

DEVELOPMENT ADVOCATE PAKISTAN



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WOMENOMICS WOMEN POWERING THE ECONOMY





DEVELOPMENT ADVOCATE PAKISTAN

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Development Advocate Pakistan provides a platform for the exchange of ideas on key development issues and challenges in Pakistan. Focusing on a specific development theme in each edition, this quarterly publication fosters public discourse and presents varying perspectives from civil society, academia, government and development partners. The publication makes an explicit effort to include the voices of women and youth in the ongoing discourse. A combination of analysis and public opinion articles promote and inform debate on development ideas while presenting up-to-date information.



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5 GENDER EQUALITY



The Power of WOMENOMICS

Women globally are moving into a growing space as innovators, entrepreneurs, startup founders, techies, businesswomen, as well as home-based workers. From their existing roles in traditional economic sectors of agriculture, health, education etc., women are now making inroads in the Fourth Industrial Revolution to drive global and regional knowledge economies of scale.

The idea of women as drivers of a nation's economy can be understood by 'Womenomics' – a term coined by Kathy Matsui, strategist at Goldman Sachs, and launched by Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in 2013 to stimulate his country's economic growth and promote gender equality in the workforce.

Womenomics is not just a good social move, it is also good for business: USD 12 trillion could be added to the global GDP by 2025 by advancing women's equality. Yet, while women's control of investible wealth is on the rise, major barriers continue to prevent achieving SDG Goal 5 of Gender Equality in developing economies like Pakistan. At the global level, women currently represent 38.8 percent of the global labour force, and just 20 percent in Pakistan.

Inequality in opportunity and in working Pakistan's barriers against women's economic empowerment generally include lack of gender-sensitive policies, income inequality, attitudes/harassment at workplaces, and stereotypes defining women's role in society. For those already stepping into the workforce, however, additional barriers include a lack of gendered infrastructure at workplaces, gender pay gaps, limited mobility, scarcity of public toilets, denial/discrimination of professional development and leadership opportunities, job security, and other occupational hazards.

For Womenomics to become a reality in Pakistan, both traditional and emerging occupational barriers need to be structurally and systemically addressed.

Out of the only 13.5 million (20 percent) women taking part in Pakistan's labour force, seven million women working in agriculture fall under the category of contributing family workers and remain unrecognized and unpaid. The gap between men and women's earnings has also increased. In 2018-2019, women earned just 18 percent of what men earned. Cultural expectations must also be addressed, as they contribute to women's 'time poverty'. For example, women in Pakistan spend nearly 10 times the hours as men in unpaid care work.

Meanwhile, in all too many households, women are compelled to give all their earnings to their family and have no financial independence or freedom to spend as they choose. This perpetuates a vicious cycle of silent exploitation and abuse – one where women are made to be completely dependent upon male family members for good.

Financial inclusion is imperative for women to access loans, credit, and to save for a more secure future. In Pakistan, however, 94 percent of adult women do not have a formal bank account, according to the World Bank. Of late, a number of efforts have been made to promote women's financial inclusion in the country. These include adoption of targets for improving access to bank accounts (at least 20 million adult women should have an active bank account by 2023); improving financial literacy of women under the State Bank of Pakistan's National Financial Literacy Program; and provision of loans of up to PKR five million for women entrepreneurs under the Refinance and Credit Guarantee Scheme.

Financial inclusion can benefit greatly from technology. Mobile access can transform economic isolation into connectivity, thereby empowering women in rural areas and inhibiting social environments. Unfortunately, there is a 33 percent gender gap in mobile usage in Pakistan – something that must be addressed in order to realize women's full potential. Similarly, investment in skills and training is the need of the hour. Women must be imparted skills as shop keepers, business agents, goods sellers, marketers, stock dealers, investors etc.

More research and development are needed on exploring the linkages between innovation, growth, and women's economic participation to demonstrate their direct contribution to the national GDP. The ongoing COVID-19 response and recovery initiatives have digitized the way things work, with major impact in the education and health sectors. The key question then is to see how these revolutionary trends and innovations can foster women-led economic recovery and growth.

Recognizing these needs, UNDP Pakistan is providing economic empowerment opportunities to women through vocational skills training, startup tool kits, and support in establishing businesses through partnerships with microfinance institutions. Our Business Incubation Programme focuses on creating income-generation opportunities for young women in the Merged Districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Our Youth Innovation Challenge provides grants to women for youth-led initiatives and enterprises working to solve development challenges in Balochistan. With the help of the European Union, we have established women's dormitory and childcare facility at a Regional Training Centre in Swat Khyber Pakhtunkhwa for women police officers. We also support Gender Desks in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa's Merged Districts, Sindh, and Punjab provinces, which serve to link local women to government service providers and enhance their agency and mobility.

As part of Pakistan's national commitment to achieving Agenda 2030 of 'Leave No One Behind' in sustainable development, we have a clear opportunity pathway ahead of us – invest in women as drivers of Pakistan's economic growth.



“

Women need to be part of the nation-building agenda.

”

The Future is Female: Positioning Women as Drivers of Economic Growth

“ Women's work, both paid and unpaid, may be the single most important poverty-reducing factor in developing economies.”¹



By Dr. Saira Yamin

Professor
Daniel K. Inouye Asia-Pacific Center for
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When more women enter the workforce, it benefits the economy. It's smart economics, not rocket science. Adding more women to the labour force leads to increased productivity at the national level, increased household incomes, increased purchasing power, increased spending on goods and services, and a rise in living standards. To be sure, more workers regardless of gender, would boost economic output, yet gender diversity affects productivity in more meaningful ways. Enhancing labour productivity is not all about increasing the numbers; adding women diversifies existing skillsets, knowledge, and experience. Inclusion matters. Former Managing Director of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), Christine Lagarde, points out that an equal increase in men in the labour force does not bring similar economic gains. She suggests that "women and men complement each other in the production process, creating an additional benefit from increasing women's employment on growth." Gender parity in the workforce is vital for Pakistan as it stands near the bottom of female participation in the labour force internationally.² It is also critical as the economy has been hit hard by the global pandemic, the GDP growth rate having dropped to negative 0.4 percent, the lowest ever in history.³

A diverse workforce benefits everyone. It economically empowers women, promoting improvements in their health and well-being, reduces domestic violence, gives them greater agency and a say in decision-making.⁴ It positively influences their families and communities' lives and is especially beneficial in developing contexts where structural inequalities perpetuate gender injustice. Countries that invest in women and increase their employment opportunities show

