filled through elections on the basis of lists of female members; and its office-bearers have sufficient representation in all party structures, particularly the decision-making bodies, e.g. central and provincial executive committees, parliamentary boards and parliamentary party forums etc. (may be included in Election Act 2017);
4. Women's wings become autonomous entities, free to make independent decisions in accordance with party manifestoes and policies; and are able to develop their own women's rights charters and devise policies on women's rights issues; and are actively involved in preparation/amendment of the party charters and election manifestoes, particularly in the context of commitments to women's rights (may be included in Election Act 2017);
5. The female membership of the party (or women's wing) will be primarily responsible for developing the criteria for women candidates for reserved seats in the Senate, National and Provincial Assemblies, as well as for women candidates for general seats in the NA and PAs; they are involved in the final selection and their decisions are respected as mandatory in accordance with democratic norms and may be through provisions in party constitutions (may be included in Election Act 2017);
6. Political parties will bear at least 50% of the financial costs of their women members for contesting general or reserved seats; and provide other support in terms of planning election campaigns, training of female polling staff, providing instructional/educational materials for voters, ensuring local party structure support etc. (may be included in Election Act 2017);
7. Security deposit for female election candidates will be reduced to encourage more women to contest elections (may be included in Election Act 2017);

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Key Recommendations for Electoral Reforms for Strengthening Democracy and Ensuring Inclusion

Suggestions for Amendments in Election Act 2017

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V. To enhance women's effective participation as constituents and voters:

1. Regular updating of electoral rolls should be carried out on annual basis; female personnel should be employed for female voter registration, with at least one female enumerator in each team across the country; women should also be inducted in the ECP staff, at all levels, including district ECP offices (may be included in Election Act 2017);
2. Special campaigns/drives and proactive efforts (through electronic media, concerned agencies, local government structures, political parties, NGOs/CBOs etc.) should be undertaken to ensure that all eligible women have CNIC cards and are registered on the electoral rolls, with a focus on tribal and rural women, as also on women with disabilities (may be included in Election Act 2017);
3. Measures should be undertaken by the ECP in collaboration with political parties, local government authorities, NGO/CBOs, and media to ensure that more women participate in the voting process and are knowledgeable about voting procedures. Special efforts must also be made to enable them to make informed political choices (may be included in Election Act 2017);
4. Separate polling stations set up for women, particularly in tribal or conservative rural areas; trained female staff be posted at the polling stations; and special security arrangement as well as facilities like waiting rooms, bathrooms should be ensured at the stations (may be included in Election Act 2017);
5. Campaign on the right of women to vote, the importance of women's vote and voting according to their own choice, through mass media, particularly the electronic media be carried out in collaboration with women's rights groups (may be included in Election Act 2017).
6. ECP must take strict notice of, and action against, any informal agreements between political parties to prevent women from voting; including debarment/denotification of offending candidates.

Policy Advocacy and Reform Efforts

Women's participation in politics has always been considered a sensitive subject in many societies, including Pakistan. However, in recent years, there has been a significant increase in awareness regarding the importance of women's political participation. This is because women's participation in politics is critical to building a strong and stable democracy.

Political participation is not only a fundamental right but is also crucial for empowering women and promoting gender equality. Women's participation in politics enables them to advocate for their rights and influence decisions that affect their lives. Moreover, when women participate in politics, it leads to better decision-making and a more diverse and representative government.

In Pakistan, women make up 49.2% of the population, yet they remain underrepresented in politics. Despite the government's efforts to increase women's political participation, the number of women in parliament remains low. The current National Assembly of Pakistan has only 70 out of 342 seats reserved for women. Even with reserved seats, women's representation in parliament is only 21%. This is a concerning issue because women's perspectives and experiences are essential in policymaking.

