

WVL-P SYMPOSIUM EVENT REPORT

Launch of knowledge content at the symposium "Promote Shared Knowledge for Continued Actions Supporting Gender Justice in Pakistan" held in Islamabad.

20
23



The Women's Voice and Leadership – Pakistan (WVL-P), funded by the Government of Canada through Global Affairs Canada, is a 5-year program aimed at strengthening the capacity of Women Rights Organizations (WROs) by improving their management and delivery of programs and networks seeking to empower women and girls, advance the protection of women and girls' rights, and achieve gender equality.

Since 2019, WVL-P has been providing short-term issue-based grants through which academics, researchers, universities, think-tanks, research centers and consultants could build knowledge on gender-equality issues in Pakistan. A total of 09 published knowledge contents were presented at the symposium held on February 2, 2023, in Ramada Hotel, Islamabad.

Government officials, other rights-based and development organisations, and women rights activists attended the Symposium.

09
knowledge products
launched

75
participants attended



The Special Assistant to the PM on Poverty Alleviation and Social Safety Mr. Faisal Karim Kundi was the Chief Guest at the Symposium. In his talk, he spoke about the importance of gender equality, social reform and government's social protection programs for women. He expressed hope that the work of alliances under Human Resource Development Network (HRDN) and Oxfam in Pakistan can continue to uplift women out of economic hardship by skill development, income generating grants and social safety programs.

41
organizations'
representation

THE PLIGHT OF URBAN, DOMESTIC AND HOME-BASED WORKERS



In Pakistan, domestic or home-based workers and other working women living in urban areas are not exempt from facing discrimination, violence and social injustice and lack agency over their lives and finances. However, digital technology was able to ease off some of these pressures – provided the women had knowledge of its use and access to it.

'Domestic and Home-Based workers Vulnerability during COVID-19 and the Role of Digital Technology', from Lahore University of Management Sciences (LUMS) looked at the lives, social barriers and use of technology by domestic and home-based workers in the Covid-19 pandemic. 'Exploring Changing Forms of Gender Issues in Urban Context of Pakistan' produced by the same institute studied how women stepped into the field of entrepreneurship with small online business during the pandemic – why they did it, what they learnt and how it reduced economic vulnerability.



'Exploring Changing Forms of Gender Issues in Urban Contexts of Pakistan: Lived Experience of Kafalat Schemes Women Beneficiaries' by Ameena Rehman studied the federal government's Ehsaas Kafalat scheme which aimed at achieving greater financial inclusion of poor women through digital technology. A discussion on these schemes, their gaps and how these gaps can be overcome was held after the presentation of the studies; for example, it was suggested to make the beneficiary selection criteria more flexible to include more women.

WORKLOADS ON WOMEN, AND THE MARGINALIZATION OF MINORITIES

In Pakistan's healthcare system, members of the minority communities, especially women, often feel side-lined and face impolite behaviour from doctors. Many resort to traditional practices or traditional knowledge for healing. 'Informing Post Covid Public Policies with Minorities Traditional Knowledge' from Forman Christian College – Lahore (FC College) highlighted that traditional knowledge is legitimate and useful not only as a medical practice but also to restore dignity of minority community members.

'Urban Working Women in Pakistan', a knowledge product from NOW Communities Karachi interviewed Lady Health Workers (LHWs) in urban Karachi to understand their burdens. They found that, despite being active and economically sound, these women still have little agency over their lives and finances.

Domestic workers are often 'invisible workers' meaning their work, effort and contributions are unrecognised. We fail to see their work as important.

Uzma Zarrin, Session Moderator & Programme Manager WVLP



Spouses of 34.2% interviews did not contribute in the family income, and 20% respondents had faced violence. 42.6% women spent their salaries on children. These difficulties and pressures do not allow women to be independent or acquire assets, and they remain vulnerable to social injustice, despite earning for themselves.

'Exploring Changing Forms of Gender Issues in Urban Context of Pakistan' by Prof Raana Malik from Punjab University, Lahore, also looked at transformations in the urban labor market especially in digital spaces, the benefits of which are still unbalanced between genders. After speaking with a 1,000 women (including special persons, transgenders, domestic workers, working women and housewives) it concluded that women are held from participating in income-generating activities because of limited mobility, access to technology and education.

No women, either in urban or rural areas, highly educated to illiterate, is exempt from pressures of responsibility of her family. No matter what, at the end of a day when a woman comes home from her job, she will have to cook, clean and take care of her children and husband.

Session Participant



INCLUSION, TECHNOLOGY AND GENDER

Despite legislature being present, women, especially those living with disabilities, are rarely part of fiscal, public or policy discourse. 'Economic Development in Legislation Regarding Disability in Pakistan', from Potohar Mental Health Association (PMHA), found that more than 80% women specified that due to inaccessibility of job ads, ATMs, banks, offices and transport vehicles, women could not exercise rights granted to them by the Constitution. The 2% employment quota for people living with disabilities was also not implemented. The knowledge product contained recommendations which were discussed by participants of the symposium.

'Gender and Power in Digital Spaces' by Dr. Shahla Tabassum from Fatima Jinnah Women University (FJWU) explored smartphone usage by women and found that there is disparity in ownership of technology based on age and gender, but that women are becoming more independent with technology by starting businesses and building networks.

From UKS Research Resource and Publication Centre, 'Bridging the Information and Knowledge Gaps' sought to fill gaps around women's issues and found evidence of discrimination, forced marriages, increase in poverty and unemployment of women during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The study found that 88% women domestic workers became unemployed, more than 75% women healthcare workers were not provided protective gear, and informal workers struggled to keep children in schools during the pandemic. Cases of early marriages and forced marriages grew and women faced exploitation in the process of obtaining cash from government poverty alleviation schemes like Ehsas Emergency Cash.

The Symposium was concluded by Syed Shahnawaz Ali, Oxfam Pakistan Country Director). He urged for more events for knowledge sharing which is beneficial for communities, NGOs, and the government.

Mr. Shahnawaz congratulated Human Resource Development Network (HRDN) and his team for bringing multiple stakeholders on one platform to build knowledge and commended WVLP's aspiration to cultivate thoughts and actions using the sound knowledge base produced through connecting traditional knowledge, technology advancement & evolving opportunities in the post-pandemic world. "Let's make the current state of our country an opportunity to build empathy in our actions," he said.



Dr. Roomi S. Hayat (Chairperson, HRDN), and Robeela Bangash (CEO, HRDN) present shields to (from right to left) Dr. Noreen Khalid (Team Lead, WVLP), Syed Shahnawaz Ali (Oxfam Pakistan Country Director) and Dr. Nasira Malik (National Coordinator, WVLP, HRDN)



The participants and management team with Mr. Faisal Karim Kundi