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■ SENSITISATION WORKSHOP

Most women legislators lack capacity to actively participate in parliament business

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After spending two parliamentary years in their respective assemblies, most of women parliamentarians still lack information and capacity to introduce legislation and actively participate in the assemblies' business.

This was realised during a two-day sensitization workshop when women parliamentarians complained lack of information and support and demanded capacity building sessions on legislative business. Looking into parliamentary experience of the sitting women parliamentarians reveals that among a total of 211 women parliamentarians who joined the National and provincial assemblies after the General Election 2013, majority i.e. 144 joined in for the first time, and hence needed information and skills on legislative business.

The two-day sensitisation workshop with women parliamentarians on 'Legislative Business and Role of Parliamentarians in Pro-Women legislation' was organised by Aurat Foundation on April 1-2, 2015. The workshop was held under AF's 'Gender Based Violence — Advocacy and Capacity Building' programme supported by Trocaire, Australian Government and Australian Aid.

On this occasion, Joint Secretary (Legislation) National Assembly Muhammad Mushtaq gave a detailed presentation on drafting and moving bills, resolutions and motions, raising Calling Attentions Notices and Point of Orders, putting questions and asking supplementary questions etc. His session also covered the pre- and post-introduction of bills e.g. how and where to get the support for drafting a bill, how to bring the bill on the assembly business, what if the bill is referred to a concerned standing committee, and what if a bill is dropped or lapsed.

MPA, PML-F, Sindh Assembly Nusrat Seher Abbasi complained that contrary to the practice in National Assembly, Urdu translation of a bill is not provided to the members. Members of the National Assembly also complained that they face problems on submitting questions to be taken during the assembly sessions e.g. due to lesser time, a lot of their questions are lapsed, and on Fridays the floors of the assembly leading to Notice Office (office for submitting questions) are blocked due to Friday prayers, whereas the time for submitting the questions during other week days is also limited.

Pointing to his observation that women parliamentarians usually do not utilise the avail-

able resources and support, Mushtaq asked the present members that they shall benefit the researchers and editors and other staff available for their support.

Manager Law and Gender, Aurat Foundation Maliha Zia spoke on legislation and role of parliamentarians, women specific legislation in Pakistan, issues relating to legislating on women in Pakistan, important factors for legislation, role of parliamentarians, and shifting from legislation to implementation. The participants pointed out that passage of laws has been a great success but there has been poor implementation. One of the recommended methods for this purpose would be to focus attention on the different segments of the criminal justice system i.e. the police, medico-legal, lawyers, judges and jails. While speaking on the networking and alliance building among women parliamentarians and their parliamentary caucuses, Dr Rakhshinda Parveen, Consultant and Founder Creative Anger by Rakhshii, discussed the ethical, political tactics and strategies required for such alliance building. She suggested that women parliamentarians need to build strategic alliances as no one succeeds alone.

Chief Strategy and Policy Officer, Aurat Foundation Younas

Khalid spoke about the sustainable development goals and their history, their need, the proposed 17 goals, how these goals were chosen, whether governments are happy about the proposed goals, if the number of goals are expected to be changed, how will the goals be funded and when will these goals come into force? Earlier, women parliamentarians were asked to share their legislative and political experiences.

Rabeea Hadi, Director Advocacy and Ending Violence against Women, Aurat Foundation, while coordinating the session, said that Aurat Foundation is always pro-politics and pro-democracy, and strive hard to provide knowledge, information, and access to resources and institutions. MNA, PML-N and General Secretary Women Parliamentary Caucus (WPC), Shaista Pervaiz said that although more pro-women laws are needed, but there is strong need for effective implementation of these laws.

While talking about her legislative experience, MNA, MQM Kishwar Zehra said that women member from opposition face a lot of obstacles in introducing bills, resolutions etc, as mostly the private members bills are ignored or dropped.

Jamila Gilani, former MNA, and Provincial General Secretary ANP, in response to other

members' demand that women parliamentarians shall be provided development funds, strongly opposed the demand and said that instead development funds to men parliamentarians shall be ceased.

MNA, PML-N Shaheen Shafeeq suggested that in order to support and rehabilitate women victim of domestic violence, the Women Parliamentary Caucus shall establish its office in each district.

MNA Musarat Ahmadzeb even proposed to WPC that women's reserve seats shall be reduced and instead a quota on general seats shall be created for women. While talking about the achievements on pro-women laws, Chief Operating Officer, Aurat Foundation Naeem Mirza outlined the reality that such achievements would not have been possible without the active support of women political workers from grassroots who faced jails and have always been side by side their leaders.

Other women parliamentarians present in the workshop included Nafisa Inayatullah Khan Khattak, MNA, PTI, Sorth Thebo, MPA, PML-F, Sindh Assembly, Asia Naz Tanoli, MNA, PML-N, Aisha Syed, MNA, JI, Shazia Ashtaq Mattu, MNA, PML-N, Shahida Akhtar Ali, MNA, JUI-F, and Surraiya Asghar, MNA, PML-N.