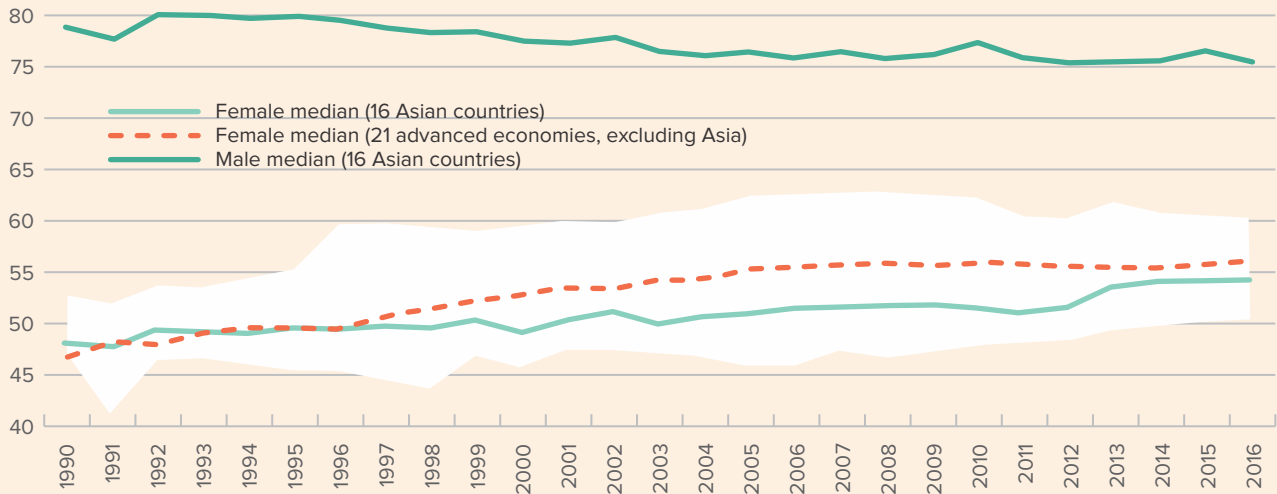
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Figure 1: Women's Labour Force Participation Rate (%)

Trending up Gradually

Female labour participation in Asia is improving and lies close to the average levels in advanced Western economies, but cross-country divergence has increased.



Women's labour force participation across Asia has recorded an average rise of 6 percentage points since 1990.⁵

Source: World Bank, World Development Indicators; and IMF staff calculations.

Note: Due to data unavailability, the figure excludes data for the following countries: Cambodia (1990-91, 2015-16); China (2011-16); Fiji (1990-95); India (1990, 2013-16); Vietnam (1990-95). Shaded area shows interquartile range

higher GDP growth rates. The evidence is clear. According to the IMF, closing the gender gap in countries where it is most significant would increase the GDP growth rate by an average of 35 percent. In the same vein, a Harvard Business review article made the case that "if women in the United States, Japan and Egypt were employed at the same rates as men, the GDPs of these countries would be higher by five percent, nine percent, and 34 percent respectively."

Pakistan's economy could expect similar gains by building a gender-inclusive workforce. But such a push will need to be supported by policies ensuring women's access to health and education, finance and markets, gender-friendly work environments, jobs providing economic security, and safe public spaces.⁶ This article sheds light on country good-

practices where gender-inclusion is being aggressively pursued to accelerate growth and development, reduce poverty, and become internationally competitive.

“ Countries that invest in women and increase their employment opportunities show higher GDP growth rates. The evidence is clear. ”

Womenomics: Upsizing and Upscaling the Japanese Workforce

When Japan's former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe assumed office in 2012, his country's economic growth was worrisome. With companies facing a shortage of workers due to a greying and shrinking population, Japan had seen minimal economic growth in previous years-its "lost decade." Abe, best known for his financial wizardry, launched a threefold strategy to shake Japan out of economic stagnation. Known as Abenomics, the plan introduced regulatory reforms, increased money supply, and government spending to stimulate growth. But, as Abe recently stated, his real economic goal was attaining full

employment through a policy known as Womenomics, getting women into the workforce and promoting them to leading positions.⁷ Elevating women to decision-making positions reaps benefits such as diversifying the economy, boosting profits and business efficiency, and promoting income equality.⁸ This, in turn, helps to create strong companies encouraging vibrant competition and driving growth. Under the policy, Japan has seen its female labour participation ratio surge to a record 71 percent and has helped boost GDP growth.

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Gender Equality and Poverty Reduction in Bangladesh

Despite daunting challenges, Bangladesh's growth has surpassed most other South Asian countries, including India's, one of the world's largest and fastest-growing economies. Pre-Covid-19, Bangladesh showed an average annual GDP growth rate of eight percent, well above the Asian average.⁹ Its economy has remained resilient against external shocks slowing down investments, exports and remittances. And Bangladesh has worked hard to get there.

When it gained independence less than 50 years ago, it was incredibly poor with a GDP rate of negative 14 percent growing modestly for the next couple of decades.¹⁰ Economic reforms in the 1990s helped put Bangladesh on a robust growth trajectory.¹¹ Poverty levels declined steadily over 25 years and were reduced to half.^{12,13} Bangladesh has remained committed to investing in its human capital, pursuing gender equality as a policy priority, particularly in health and education. It has been recognized for meeting its Millennium Development Goals within the 2015 deadline, with outstanding progress in many areas, including gender parity in primary and secondary level education.¹⁴ Fertility rates in this populous nation have fallen, infant and maternal mortality rates have reduced by half, and life expectancy has increased by ten years.¹⁵ According to the Asia Foundation, Bangladesh's development gains "are among the fastest improvements in basic living conditions ever seen in history."

Bangladesh's development successes have been rightly attributed to innovations in social development. It has increased female employment in the last decade while cutting the wage gap between men and women. It ranked 50 out of 153 countries assessed by the World Economic Forum in 2020.¹⁶ This is an enviable position for a country that has fairly recently achieved a lower-middle-income status. Its exports-based garment industry's success, one of the world's largest, has been instrumental in this regard. 80 percent of the workforce are women, often described as the drivers of economic growth. The government facilitates women's participation in cottage, micro, small and medium enterprises, and public-private partnerships have led to substantial successes in micro-finance schemes. Among them is The Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC), the world's largest NGO and charity, credited for making Bangladesh richer.¹⁷ BRAC has transformed the lives of Bangladeshi communities through sustainable livelihood opportunities for women. Building their capacities in livestock productivity has been one of its successes. Nearly a billion of the world's poor rely on livestock for food, income, and work, with women comprising two-thirds of this population.¹⁸ In many cases, women are the primary caretakers for livestock in the family setting and even on small farms. Given traditional gender roles limiting women's public mobility, livestock development participation is a smart economic growth strategy.

Malaysia's Development Trajectory: A Gendered Pathway

In Malaysia, one of the strongest economies in Southeast Asia, creating economic opportunities for women has been considered one of the most promising pathways to development.¹⁹ Malaysian girls and boys enjoy equal and affordable access to education opportunities, resulting in 93 percent and 96 percent adult literacy rates, respectively.²⁰ In the decades

since independence in 1957, Malaysia has transitioned from a low-income agricultural country to a middle-income, manufacturing, and services-based economy, to one that is upper-middle-income and knowledge-based.²¹ Female labour force participation has accelerated its GDP growth rate significantly in the past nearly two decades.²² A key priority of the govern-

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ment's 11th Malaysia Plan (2016-2020) was to improve the female labour participation rate by five percentage points to 59 percent.²³ Despite women's educational and professional competencies, they faced barriers the government sought to overcome through quotas in leadership positions, equal pay, flexible working arrangements, career counseling, professional development opportunities, maternity and paternity leaves, women's rights awareness in the workplace, and policies to address discrimination and sexual harassment.²⁴ With these efforts, the country's female labour force participa-

tion rate saw a steady rise from 47 percent to 55 percent, but has plateaued due to education barriers, constraints in labour force participation, and employment opportunities.²⁵ More recently, the pandemic's impact reversed progress on sectors with high concentrations of women, such as tourism, hospitality, and service industries.²⁶ Recognizing this setback to growth, Malaysia is currently working to unleash women's full economic potential through a stronger focus on their participation in digital economy, leadership, science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM).²⁷