Aurat Foundation has also engaged in policy advocacy, working with Women Parliamentary Caucuses (WPC), SDG Secretariat, Ministry of Law and Justice (MoLaw) and other stakeholders to promote policies that increase women's representation. The organization has lobbied for the implementation of the 33% quota for women in all elected local government bodies and advocated for the inclusion of women's issues in political party manifestos. As a result of several advocacy meetings with WPC and MoLaw, an electoral reform committee composed by WPC of women parliamentarians from leading political parties, including legal experts, representatives from civil society organizations, and members of the government.

The committee's main objective was to review the existing electoral system, consultation with civil societies and make recommendations for reform to increase representation of women, Persons with disabilities, transgender persons and minorities electoral process. WPC finalized the proposed reforms and presented to Ministry of Law & Justice by highlighting the recommendations provided by Aurat Foundation under the umbrella of JAZBA Programme.

The main emphasis remained on 33% representation of women in all tiers of government and increase in party tickets 5% to 15% to women on General Seats. The objective of these recommendations was to ensure meaningful participation and mainstreaming of women, religious and ethnic minorities, Persons with Disabilities (PWD) and transgender people into political and public life, as well as, to ensure transparent, free and fair elections in Pakistan.

Emerging Social Media Trends & Techniques

Aurat Foundation (AF) organized a two-day training program for members of the legislative assembly of Balochistan and Gilgit Baltistan on the subject of "Emerging Social Media Trends & Techniques - Building Constituencies of Women Parliamentarians." The training aimed to build the capacity of parliamentarians how to manage and maintain their social media accounts, link their social media performance with sustainable development goals, raise awareness about cybercrime, and demonstrate their community's strength by increasing their likes, follows, and follow-backs.

The two-day session on social media was well appreciated by



Madam Romina Alam, MNA, SAPM. She additionally requires these types of refreshers because everything is becoming more virtual and interconnected on social networking sites. She claimed to have gained a great deal of knowledge about social media and acknowledged that the Jazba Team's social media training was the most effective of all the previous training sessions. It was

loaded with information on social networking and facts. She claimed to have gained knowledge on how to use social media platforms as well as how to market her online activities and interact with her community through these platforms. Furthermore, she also gained the best strategies to advertise her social media activities and interact with her audience during campaigns and gatherings.



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Women Assemblies to Demand 33% Representation of Women in Local Government and Political Party Structures

Women's participation in politics is essential for a vibrant and democratic society. Unfortunately, women have historically been underrepresented in political parties and local government. To address this issue, the JAZBA Programme organized women assemblies in 12 districts of [country name] to demand 33% representation of women in local government and political parties' structure.

The assemblies aimed to provide a platform for community women to voice their concerns and demand equal representation in politics. The assemblies were organized in collaboration with local women's organizations, and women from all walks of life were invited to participate.

The participants shared their experiences of gender discrimination and the challenges they faced in participating in politics. They also discussed strategies for increasing women's representation in political parties and local government. Many participants emphasized the need for training and capacity building for women to increase their participation in politics.

The demand for 33% representation of women in local government and political parties was the main focus of the assemblies. Participants demanded that political parties should reserve at least 33% of their tickets for women candidates in elections. They also demanded that women should be given key positions in local government, such as mayors and councilors.

The demand for women's representation in politics



A Group of Women Assembly at district Korangi Karachi.

is crucial to ensure gender equality and address the underrepresentation of women in decision-making processes. Women bring unique perspectives and experiences to the table and can contribute to more inclusive and diverse policy-making.

It is important to continue pushing for equal representation of women in all levels of government and political parties. By doing so, we can create a more equitable society that reflects the diversity of its citizens and ensures that all voices are heard.

Democracy only way to save country: WPC



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Mr. Raja Pervez Ashraf,
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Assembly

Ms. Kishoo Bai
Senator of
PPPP

Ms. Sana Jamali
Independent senator
Balochistan

Ms. Maya Zaman
Transgender
Activist

From Page 1

Ms. Nowsheen Khurram, National Programme Manager, Aurat Foundation highlighted the importance of International Women's Day and said that women have come a long way in their struggle for equal rights and opportunities, but there is still a long way to go. Women still face discrimination, gender-based violence, and unequal access to education and economic opportunities. We must continue to work towards creating a world where women can live free from discrimination and violence and have equal opportunities to pursue their dreams.

