

Launching Ceremony of Dr. Sarwar Bari's Book, 'An Unfinished Struggle: The Tale of The Women Councilors'

At Marriott Hotel on 7th March, 2011

First of all I would like to congratulate both Dr. Sarwar Bari and the PATTAN Development Organization for their tremendous efforts in recording and highlighting the struggle of women councilors' in the political milieu of Pakistan.

'An Unfinished Struggle: The Tale of The Women Councilors' is a comprehensive chronological record of the struggle of women councilors, their contributions in promoting gender sensitivity, improving governance, and fighting terrorism.

This book not only explains the context in which a need was felt for establishing a forum like 'Women Councilors Network' (WCN) but it also gives the guidelines or a way forward in the present and future context for 'Women Concerns Network'

I was especially encouraged and impressed to see that PATTAN and WCN has gain strength with the passage of time and in the changed context instead of limiting their scope they have broaden the horizon of their forum by changing it to ' Women Concerns Network'.

It would be superfluous to say that how much our society and country needs such active, positive and functional groups and forums who are working for creating space for women in our social, political and economic spheres.

I found the 5 P's formula for the sustainability of any organization especially interesting and handy. No doubt that Presence, Participation, Performance, Publicity and Promotion (5 P's) are vital for sustainable functioning and growth of any organization.

I can very well empathize with the objectives of WCN and the obstacles they would be facing as I myself have been working since last fifteen years for the promotion of women rights.

I have learned from my Shaheed leader Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto that no matter how hard is the struggle or how low are the odds one should not lose faith in ones ideals and should strive even harder when chips are down.

I feel immense pride to say that I and you, we both are fighting the same battle for women empowerment and for giving them their rights.

Ladies and Gentlemen, let me apprise you a little bit about BISP the largest social safety net of the country; and especially the role it's playing in empowering the poor and marginalized women of our society.

BISP was launched in 2008 as a means to provide financial assistance to the poorest of the poor adversely affected by the high inflation and the impact of the international economic crisis.

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.

I remember reading in your book that approximately 13.30 million fewer women have CNIC than men.

Let me share with you that due to efforts of BISP (as possession of CNIC is 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 that of female 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.

Further, even in geographically remote and culturally ultra conservative areas of the country like FATA, interior Sindh and Baluchistan the rate of female registration has increased considerably. BISP is helping the women folk of the country, particularly rural women in getting their identity and achieving self respect

BISP has, in a short span of time, reached out to more than 3 million families across the country. In reaching out to the underprivileged and the vulnerable of society, the route is the female of the family. All our initiatives are passed on to the beneficiaries families through their female family members.

Ladies & Gentlemen, Let me share with you that BISP does not aim to foster dependency on the state donations rather we are striving hard to empower our women on self sustain basis.

Under BISP'S graduation strategy, the microfinance initiative of 'Waseela-E-Haq' aims to facilitate the income generation opportunities for women, often the most vulnerable part of our society, 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' has been launched by the Prime Minister of Pakistan on 12th October 2010. This initiative 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 Sehet', bread earner of beneficiary families is provided life insurance of upto Rs 100,000. President of Pakistan was pleased to announce the start of the initiative from 1st November, 2010. In the next phase of Waseela e Sehet, health insurance would be provided to all the beneficiaries' families through female members of the family.

I have given you this brief introduction of BISP to encourage you that you are not alone in this struggle for the rights and concerns of the women. As I already said we are fighting the same battle. Only difference is that I am fighting it within and you are fighting it from the outside. And its imperative that we both coordinate and synchronized our efforts in this fight against ignorant, intolerant, and patriarchal system.

I believe that WCN and similar efforts would go a long way in promoting our goal of gender equality and gender sensitization.

In the end I once again congratulate Dr. Bari and the PATTAN for their relentless efforts for the promotion of women rights in our society.