Indonesia's Digital Inclusion

The Indonesian experience in the digitalization of technology has helped develop one of the most robust foundations of female entrepreneurship worldwide.²⁸ Digital inclusion has provided a fast track to female owned enterprises contributing 9.1 percent of Indonesia's GDP.²⁹ Women represent over half (51 percent) of small-business owners, well above the global average of 35 percent, and 34 percent of medium-sized business owners.³⁰ Digitization has provided women greater access to finance and credit, market information, and payment platforms.³¹ It has rendered middlemen redundant and opened up opportunities for everyone in less developed regions, although it is believed to particularly benefit women.³² The

advantages of digital technologies include reduced travel and wait time in queues, better work-life balance, family connectivity in remote locations, access to telehealth and online education, and improved access to financial services, particularly in less developed regions.³³ Although challenges remain, Indonesia has efficiently addressed gender disparities in critical areas, showing significant improvements in maternal health, and infant and under-five mortality rates.³⁴ Gender parity index in education has been achieved, and women's labour participation rate, 53 percent, is reported as offering better returns for educated women than men.^{35,36}

Singapore's Post-Pandemic She-covery

Singapore ranks amongst the strongest and fastest-growing economies in the world. Presently however, its trade-reliant economy is struggling with its worst-ever recession caused by the global pandemic. President Halimah Yacob believes that narrowing the gender gap in the workforce, with 61 percent female participation, carries the potential to generate USD 26 billion for Singapore's economy in the next ten years.^{37,38} This

gendered approach to economic transformation would focus on, among other things, encouraging workers to reskill and upskill, leveling the playing field for men and women, and diversifying women's leadership.³⁹ Perhaps taking a cue from others, Singapore will also accelerate digitization to enhance gender equality in the workforce.⁴⁰

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Closing the Gender Gap in Vietnam's WorkForce

As women advance in Asia, Vietnam too stands out. It has been described as the "top-performing Asian economy in 2020", with female labour force participation consistently ahead of ASEAN and most members of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).^{41,42} In Vietnam, 79 percent of working-age women are either employed or seeking employment, compared to 86 percent of men.⁴³ Small and medium enterprises are the economy's strength, and

female entrepreneurs are at the forefront in this sector.⁴⁴ Notably, Vietnam is one of the countries with the least legal differences in how it treats businessmen and women.⁴⁵ Vietnam's policy choices resulting in these outcomes, have included economic reforms pushing for gender equality in education and family-friendly legislation supporting maternity needs and childcare.⁴⁶

Conclusion

International experience shows that more women in the workplace helps drive economic growth and development. Gender inclusion is a win-win for all. It increases a nation's wealth, makes businesses more profitable and households prosperous. Yet, women remain the most underutilized economic asset in the global economy, and particularly so in South Asia, where the female labour force participation rate is 23.6 percent versus 80 percent for men.⁴⁷ If Bangladesh's lessons are applied in Afghanistan, women could help lift the country out of poverty. An Afghan girl born today will at best, only be "40 percent as productive when she grows up as she could be if she enjoyed complete education and full health."⁴⁸ Given that 70 percent of Afghans live in rural areas and 61 percent of all households generate income from agriculture, women's agricultural productivity can reduce poverty better than growth in other sectors.⁴⁹ As in Bangladesh, if a critical mass of Afghan women could be empowered through livestock productivity, they could improve food security and accelerate economic development.⁵⁰ A similar case could be made for Pakistan, where 64 percent of the population lives in rural areas and where agriculture remains the economy's backbone.⁵¹ At the most fundamental level, when women are positioned as economic assets, they carry greater value within their families and communities, making them less vulnerable to domestic violence and other disadvantageous treatment.

McKinsey Global Institute suggests that all countries in the Asia-Pacific region could make significant economic gains by advancing women's equality in the labour force, adding USD

“ Elevating women to decision-making positions reaps benefits such as diversifying the economy, boosting profits and business efficiency, and promoting income equality. ”

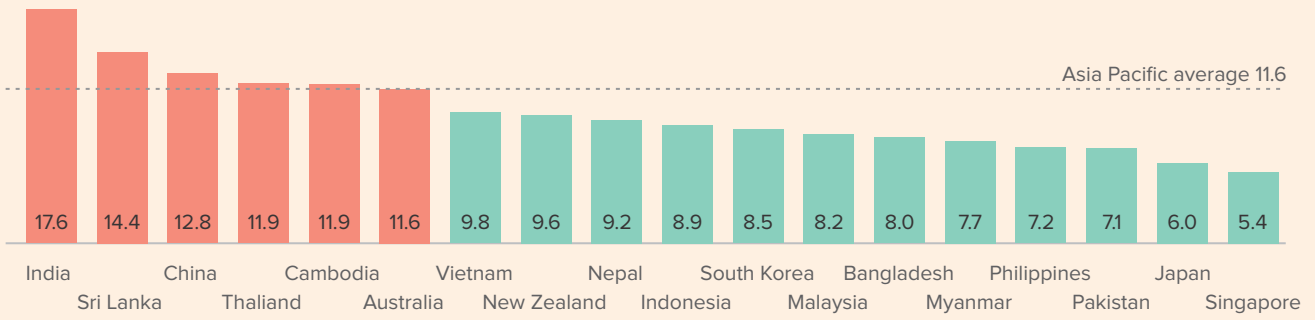
4.5 trillion to their collective GDP annually by 2025.⁵² If Pakistan were to follow this path (see Figure 2), its GDP growth rate could see an incremental rise to seven percent. But this would require more than just increasing women's numbers in the workforce. McKinsey advocates for increasing the number of paid working hours for women and placing them in sectors where their productivity could be enhanced.⁵³ It is essential to create and diversify women's employment opportunities, expand access to secondary and higher education, close the gender pay gap, provide safe working environments, legalize childcare and other support services.⁵⁴ Family-friendly policies are especially helpful in encouraging female-labour force participation.⁵⁵

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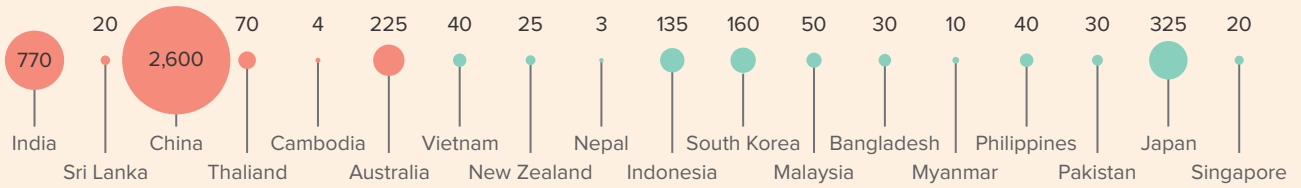
Figure 2: Asia Pacific Comparative Analysis

Incremental 2025 GDP from improving gender equality at the best-in-region rate

2025 improvement above and beyond business-as-usual GDP, %



2025 improvement above and beyond business-as-usual GDP, USD billion 2014



Source: IHS Markit; International Labour Organization; nation statistical agencies; oxford Economics; World Input-Output Database; Global Growth Model by McKinsey; McKinsey Global Institute analysis.