Ms. Abia Akram, founder of the national forum of women with disabilities in Pakistan, spoke candidly at the seminar. She said almost all of us were

brought to the venue on a wheelchair, which she explained in this manner that the cars we sit in and travel in, has a wheel and a chair, just like the wheelchair of a disabled person. She further said we need to finish systematic barriers in Pakistan which stop the disabled people from excelling in any field.

Ms. Maya Zaman, a transgender activist, said that presently there is a debate ongoing about who is a real transgender? She said that the protection act of the transgender has been challenged in court by a right-wing political party who says that all transgenders are fake. She further stated that the 2017 population census has different number of transgender persons while the national database and registration authority (NADRA) has very low numbers of her community. She

said that this issue needs to be looked into on a priority basis.

Ms. Kishoo Bai, senator of PPPP, said that the majority should not be afraid of a tiny minority and allow them to live freely in Pakistan. She said that we need to stand up for minority rights as it benefits the society at large. She also thanked her party co-chairman Mr. Bilawal Bhutto Zardari due to who's support she is in the senate of Pakistan.

Ms. Sana Jamali, independent senator from Balochistan told a harrowing tale of the damage that the recent floods have wreaked in her native province. She said that rainfall was ongoing for a consecutive 18 days and that Balochistan usually received only 10 mm of rain. However, during the recent floods, it received a huge 240 mm of rain which has destroyed the

infrastructure of Pakistan's largest Balochistan.

She said that around 60,000 women are pregnant and are due to give birth in the next few months and they are not getting any sort of medical care which their situation requires.

Ms. Farukh Khan, member national assembly from PML-Q said that a woman has so many rights given to in our religion Islam. She said that showing restraint and patience is a key part of democracy and we should not stray away from this.

In conclusion, Ms. Shahid Rehmani thanked all the participants and said that we need to work with a new aim to make democracy strong in our country and we need to realize the power of our vote.

Women demand 15% party tickets on general seats and 33% reserved seats



Tariq Malik, Chairperson NADRA, presenting gender sensitive measures taken by NADRA.

By Waqar Ahmed

27 July 2022, Islamabad - Aurat Foundation (AF) in collaboration with South Asia Partnership-Pakistan (SAP-Pk) organized a broadbased consultation in Islamabad today. All political parties were invited. Sen. Taj Haider (PPP), Mehnaz Akbar Aziz (PML-N), Parliamentary Secretary for Law & Justice and Ayub Malik (PNP) were among the speakers.

NADRA Chairperson Tariq Malik and senior officials participated. The Election Commission of Pakistan was invited, but did not attend. Paul Godbout, Counsellor Political, Canadian High Commission (CHC) attended, along with colleagues.

The consultation brought together a diverse and inclusive group, including civil society organizations, activists, women councillors, political workers, transgenders, PWDs, academia and media.

Naem Mirza, AF Executive Director and Irfan Mufti, SAP-Pk in their introductory remarks, stated the meeting objectives - to strengthen democracy, increase women's political participation and ensure diversity. Mirza asserted that it is up to the political parties to ensure that the Parliament of Pakistan remains a sovereign entity and to focus on women in politics.

Human rights activist Tahira Abdullah presented key recommendations on constitutional and electoral reforms, including: extension of women's reserved seats Constitutional provision for the next 30 years, with a Parliamentary review every 10 years; increasing reserved seats from 17% to 33% in all legislatures and local government tiers; adding one seat for ICT; reservations for transgenders (5%), PWDs (10%), peasants (5%), workers (5%) and 33% women within reserved seats for religious Minorities; increased quantum of political party tickets for women contesting on general seats from 5% to 15% across the board; tickets to be awarded on 'winnable' and 'electable' seats and parties to fund 50% of women's election campaign expenses; mainstreaming "Women's Wings" outside the "zanana dabba"; increasing women's political party membership; party appointments at senior policymaking positions; gender training of all legislators; women's appointment as Chairs of 33% Standing Committees.

