

Report on A Dialogue on Political Participation of Women and Electoral Violence with all Stakeholders

Dialogue arranged by: **Sindh Commission on the Status of Women**
with the support of **UN Women**

Date: 13th July, 2018

Place: Hotel Marriott, Karachi

Total no. of Participants: 123 (83 females, 40 males)

Including government officials, female candidates from PSP, PTI, MQM, PPP, GDA, independent candidates, members of the civil society, and members of media.

Speakers:

Ms. Nuzhat Shirin - Chairperson of Sindh Commission on the Status of Women

Nighat Siddique – Additional Director (Gender Affairs) ECP

Baqaullah Unar – Secretary WDD

Ms. Mehnaz Rehman – Resident Director Aurat Foundation

Ms. Anis Haroon – National Commission for Human Rights

Mr. Shahid Fiaz – CEO Trust for Democratic Education and Accountability

Sindh Commission on the Status of Women (SCSW), Government of Sindh, has been established as an autonomous body under the Sindh Provisional Commission on the Status of Women Act (2015). Under Chapter III, section 12 (i), the SCSW has the power to lobby and advocate for increased political participation of women and catalyse the building of networks that enable women to participate in the political life of the country. In accordance with its mandate, a dialogue on political participation of women and electoral violence was arranged by the Commission with the support of UN Women. The aim of the dialogue was to help the women candidates and to create a network of political parties and civil society so that they can combine their resources and together work towards women's rights and issues.

Chairperson Ms. Nuzhat Shirin informed the audience about the mandate of the Commission. She clarified that the role of the commission is to work as a monitoring and facilitating body and that is why the program was organized to increase the political participation of women in Sindh. The candidates were ensured that their problems will now be addressed and they have a government body that will raise its voice for them. She also referenced researches regarding political participation of women and stressed upon the importance of coalition building and data gathering for improved government initiatives.

Secretary Women Development Department Mr. Baqaullah Unar detailed that the government had taken many initiatives, but we are painfully behind every set goal needed for the political participation of women. He emphasized that women should be empowered in social spheres to have a strong political standing.

Ms. Saman Ahsan was representing UN Women and introduced it as a branch of UN which stabilizes and supports government departments working on issues of gender and equality. She praised the SCSW for organizing an impactful and impressive event and assured the continued support of UN Women to SCSW in its future endeavours for women's rights in Sindh.

Ms. Mehnaz Rehman Resident Director from Aurat Foundation gave a detailed research of the history of political participation of women in Pakistan, from their role in Pakistan movement to their current political representation. She pointed out that women have been politically active since the inception of Pakistan. Despite the structural disenfranchised, Pakistani women seize every opportunity possible to participate in the political life of the country and have brought much honor to Pakistan over the years.

Ms. Nighat Siddique Additional Director (Gender Affairs) from Election Commission of Pakistan gave the sections of the elections Act 2017 which ensure that elections become more inclusive in Pakistan. She also quoted several instances where ECP has taken swift action against people violating the code of conducts. She informed the audience that ECP wants to facilitate the disenfranchised such as women and people with disabilities to actively participate in the elections. She also assured the female candidates present that their complaints are being noted and will be taken up by the relevant ECP committees.

Ms. Anis Haroon member Sindh from NCHR expressed joy at women having 5% quota on general seats tickets. She accredited this progress to the women of Pakistan. The women of the subcontinent have been a part of the political process since before the creation of Pakistan but social, financial, and cultural restraints hamper their participation in political processes. Women's rights have been socially and financially wrested away from them. She emphasized the need for the government to support women in politics financially as they have been systematically sidelined economically. She also talked about different issues women face on all levels.

Mr. Shahid Fiaz, CEO of TDEA shared his research which showed the many forms in which women face electoral violence. There are many women friendly legislations but they are not implemented. His research showed that the most severe form of electoral violence faced by women is at polling stations. Due to unrest, women are the first ones who lose their chance of going out to vote even if thereafter situation improves. His research also showed that the largest deficit of unregistered voters is in Karachi, Lahore and Faisalabad. These findings need to be understood in depth as they do not reflect the popular understanding of women in rural vs urban areas. Mr. Shahid also emphasised on the need for reliable data so that efficient redress mechanisms could be formulated to improve the political participation of women in Sindh.

PANEL DISCUSSION WITH POLITICAL CANDIDATES:

Women candidates shared their concern over their security issues. They said that their motivation for taking part in this is to fight the patriarchy and the class discrimination that is prevalent in society. Some women shared concern about party discipline hindering their political freedom. Independent candidates faced more problems as they did not have the financial backing of a party to pay for electoral campaigns. Women from minority communities also face discrimination from Muslim voters who are unwilling to vote for non-Muslim candidates on general seats.

Justice Majida Rizvi gave the concluding remarks and reiterated that ECP must give some financial leeway to independent candidates as they find it very difficult to pay for the nomination papers fee which has been increased from Rs. 2000 to Rs. 20,000. Other campaign expenses are also difficult for candidates from middle class and lower middle class to bear. This should be facilitated by the state so that the process of democracy can move forward.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Voters should be educated to make informed decisions and to eradicate biases towards minority and female candidates.
- Election should be free of such biases and candidates must be judged on the basis of their character, motivations, and political prowess.
- ECP must give some financial leeway to independent candidates as they find it very difficult to pay for the nomination papers fee as well as other campaign expenses.
- Political parties must be incentivised and pressurised to support the election campaigns of their female candidates so that they have a better chance of entering the parliament.
- Media must give equal coverage to female candidates as it does to male candidates.
- Candidates are not well informed of their own rights. Political parties should try to disseminate literature that educates the public about the rights of a political candidate and the facilities provided to women and other disenfranchised members who want to contest elections. This will encourage women to participate in elections.

Attendees: Total 123

Senior Officials:

Ms. Nuzhat Shirin - Chairperson of Sindh Commission on the Status of Women
Ms. Nighat Siddique – Additional Director (Gender Affairs) ECP
Mr. Baqaullah Unar – Secretary WDD
Mr. Mudassir Iqbal - Secretary Interprovincial Coordination Committee
Ms. Mehnaz Rehman – resident Director Aurat Foundation
Mr. Karamat Ali - CEO PILER
Ms. Renuka Swami - UNFPA
Ms. Anis Haroon – National Commission for Human Rights
Mr. Shahid Fiaz – CEO Trust for Democratic Education and Accountability

Female candidates from PSP, PTI, MQM, PPP, GDA

Asia Ishaque
Dr Shahida Rehmani
Niomi Bashir
Mangla Sharma
Nusrat Wahid
Seema Zia
Rafia Haider

Civil Society:

Legal Rights Forum
Interfaith Harmony Forum
Strengthening Participatory Organisation
Aurat Foundation
Human Rights Commission Pakistan
Trust for Democratic Education and Accountability
National Commission for Human Rights
Justice Helpline
Piler – The Pakistan Institute of Labour Education & Research

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