Women need to be part of the nation-building agenda. Governments have a crucial role to play in enabling them to grow and succeed. The development case is clear: When women are empowered, nations become more prosperous

and the region more stable. Unlocking women's potential to contribute to the labour force promises sustained and improved economic growth over time.



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STORIES FROM THE FIELD



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Neelum Akhtar | Entrepreneur

Neelum Akhtar is a young entrepreneur from Haripur, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. She started her business by the name of Sapphire Innovations four years ago. The purpose of her organization was to promote handicrafts made by different artisans, particularly women. She started by reaching out to the artisans of her own region but slowly expanded her reach all over Pakistan.

She participated in a micro-entrepreneurship training program organized by UNDP. This training helped her organize her

business better and come up with new ideas to develop it further. Her company has now established pick-up points all over the country. The artisans of that particular region can not only use these pick-up points to deliver their wares to the clients, but also to display their work. She has also started arranging events where handicrafts are displayed and promoted. Although she started selling through word of mouth and a Facebook page, she is now developing her own website with the aim to sell internationally.



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“ Increasing women's full participation in the economy requires empowering girls and women through future-oriented learning, professional and personal growth opportunities, and leadership roles from a young age. ”

Kanni Wignaraja

Assistant Secretary-General, Assistant Administrator, Director
United Nations Development Programme
Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific

What comes to your mind when you see the term 'Womenomics'? How do you relate to it as a development practitioner and woman leader?

'Womenomics' was a term first adopted in Japan, back in 2013, as a core pillar of the nation's growth strategy, as they were looking for a more purpose-driven way to boost economic progress through increased participation of women in the labour force. The experience from Japan offers valuable lessons to other countries in Asia and the Pacific. Most importantly, that real progress is not a matter of economics alone. Increasing women's full participation in the economy requires empowering girls and women through future-oriented learning, professional and personal growth opportunities, and leadership roles from a young age. It also means transforming what society values as equality in the economic ecosystem. There are several societal, institutional, structural, and behavioural issues that need to be opened-up for change, to get there.

Why and how is women's economic empowerment central to achieving Agenda 2030?

The 2030 Agenda challenges the status quo in fundamental ways. A cornerstone of the 2030 Agenda is the principle of 'Leave No One Behind'. Women's economic empowerment, defined as women's autonomy over the decisions governing economic resources, is critical for women to be independent. It is a necessary but not sufficient factor, for achieving Agenda 2030. If only half of a society is enabled, recognized and supported to contribute to and benefit from development, a country loses out and gets left behind. There is nothing sustainable, just, or worthy about that.

In your view, what are the major challenges for governments in creating ease of doing business and entrepreneurship opportunities for women in the Asia Pacific region?

The evidence has been with us for many years, which is that every country would benefit significantly by advancing gender equality, particularly in labour markets. And with it the conclusion, that women and men should have equal opportunities to engage in entrepreneurship and business development. The closer to equality in the marketplace, the better for social justice, and the better for business. While much of the needed changes can and must come from the private sector, governments can close gaping gender disparities by removing the structural barriers and

discriminations that women face in the marketplace. Ownership and access to finance and assets is a clear example of where things remain regressive. Discriminatory customary laws and civil legislation is another. Financial inclusion, equal access to education, support to working women on childcare, health benefits, social protection, and investing in safety and workplace protections, have demonstrated huge gains across countries.

How do you rate the private sector's support/contribution to powering women as drivers of economic growth?

The private sector in many countries in the region has been progressive. We see women leaders and managers assuming leadership positions in major tech, finance, retail and other businesses. The Philippines, New Zealand and Singapore show systematic progress. Demonstrations of success motivate more women to also pursue business fields and roles they would not otherwise take up. GGV Capital, XL Axiata, VietJet, and a growing list of others show us how. Women do not have to follow male leadership models to excel—they will do it their way. And companies that support diverse models of leadership, invest in new skills and mentoring for women, and provide incentives to balance work and family, win out. Companies must also encourage and support men to engage in parenting and home care. UNDP works with the private sector to adopt diversity and inclusion as the norm and actively fight all forms of harassment, to ensure a healthy work environment for both women and men so they contribute to their fullest potential.

What are the top 3-5 emerging opportunities that you envision in the Asia-Pacific region that could be game-changers for creating women-powered economics?

The economies in Asia and the Pacific are experiencing several game-changer trends. One is the switch to the remote work modality due to the pandemic. "Work-from-home" options may enable millions of women to participate in work previously unavailable to them, as workplaces were not accessible. An example lies in the exploding fields of e-commerce, telemedicine, e-learning and other digitally powered services. Advancing digital economies are providing new opportunities for both men and women. Easy access to high speed internet, new skills development, and flexible work hours could bring millions more women to power economies of the future. So watch this space!



ایوان قائد

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“

Economically empowered women can considerably reduce poverty by not only uplifting themselves, but their families and entire communities out of poverty.

”

Women on a Mission

By Maheen Rashid, Meeran Jamal, Sana Ehsan, Maheen Hassan

It has been a man’s world! But women are on a mission to change it and level the playing field.

‘Womonomics’, a term coined by Kathy Matsui, was launched by Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in 2013 to stimulate Japan’s economic growth and promote gender equality in the workforce, increase active inclusion of women participation and promotion of women to leading positions as Japan’s population shrunk.

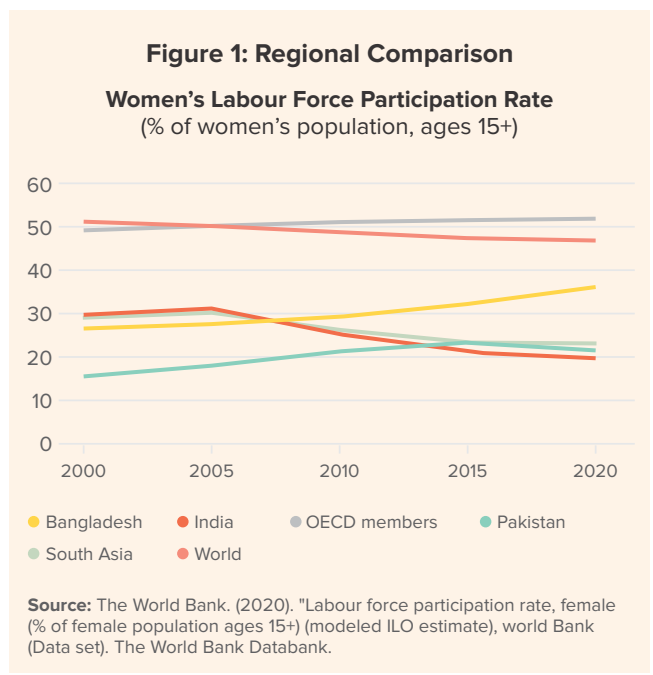
Women and Economic Participation

Women’s economic empowerment and emancipation not only helps realize women’s rights, but this economic freedom also provides women with greater agency, autonomy, and meaningful participation in decision-making at all levels.

