



WOMEN'S VOICE AND LEADERSHIP – PAKISTAN

SYNOPSIS

Exploring Changing Forms of Gender Issues in Urban Context of Pakistan

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This project is funded by the Government of Canada through Global Affairs Canada

Due to mobility restrictions to the widespread lockdowns, COVID-19 has highlighted widespread vulnerabilities, particularly in urban populations, specifically the women within them. Despite the damage and destruction done to the communities worldwide, the on-set of coronavirus has been instrumental in underscoring the significance and immense potential of digital technologies in every walk of life. More specifically, the pandemic has shown the world the benefits of digitizing businesses for reducing economic vulnerabilities and allowing people to easily upscale their skills, particularly for women and disabled, who find it harder to secure jobs because of discrimination and societal restrictions.

This knowledge content aims to not only understand the prospects of going digital for women's socio-economic environment but also to help organizations and government bodies chart practical pathways for women's digital and broader economic inclusion in the economy.

METHODOLOGY:

- Semi-structured Interviews: Qualitative data collection methods through semi-structured telephonic interviews with 22 women micro-entrepreneurs in the major cities of Pakistan including Islamabad, Lahore and Karachi.
- Key informant interview: A group discussion was held among the project team members and key personnel of "Mera Maan" – a social enterprise.

MAJOR FINDINGS:

The sample pool for this knowledge content included middle to upper-middle class women who run online businesses from their homes using social media apps such as WhatsApp, Facebook or Instagram. The participant pool consisted of women who had previously worked in offices and had recently shifted to this line of profession as well as those who report this to be their first source of income. The major findings of the study are as below:

WORKING LIVES AND PREFERENCES

- Preferred their work running an online business at home as compared to other types of employment
- Care taking duties is the most pervasive reason for the above preferred mode of work
- Work from home provides flexibility and autonomy to work according to the needs of their house, husband, children and sometimes even inlaws
- Majority of the respondents opted for work not for the sole or shared responsibility of being a breadwinner, but to gain financial independence.

TECHNOLOGY AND SAFETY PERCEPTIONS

- WhatsApp - Most preferred mobile phone application when it came to selling online
- More educated and upper-middle class women naturally gravitate towards using advanced technological tools like Instagram and Facebook
- Lower to middle class women have started to get acquainted with social media through NGOs and organizations working towards technology literacy, or friends
- Knowledge, training and education related to technology can vastly help women from all backgrounds to learn and utilize their skills at home
- Most women use separate SIMs/mobile phone numbers for conducting business to keep a clear distinction between the two and to avoid prank calls
- Men sending untoward messages to business accounts run by women is seen to be extremely rare

CONCLUSION:

1. Women entrepreneurs prefer home business compared to office-based work because of being able to manage household and family simultaneously
2. Usage of social media applications depends on the type of product that women entrepreneurs are selling
3. Low income women have comparatively less experience with technology compared to high income women, hence they use simple application like WhatsApp groups to market and sell their products