She listed the ECP's responsibilities: reducing/waiving fees/security deposit for women candidates;

updating electoral rolls; working with NADRA to ensure CNICs and automatic voter registration for all women above 18; ensuring privacy and security at women's polling stations; recruitment, training and promotion of women staff at all tiers of ECP, including POs, DROs, and ROs; zero tolerance of illegal agreements/jirgas for prevention or exclusion of women candidates or voters.



Tahira Abdullah, Human rights activist presenting Charter of Demands

All recommendations were unanimously endorsed by all participants by a show of hands.

Harris Khaliq of Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) also endorsed them, saying we should not back down on these demands; as activists we should continue the movement for democracy

and political rights.

PPP Sen. Taj Haider commended and endorsed all the recommendations, pledging to convey them to the PPP leadership and also to the coalition government, currently working on the Electoral Law Reform Bill, which is easier to achieve than a Constitutional Amendment requiring a two-thirds majority vote.

Tariq Malik, Chairperson NADRA presented a comprehensive list of progressive measures he has initiated at NADRA for gender equality, TGIs and social inclusion. NADRA issues 125,000 CNICs daily (56% women); the gender gap has decreased from 14.7% to 8.9% within one year.

PML-N MNA Mehnaz Akbar Aziz, Parliamentary Secretary for Law & Justice, commended the organizers' initiative, despite the heavily polarized political environment. She pledged to continue working for women and children's rights; marginalized women's political participation; and promised to support inclusion of the proposed recommendations in the draft Bill.

Paul Godbout (CHC) reiterated the importance Canada places on women's political participation, gender equality and social inclusion. He was pleased to see so much diversity in the gathering. Local problems need local solutions to come from Pakistani civil society, and programmes like JAZBA are of immense importance, bringing about visible changes.

Nadeem Kashish and Julie Khan spoke on TGI issues, while Imran and Zulqarnain Asghar highlighted PWDs' problems.

In conclusion, Naem Mirza thanked all participants and announced the formation of a working group to present the proposed reforms to the Law Ministry and Parliamentary Standing Committees.



A view of the participants of the consultation

Transgender and Special Persons Make History in Sindh Local Government Elections

The recent Sindh Local Government Election has marked a historic moment for Pakistan as 508 transgender and special persons will play their role in the local government structure of 31 districts of Sindh for the first time ever. The Local Government Amendment Act has reserved one percent of seats for transgender people and one percent for special persons. The reserved seats for transgender and special persons have been introduced in the Local Government Act for the first time. In the first phase of local body elections in Sindh, the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) has won in 98 out of 101 town committees.

The President of Gender Interactive Alliance (GIA), Bindiya Rana, stated that the transgender community wants its representation in the provincial

and national assemblies, but this initiative to be part of the local bodies is the community's first move. There are around 18,000 registered transgenders with GIA, and it remains to be seen how many of them want to pursue political careers. Bindiya added that after being elected,

their priority would be to improve water supply and sewerage lines. However, there is a concern about the powers that the elected representa-



Bindiya Rana, President of Gender Interactive Alliance (GIA)

tives will have, as in the absence of powers and authority, their representation in local bodies would be of no use.

A significant number of women also contested the local government election as candidates. According to the ECP, out of a total of 22,833 candidates, 4,944 were women, which accounts for approximately 22% of the total candidates. While this num-

ber may seem low, it is still a significant improvement from the previous local government election held in 2015, where only 1,688 women contested out of a total of 40,000 candidates.

This election has marked a significant step towards greater inclusion and representation of marginalized communities in Pakistan's political system. It is essential to ensure that the reserved seats for transgender and special persons have real power and influence, and their voices are heard in the decision-making process. Moreover, it is also crucial to continue working towards broader electoral reforms to ensure that all communities have equal opportunities to participate in the political process and shape their country's future.