Women currently represent 38.8 percent of the global labour force. Pakistan’s total female labour force participation in 2020 was 22.18 percent as a proportion of Pakistan’s total labour force, compared to 7.0 percent in 1980. If given the opportunity and space of reaching full gender parity in the workforce, women could add USD 28 trillion to the global GDP and USD 484 billion to the South Asian GDP alone, says McKinsey Global Institute in their report, “The Power of Parity”.

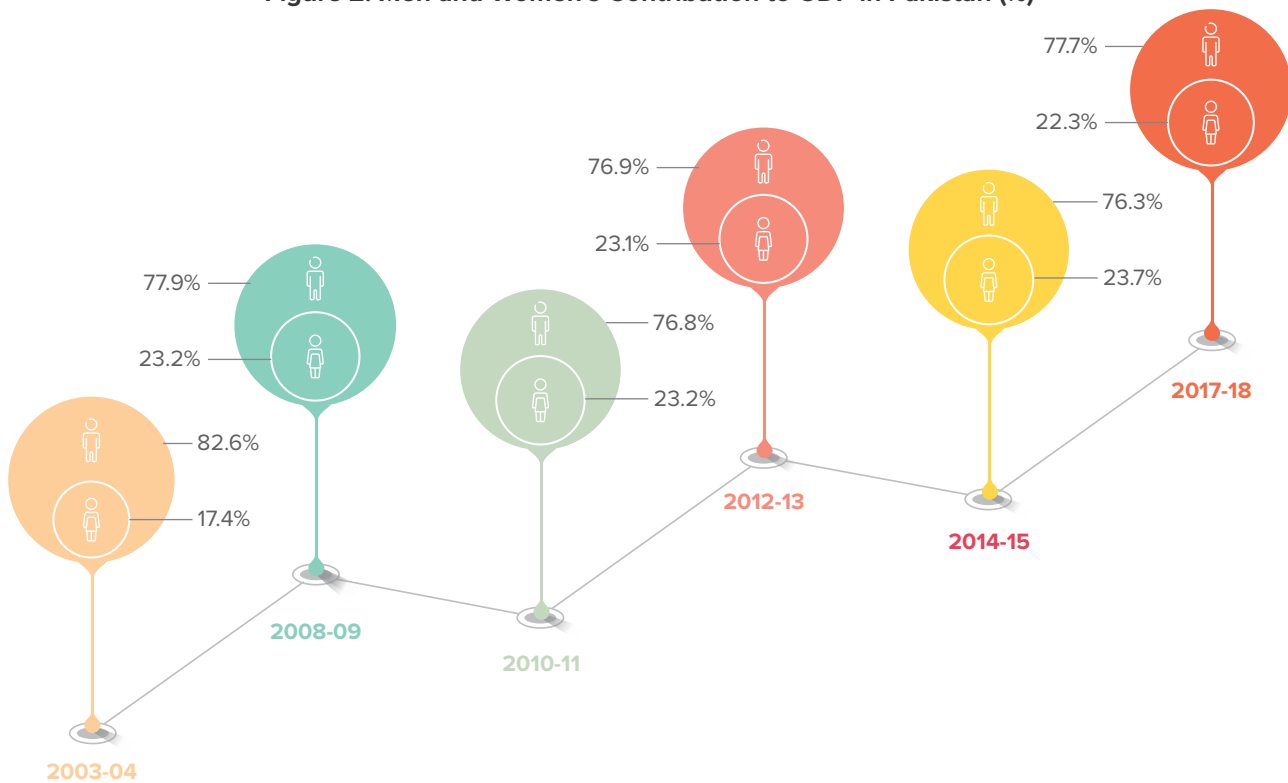
While significant strides have been made in Pakistan and globally for increasing women’s economic participation, we see a slight dip in the female labour force participation rate of Pakistan, India, South Asia, and the world, except Bangladesh and Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) member countries (Figure 1). Some reasons for this decline include increased attendance of education and rising household income levels. On the other

hand, this decline may also largely be attributed to women partaking in unpaid domestic care, family work and the unaccounted informal sector. It is, therefore, important to understand that the economic empowerment of women does not only include increasing female labour force participation, but also includes providing women control over their time (through distribution of domestic care and family care duties), control over resources (inheritance and property rights), equal value for equal work, reducing the gender wage gap, improv-



* The writers are staff of UNDP Pakistan

Figure 2: Men and Women's Contribution to GDP in Pakistan (%)



Source: Multiple years of the Labour Force Survey and Economic Survey of Pakistan.

ing access to capital, and female participation in high-skilled jobs, as women are more likely to be engaged in informal, low-skilled and more vulnerable forms of employment.

Gender diversity and inclusion is no longer an option, rather an economic and business imperative. The real question here is to analyze whether our investments are gender-responsive and supportive of women so they can unleash their economic potential and drive the economy. In Pakistan, over the years, women's contribution to GDP has increased at an average annual growth rate of 11 percent as compared to nine percent growth of men's contribution. This implies that the difference between the contribution of men and women has decreased over time, with women catching up (Figure 2).¹

Gender Parity and Gender Gap

In the region, Nepal is leading with highest gender parity followed by India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, and Pakistan (Table 1). Within Pakistan, the Women Economic Empowerment Index places Punjab's performance as leading (0.52), followed by Sindh (0.38), then Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) (0.35), and finally Balochistan (0.26). The national figure stands at 0.39. While the results are in line with the distribution of resources in the provinces, it is nonetheless, a half glass full situation for Pakistan and a lot more needs to be done to reach the finish line with others.

No country has been able to achieve full gender parity so far. According to the Global Gender Gap Index 2020, out of 153 countries, only the top five have been able to perform best by closing at least 80 percent of their gender gaps. Overall, South Asia has closed 61 percent of its gender gap, second-largest after the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. Pakistan

is ranked 3rd last at 151, lowest in South Asia and has been able to close 56 percent of its gender gap, whereas Bangladesh has closed 73 percent of its gender gap (50th/153rd), Nepal 68 percent (101st/153rd) and India has closed 67 percent gap (112th/153rd). Bangladesh's longest tenure of women leadership of the state over the past 50 years attributed to its political empowerment ranking of 7th, whereas Pakistan ranked 93rd. In 2017, there was not a single female federal minister in Pakistan. As of February 2021, there are three female federal ministers in a Cabinet of 28 members. Pakistan can turn towards attracting women political participation through legislation, creating equal job opportunities, creating a conducive environment for working women, decent pay, increasing school enrollment, and improving health facilities to increase economic participation and opportunities.

Empowering women to decision making roles is certainly a challenge as only five percent of the senior and leadership roles are currently held by women (146th rank), which only doubled as compared to 2016. In Pakistan, women hold only 4.9 percent of engineering supervisory roles. Less than 12 percent of firms have female participation in ownership compared to more than 18 percent in South Asia, and 34 percent globally, according to World Bank.

Entrepreneurship and Financial Inclusion

Globally, there are more than two male entrepreneurs for every female entrepreneur in Egypt, Norway, North Macedonia, Japan and Pakistan. The lowest levels of female entrepreneurship are in Pakistan, Japan, Italy and North Macedonia. Pakistan has one of the lowest rates of women entrepreneurs in the world—only eight percent of micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) are owned by women—and there are large

1. The male and female contributions to GDP have been calculated based on GDP at current prices (PKR million), based on national data using CAGR approach. National data sources include Labour Force Surveys and Economic Survey of Pakistan.

