WOMEN'S VOICE AND LEADERSHIP - PAKISTAN

SYNOPSIS

Domestic & Home-based Women Workers Vulnerabilities during Covid-19 and the Role of Digital Technology

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This knowledge content aims to look at how female domestic workers (DWs) and home-based workers (HBWs) in Lahore and Kasur navigate home and workplaces. It also unpacks their experience of harassment and marginalization and their access to safe spaces and technologies with a specific focus on the usage of mobile phones. The study was conducted through detailed qualitative interviews with female DWs, HBWs, workers in women rights organizations (WROs), and digital rights organizations (DROs).

The narratives derived from these interviews pinpoint incidents specific to hostile work environments, harassment, and difficulty in using technology at home, as well as the constraints faced by organizations working towards improving the lives of these women. The knowledge content also documents the support structures available to these vulnerable women and sets forth a detailed list of policy recommendations. These recommendations – derived from the rich workshop discussion with DROs and WROs, are aimed at helping these vulnerable workers to increase their digital literacy for attaining economic empowerment while navigating through a patriarchal society.

METHODOLOGY:

- Qualitative semi-structured interviews with WROs and DROs in both locations. A total of 50 women were interviewed – 25 women in Lahore (12 DWs, 12 HBWs and 01 working as both DW and HBW) – 25 women in Kasur (12 DWs and 13 HBWs).

- Qualitative semi-structured interviews with HBWs, DWs and DROs working on women's digital skills training. A total of 13 key informants from 05 organizations were interviewed.

- Qualitative semi-structured Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with HBWs and DWs in Lahore and Kasur. A total of 02 FGDs in Lahore (01 with 05 DWs and 01 with 05 HBWs) organized in partnership with FACES Pakistan. A total of 02 FGDs in Kasur (01 with 05 DWs and 01 with 05 HBWs) organized in partnership with HomeNet Pakistan.

- Workshop with WROs, DROs and women activists to cover a wide range of policy recommendations. The workshop was attended by participants from Mumkin Alliance, Circle, Women's Action Forum, Kashf, Akhuwat, WISE and Faces Pakistan.

MAJOR FINDINGS:

The major findings of the study have been classified into the following three categories for women HBWs and DWs:

WORKING LIVES: Multiple jobs, single income households, pandemic and increasing vulnerability.

SOCIAL BARRIERS: Limited social circles, empowerment is viewed "negatively".

TECHNOLOGY: Limited technology access, negative community perceptions, less use of digital technology by DWs, Increased use of digital technology by HBWs during COVID-19, use of smartphones linked to better parenting.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Below are the key recommendations arising from the knowledge content:

ACCESS TO MOBILE PHONES / TECHNOLOGY
- ➢ Availability of cheaper data packages for women
- ➢ Build and leverage family support
- ➢ Deconstruct false information and negative connotations regarding the use of technology
- ➢ Enlist support through engaging men

ACCESS TO FINANCIAL INFORMATION
- ➢ Set up chambers of commerce serving as facilitation centers for women to manage their finances in a better manner
- ➢ Improved access to information regarding organizations and/or institutions to acquire interest-free loans with easy return policies
- ➢ Organize programs that upskill women regarding budget making

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GENDER SPECIFIC METHODS OF TRANSACTION
- ➢ Devise alternate solutions to banking needs
- ➢ Gender lens adoption by the financial organizations while developing products and services
- ➢ Safer channels for women to access money from their homes
- ➢ Gender sensitivity training for financial services developers

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INCREASED AWARENESS ABOUT LAWS AND RIGHTS
- ➢ Access to information regarding employment rights, harassment helplines, and relevant government offices
- ➢ Cyber-crime laws should be communicated

ENCOURAGING COLLECTIVE ACTION AND INDIVIDUAL AGENCY
- ➢ Deconstruct the idea of agency and economic empowerment
- ➢ Narrative building and partnerships are of vital importance
- ➢ Unionizing gives women greater bargaining power
- ➢ Setting up community-level women organizations that can be sustained in the long term
- ➢ Collective involvement of academia and media to build pressure for policy implementation

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