

Talking Points for Roundtable Conference on Gender

Based Advocacy After Devolution

First of all I would like to thank PATTAN Development Organization, its entire team and especially Dr. Farzana Bari, Director of Center of Excellence in Gender Studies at Quaid-i-Azam University for arranging this roundtable conference on a very important theme and for providing me the opportunity to be part of this very interesting discussion.

The 18th Amendment to the Constitution has abolished the Concurrent List of the Constitution of Islamic Republic of Pakistan.

This significant development is a big step in the direction of provincial autonomy

This development has on the one hand empowered the provinces to legislate on subjects which were so far on Federal Legislative list. But on the other hand it places a huge responsibility on the provincial legislators, their governments and departments to fully understand the policy and procedural issues related with devolved subjects.

The devolved subjects also include Women Development and Social Welfare. The significance of this amendment bears immensely on the issue of related with women as the entire portfolio of women related issues will fall within the jurisdiction of provincial government

Provincial legislature will now have to deal with increased scope of legislative work. It is also considered by various Civil Society Organizations that, at provincial level, legislators in general and female legislators in particular are rarely equipped to deal with the increased legislative responsibility.

I strongly feel that it is our duty to help and assist our colleagues at provincial levels to fully understand the significance of the responsibility assigned to them through 18th Amendment. One most important aspect of this devolution is that the provincial legislators as well as their departments dealing with gender related issues should be fully aware of the international commitments made by the government of Pakistan regarding gender related issues.

Provincial governments while legislating on the subject should know that United Nations General Assembly adopted Convention on Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1979 and that Pakistan has ratified CEDAW in 1996.

They should also know that articles 2c, 2g and 2h, 13a and b, and 14.1, of CEDAW deal with the issues of social exclusion (disinheritance etc.); which means any legislation promoting, supporting or even condoning social exclusion of women would be a violation of our commitments made under CEDAW.

They should also be aware of the fact that articles 3; 5; 8; 11; 13 and 14 of CEDAW prohibit gender based economic discrimination and therefore fall in the purview of definition of Violence Against Women.

It should also be known to our provincial legislators that In 1995 fourth world conference was held in Beijing for creating an international consensus for participating states to undertake affirmative actions and align policies for creating gender equality in their respective countries.

Beijing Conference was a landmark event. Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto Shaheed represented Pakistan in this conference and Pakistan is a signatory to that conference and subsequent protocols.

In this conference Twelve Thematic areas were identified and participatory states were prompted to implement the agenda of the conference. Thirteenth area was added on the insistence of Pakistan; that was the rights of Women with disabilities. So while legislating on the subject they should be careful about the rights of women with disabilities.

It was the same Beijing Conference where BB Shaheed had said "it is my conviction that we can only conquer poverty, squalor, illiteracy and superstition when we invest in our women and when our women begin working. Begin working in our far flung villages where time seems to have stood still and where the Bullock not the tractor is still used for cultivation...."

It is high time that we start investing in our women and now it would be responsibility of our provincial governments that they make laws and apply procedures which are non discriminatory, fair and giving equal rights to all especially our women.

Our provincial governments should also be aware of the fact that we are striving hard to achieve Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) set by United Nation. BISP is the major intervention of Government of Pakistan for achievement of two major MDGs: Poverty Reduction and Women Empowerment.

Women empowerment is an integral part of the design of the programme. All benefits to the deserving families are being provided through the woman of the family.

So far BISP has disbursed more than Rs. 80 billion to these poor women to give them financial independence thus enhancing their social status.

We all know that, due to obvious reasons, poor families are generally not very enthusiastic about issuance of CNIC for the women of their families. Let me share with you that due to efforts of BISP (as we made possession of CNIC a pre-requisite for eligibility under BISP) ratio of registration of women with NADRA, particularly in remote areas of the country has picked up tremendously.

Figures of last two years will illustrate my point. In 2009 for the first time in the history of Pakistan, female outnumbered men in CNIC registration. The figure was 3.45 million for male while for the female figure was 4.8 million. Similarly up to June 2010, 1.45 million female as compared to 1.3 million male have been registered with NADRA.

Under BISP'S graduation strategy, the microfinance initiative of 'Waseela-E-Haq' aims to facilitate the income generation opportunities for women, by providing them micro loans and thus giving them a chance to escape the vicious cycle of poverty.

Our Vocational Training Program 'Waseela e Rozgar' envisages providing unskilled female workers or their nominees across Pakistan with the demand driven skill based training to enhance prospects of earning a dignified livelihood. All expenses including boarding, lodging and tuition fee will be borne by BISP.

Under 'Waseela e Sehat', bread earner of beneficiary families is provided life insurance of up to Rs 100,000.

I have given you these brief facts to highlight the importance and weightage, Government of Pakistan assigns to the issue of the gender equality and women empowerment.

With the devolution of women development portfolio to the provinces it would now be the responsibility of the provinces to assign the same importance to the issue.

This could be done through multiple means. In terms of socio-economic empowerment of the women I would suggest that while legislating on the subject or while designing new interventions for this purpose the provinces should keep few things in mind.

First, they should keep an eye to avoid duplication of work. BISP is about to complete the first ever Poverty Scorecard Survey of the entire country. For identification of deserving women no province has to do any extensive survey; they should rather get benefit from the

huge authentic data collected by BISP. We would be more than willing to share our data with the provincial governments.

Secondly, provinces should also keep a watch while designing new interventions for women empowerment. Instead of starting the same intervention which BISP is already doing they should focus on designing interventions which would be complementing the various initiatives started by BISP.

It's imperative that both Federal and Provincial governments coordinate and synchronize our efforts in promoting the culture of women empowerment.

I believe that similar efforts like this roundtable conference could prove instrumental in promoting our goal of gender equality and gender sensitization and for ensuring enhanced share for women in our society.

In the end I once again thank Mr. Sarwar Bari for providing me the opportunity to share my views with you. And I wish you all the best in your endeavor for the promotion of women rights in our society.