What has been done?

A Run-Down on Policies and Initiatives

Pakistan has made significant efforts in creating an enabling environment for women at the work place and reducing structural barriers that prevent women from seeking employment. Legislations have been passed to ensure the security and protection of women against workplace harassment such as the **Protection against Harassment of Women at the Workplace Act, Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act 2016** (against cyberstalking and cyber crime), **Child Marriage Restraint Act, Prevention of Anti-Women Practices Act 2011, Domestic Violence Act 2011**, and further legislations supporting women quotas for equal political representation.

Furthermore, the national as well as provincial governments have developed helplines to report harassment, established working women hostels, childcare facilities for working mothers, and gender taskforces have been created to reduce structural barriers women face.

Other local commitments by private and public stakeholders are also working towards the cause of empowering women economically and financially. Public sector programmes such as the **Benazir Income Support Program (BISP)** are working actively towards providing social protection to women. The **Pakistan Baitul Maal** has also established women empowerment centres/schools throughout the country, that provide free training to widows, orphans and poor girls in a variety of skill sets. Similarly, several **private microfinance organizations** are also playing an active role in empowering women financially.

gaps in women's access to finance.² Studies indicate that 50 to 70 percent of the loans given to women clients are used by their male relatives. Women, on the other hand, are grossly underrepresented in self-employment, whether in agriculture or non-agriculture, and overrepresented among unpaid family workers, pointing to significant constraints to female entrepreneurship.

Financial inclusion is at the heart of driving women entrepre-

neurship and has been one of the key reasons for Bangladesh's success in economically empowering its women. State Bank of Pakistan's (SBP) data has also revealed a lack of gender balance in bank staff and Branchless Banking (BB) agents. As of October 2019, women represented 13.2 percent of overall bank staff, 15.8 percent of head office staff, 12 percent of branch staff, while only one percent of BB agents are women. Women's access to agricultural loans is merely four percent and is only three percent for small-and-medium

Table 1: Women in Workforce: South Asian Countries

	Pakistan	Bangladesh	Nepal	India	Sri Lanka
GDP Gain by 2025 (If Women's Participation is Fully Equal to Men's)	60%	28%	15%	60%	69%
Gender Equality in Work	48	58	65	59	58
Gender Equality in Essential Services	55	81	76	75	95
Gender Equality in Legal Protection and Political Voice	16	35	38	40	29
Gender Equality in Physical Security and Autonomy	77	60	77	73	77
Gender Parity	37	48	58	48	58
Gender Equality in Education	75	81	73	76	99
Gender Equality in Financial Inclusion	17	83	74	66	96
Female Labor Force Participation	21.7	36.4	81.5	20.8	33.5

Source: McKinsey Global Institute (2015), "The Power Of Parity: How Advancing Women's Equality Can Add \$12 Trillion To Global Growth" and ILO data sets 2019

2. In Pakistan, women's access to agricultural loans is only at 4 percent and to SME loans at 3 percent, World Bank, (2017), Pakistan Development Update

Table 2: Financial Inclusion Indicators, by Country, South Asia

Country	Female Accounts (%)	Male Accounts (%)
Bangladesh	36	65
India	77	83
Pakistan	7	35
Afghanistan	7	23
Nepal	42	50
Sri Lanka	65	72

Source: Global FINDEX, the World Bank 2020

Note: GEM 2020 reports data for 2017 for all countries here

enterprise (SME) loans. In South Asia, women in India (36 percent) and Sri Lanka (65 percent) own the highest percentage of bank accounts (Table 2).

A glaring gender gap is building momentum in the country's financial inclusion levels. State Bank of Pakistan's internal gender disaggregated data reveals that unique accounts held by adult women comprise of 25 percent of total unique bank accounts. Moreover, 29 percent of the adult women population has a bank account. However, only 18 percent of these are active users of bank accounts (See Figure 3).

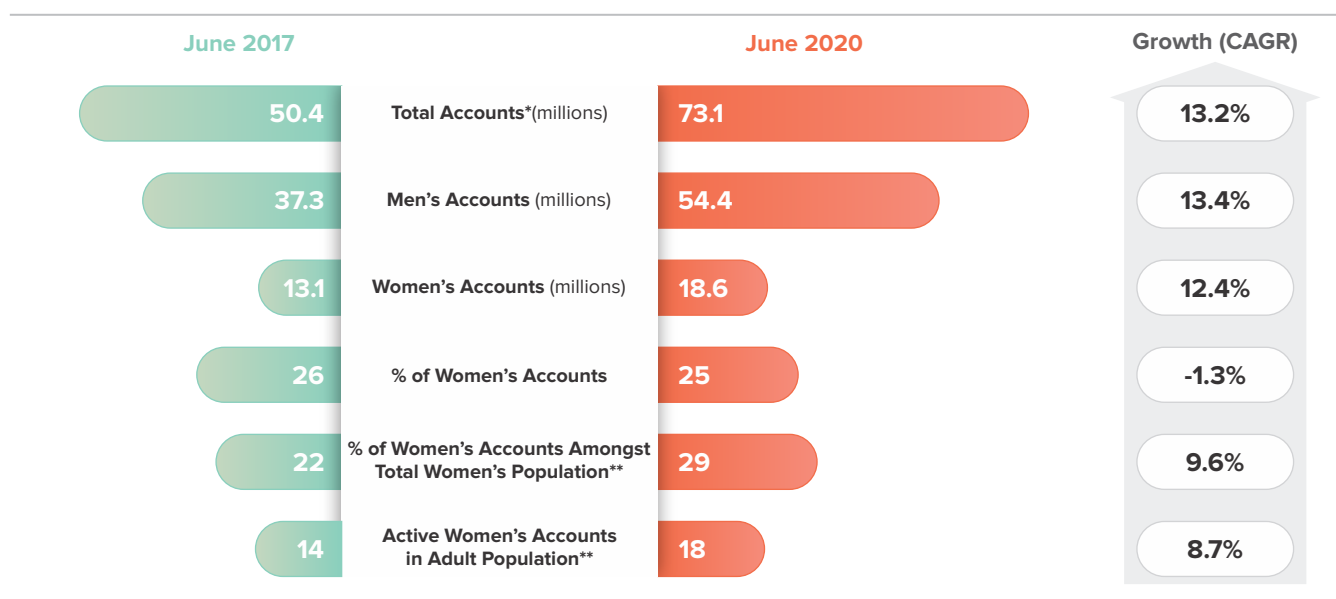
Policy Recommendations

Policies need to be holistic and developed in close consultation with stakeholders from all sectors. It is also imperative that policymakers use an iterative approach to consistently

research, implement, and evaluate which policies work best in the Pakistani context. Some policy-level recommendations to increase women's participation in the economy include, but are not limited to, the following:

- **Challenging Social Norms:** Increasing women's and girls' equal access to primary and secondary education; reforming the national education curriculum so that children are aware of gender equality from an early age and can break down gender stereotypes increasing awareness of women's rights (right to education, healthcare, self-determination, etc.) through mass media campaigns and extensive community outreach; provision of safe transportation for women and other policies to improve mobility, are just some ways to overcome socio-cultural barriers that prevent women from working.