Breaking Stereotypes Bring Change

Transgender people are part of the complex tapestry of human diversity. Transgender experiences are a phenomenon exclusive to a specific society but it has been documented in cultures across the world and the experiences and acceptance of these individuals are varied. Unfortunately, in Pakistan transgender population is a marginalized community that faces multiple problems. They have to experience stigma and victimization in their homes, schools, and communities.

Zehrish Khanzadi is a transgender who also faced much discrimination from society. She was born in Lyari, Karachi. Her family like other families was ashamed to tell her gender to anyone. Schoolmates and community children bullied her, called her names like *khusra*, *chakra*, and made fun of her. Her parents forced her to act like a male and even hired a psychiatrist to make her masculine. The psychiatrist tried to change her behavior through counseling and medicines. But when it didn't work well, he suggested to send her to 'Cadet College' so, her parent did it. But unfortunately, she also faced discrimination there. Whenever there would be a skit, she would be chosen to do female parts like dancing, singing etc. She felt herself to be labeled as a person who entertain the audience.

She continued her studies at Karachi University in 2009. At that time, students' federations were very active and had a stronghold on university. No one can say anything to them. She was harassed by them on roads but no one came forward to help her.

During university, she started activism and voluntarily worked for rights of trans people. She joined JAZBA project in 2021 when WLW was formed at district level. She attended various

activities of the project and worked on the issues raised during the meetings of the WLW.

When the JAZBA project launched the group of WLW at provincial level and invited members of district WLWs from different districts in that forum, she attended that forum on behalf of WLW of District Korangi. It was announced there that a governing body of the Provincial WLW will be formed during the meeting so who are interested can nominate themselves. Zehrish nominated herself for the position of Speaker as JAZBA' (believes on inclusiveness) has given her enough courage to stand for her rights. When voting started for the election of governing body, she was so excited and confident about her winning. The participants voted for her and she was elected for the position of Speaker of the Provincial WLW.



Ms. Zehrish Khanzadi

She felt so proud and overwhelming to see the response of participants who are from different districts of Sindh. They voted and supported her as trans person and felt herself being accepted on decision making position. She appreciated the JAZBA project as it is working for improving participation of women, minorities, people with disabilities and transgender in democratic and political processes. She was committed to work for the welfare of her community through different interventions of the project such as supporting other trans person to get their CNICs, vote registration and linked them other economic opportunities to make them financially independent.

She thinks that working with other WLW activists to support local women in local government and make them empowered would be great intervention. She also stressed that women should also be given opportunities to come forward in other professions and occupations.

Triumph of Ms. Ghazala Anjum: A Journey of Empowerment and Change

The story is about a woman, Ghazala Anjum, who embarked on a political journey in order to empower other women. She believed that bringing women into politics was a political necessity, but bringing them to an equal level was not easy. She faced many difficulties, but received a lot of support from organizations that trained her in many aspects and helped her during her election campaign.



Ms. Ghazala Anjum

Despite her efforts, she faced many obstacles along the way. When the local elections were held in 2016, she was disappointed to find that the seats reserved for women had been reduced, taking away their rights. She also faced difficulties in getting a ticket for chairperson, as she was told that it was a men's society and women were not given such positions.

Regardless of the challenges, the woman remained committed to her cause. She worked with various organizations to help disadvantaged groups such as minorities, eunuchs, and disabled women. She also worked on a project to help disabled women obtain their National Identity Cards (NICs) and get registered with Baitul-Mal, a government agency that provides social welfare services.

Through her work, she was able to make a positive impact on the lives of women in her community. She helped many girls find jobs and advocated for the improvement of schools in the area. However, she found that surviving in politics was very difficult for women. Despite working in practical politics for 20 years, she still struggled to get a ticket for UC vice chairperson, highlighting the slow and backward journey for women in politics.

Throughout her journey, the woman remained dedicated to her cause, praying that her work would continue to make a difference in the lives of women. She hoped that her efforts, as well as those of other organizations working towards similar goals, would bring about positive change in Pakistan.