Figure 3: Gender Disaggregated Unique Accounts



* Includes BB accounts

** Adult Women's Population estimated at 59.8 Million (2017) and 64.2 Million (2020)

Source: State Bank of Pakistan (2020), Banking on Equality Policy: Reducing the Gender Gap in Financial Inclusion: Draft



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- **Gender-Responsive Budgeting and Planning:** Every government department and ministry should earmark their budgets and investments for gender-based reforms.
- **Equal Pay for Equal Work:** Equal pay for equal work needs to be incorporated into the law. Often women's domestic care and family work is unpaid and unvalued.
- **Control over Resources:** In a patriarchal society like Pakistan, laws and systems are unfavourable for women and disenfranchise them. One such case is property and inheritance rights, which need to be reformed to provide women financial independence.
- **Reforming the Informal Economy:** A large majority of Pakistani women are employed in the informal and vulnerable economy (agriculture, livestock, textiles, home-based workers). There needs to be a formalization of these jobs, legislations for Home Based Workers and an improvement in their working conditions and pay.
- **Skills Development:** As is prevalent in developing countries, women are typically employed in low skilled, low paying jobs. There is an urgent need to develop their skills through trainings.
- **Access to Capital and Financial Services:** Women need access to capital and financial services to set up businesses as well as independently manage their finances. Microfinance programs may be one way to financially include women and provide them with loans.
- **Digital Inclusion and Technology:** A majority of women in Pakistan lack access to cell phones and the internet and also lack technological skills. There is a need for vocational training and other challenges/competitions to enhance their skills.
- **Prevention of Workplace Harassment and Gender Based Violence:** While legislations exist to prevent VAW and workplace harassment, implementation and monitoring mechanisms are needed at the individual, community and institutional level, to protect women.

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WOMENOMICS IN PAKISTAN



The Empowerment-Development Paradigm



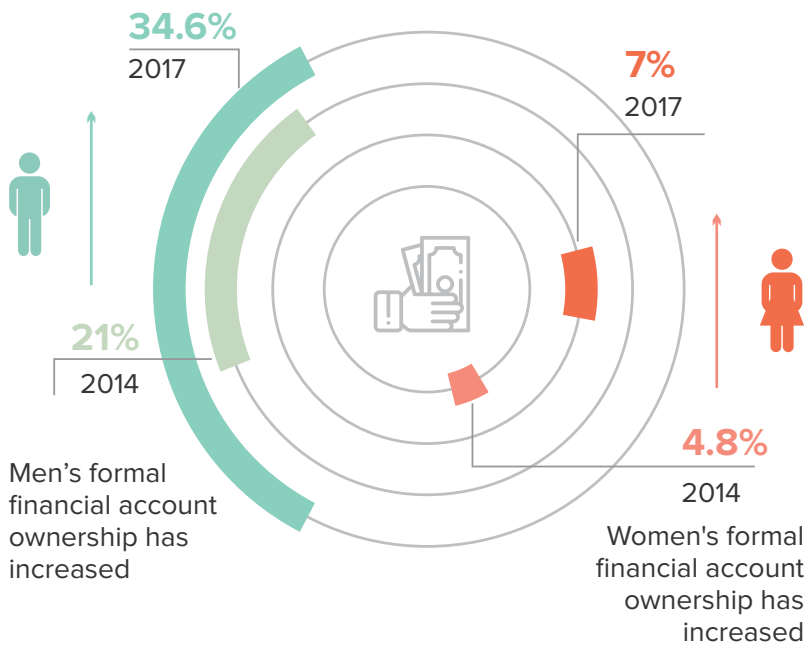
Women in Entrepreneurship

Women in Pakistan seem more motivated than their male counterparts who are in Total Early-Stage Entrepreneurial Activity



Women's Access to Finance

A Gender-Disaggregated Analysis



93% adult women in Pakistan do not have a formal financial account

With the current compound annual growth rate (CAGR), it will approximately take till **2039** for all women above 15 years of age to have formal financial accounts

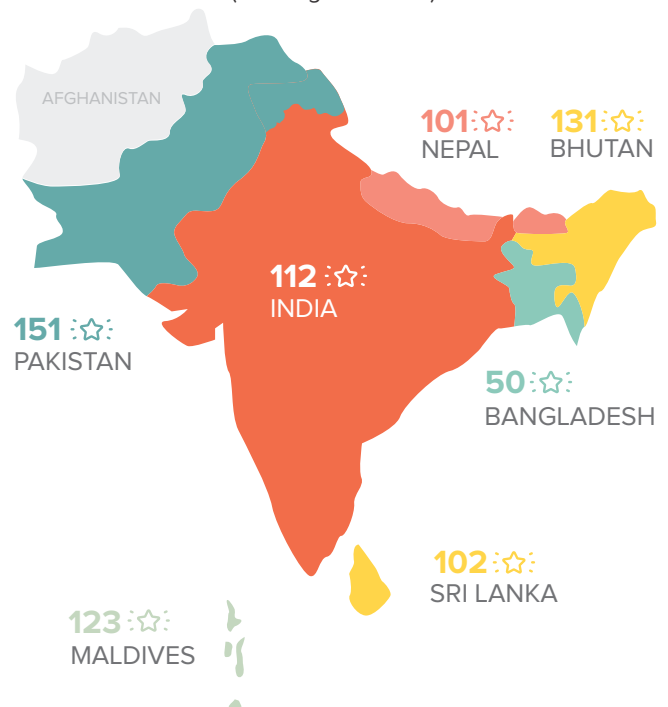
4 Primary Levers for Equality at the Workplace



Source: The Power Of Parity: How Advancing Women's Equality Can Add \$12 Trillion To Global Growth 2015, McKinsey Global Institute

Where do we stand in the region?

Global Gender Gap Report 2020 (Ranking out of 153)



Women in Leadership

(in Pakistan)



Proportion of women in managerial positions

2.9%



Proportion of women in senior and middle management positions

4.2%



Proportion of seats held by women in national parliaments (% of total number of seats)

20.2%



Proportion of elected seats held by women in deliberative bodies of local government

17%

Women and Mobility



A report published by the Asian Development Bank (2014) highlights that

70%

of Pakistani women who use public transport faced harassment



Students

31%



Working Women

23%



Homemakers

20%

decreased the use of public transport

The report highlights significant impact on female mobility due to harassment in public spaces and on public transport:

STORIES FROM THE FIELD



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Ambreen Fatima | Driver

Ambreen is the first woman driver hired by UNDP Pakistan. She has many years of driving experience driving a cab and having been employed by other NGOs as a driver. She chose driving as a career because she feels that one should always try to take the road less traveled. There are not too many women professional drivers in Pakistan so she decided to become one. She feels very proud working for an organization as prestigious as the UN.

Local Women, Local Heroes

Insights, Challenges and Way Forward

A collaboration by



The Significance of Women's Economic Empowerment in Pakistan

Gender equality is a fundamental right enforced by the constitution of Pakistan. Women's economic empowerment (WEE) is one of the essential means to achieve this gender equality. Pakistan being a signatory to Agenda 2030—an advocate of gender equality, especially Goal 5 on women empowerment and ending discrimination in all fields of life—must recognize the need for women's economic empowerment as a key pillar for inclusive and sustainable development.

According to the National Human Development Report 2020, Pakistan's overall Gender Development Index (GDI) value in 2018–2019 was 0.777. It has increased slightly between 2006 to 2019. However, Gender Inequality Index of 0.548 in 2018-2019, despite decreasing between 2007 to 2016, has slightly worsened between 2016 to 2019, thereby highlighting increase in gender inequality in Pakistan.

As per the Pakistan Population Census 2017, women constitute nearly half of the population of Pakistan i.e. 48.76 percent. Depriving this major proportion of population from economic empowerment, will likely result in forgone economic output, and may create resentment, disengagement, oppression, or unrest in societies. Only 20

percent of women are part of the labour force (13.5 million), out of which seven million women workers fall under the category of contributing family workers and remain unrecognized and unpaid for their work.¹

Challenges Holding Back Women's Trajectory in the Economic World

The challenges facing women in Pakistan are inter-connected and based on entrenched gender norms which result in patriarchal and traditional gender stereotypes and roles being played out, all of which are root causes of gender-based discrimination.

Women's role in decision-making is one of the biggest challenges in determining their and their female household members' participation in socio-economic and political spheres. Having little or no say in household decisions, limits their accessibility to available opportunities. In a patriarchal society like Pakistan, most households are male centric and do not give "agency"—the power to make choices and decisions for one self—to female members. For instance, 41 percent of women indicated that they make decisions regarding their own health care jointly with their husband, 37 percent reported that such decisions are made mainly by their husband, and 10 percent said that they mainly make these decisions on their own.² This stands true for both married

1. UNDP calculations based on Labour Force Survey data sets 2017-2018

2. Pakistan Demographic Health Survey 2017-18.

and unmarried women. Unmarried women have limited say in acquiring education and starting a career. Whereas married and educated women face difficulties in returning to work after marriage or children. As a result, many qualified female professionals either never enter the workforce, or have to pull out.

In a country where public transport is considered insufficient or unsafe, lack of mobility is a critical issue for women who want to avail opportunities available to them for becoming economically empowered. A report published by the Asian Development Bank (2014) highlight that 70 percent of Pakistani women who use public transport faced harassment. The report highlights significant impact on female mobility due to harassment in public spaces and on public transport: 31 percent of students, 23 percent of working women and 20 percent of homemakers decreased the use of public transport. 40 percent restricted traveling after sunset which reduced their chances of employability. Initiatives such as having female only compartments in buses and female only transport like the Pink Bus, is a step-in right direction towards safeguarding women's security and mobility. However, it seems like a temporary solution that reinforces inequality, thus, public awareness towards respect for women and creating gender-aware urban planning and design, is the need of the hour.

Limited access to capital and financial resources is yet another key challenge that holds back economically active women from pursuing their passion projects or business ventures. Microfinance Institutions and banks such as Akhuwat, Kashf Foundation, and First Women Microfinance bank etc. are all a step-in right direction in ensuring women's financial inclusion and ability to raise capital. However, the amount of loans given may not be equivalent to the amount one is able raise when he/she sets his/her mind to start a business venture. Thus, commercial banks in Pakistan need to invest in women-centric loans as well, to increase the limit of capital that can be raised.

The near invisibility of women in micro and macroeconomic policies compounds the issue, as the different initiatives of the federal and provincial governments are aimed more at income generation than bringing women into the economic mainstream. The situation warrants a deeper analysis of the data to develop evidence-based well-informed gender-aware policies and initiatives.

Apart from these, women face many other challenges that become an obstacle in their active economic participation, such as security, harassment at workplace, lack of information on registering businesses, societal one-track male dominance mind set, and lack of sharing in care-giving responsibilities etc. Nevertheless, Pakistan has many local women heroes, who are leading by example in the face of all these difficulties and challenges (See our 'Voices from Industry' Section).

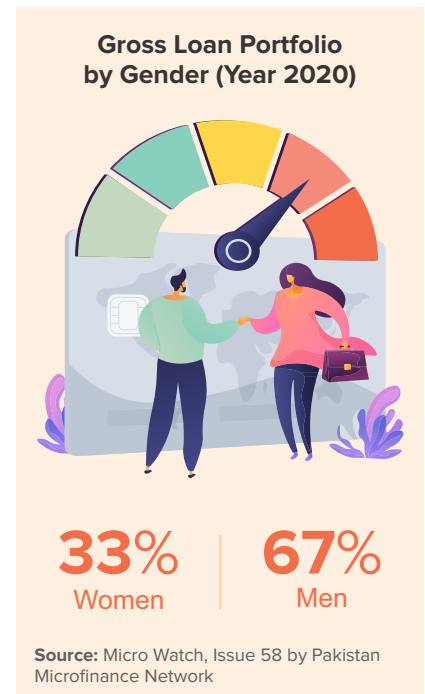
Women: Fighting the Odds to Make Space

Women today are almost in all walks of life and progressing, yet, there are miles to go before full gender parity at work force and gender parity overall can be achieved. Despite all challenges, women are fighting to make space for themselves at the economic table. In Pakistan, women hold only 4.9 percent of engineering supervisory roles. Within Pakistan, although there has been a decrease in women managers or senior officials from 1.7 percent to 1.23 percent between 2008 and 2018, however, the number of females in professional roles has considerably improved from 4.4 percent to 24.61 percent between 2008 and 2018. The highest increase of female employment was observed in professional occupations; followed by skilled agricultural, forestry and fishery workers, plant and machine operators, and assemblers services and sales workers.

Recommendations and Way Forward

If we wish to ensure women led economic prosperity, several areas of focus are necessary. Economic growth at its full potential cannot be achieved unless women along with men, are given right to their economic resources, decision making, equality in certain laws, and a conducive environment while removing other stigmas and barriers. This inclusive path of women's economic empowerment is indeed the way forward. Uplifting women with the right skills and equal opportunities has high returns, as along with increased productivity and income, it also strengthens their family and community.

Policies and legislations supporting women's business development financial services, microenterprises, and SMEs; focus on education and training, market demand-driven skills and knowledge, creates an enabling environment for women to enter lucrative markets and take advantage of various economic opportunities and



3. Ramla Qureshi & Nameerah Hameed, "Inspiring a New Generation of Pakistani Women Leaders in STEM," End Poverty in South Asia, World Bank, November 5 2019, <https://blogs.worldbank.org/endpovertyinsouthasia/inspiring-newgeneration-pakistani-women-leaders-stem>

4. Pakistan Labour Force Survey multiple years 2008 to 2018



increase output per capita.

Linking women businesses to market and industries not only helps them grow but also contributes to overall economic growth. Government initiatives can include prohibiting gender-based discrimination in labour markets, taking account of the unpaid work of women (family labour whether in agriculture or in the home) and devise mechanisms to ensure that women's care work does not keep them out of the labour force by providing day care centers and efficient, affordable, and safe public transport systems. Since women are employed mostly in the informal sector, supporting mechanisms that eliminate or reduce the vulnerability of such employment are imperative. Women who challenge gender roles by assuming non-traditional work e.g., carpentry, electronics etc. should be encouraged in the form of access to credit, be it for owning a business or for tools, connecting them with established private sector organizations and support from local vocational training institutes.

Specific recommendations include:

- Improve the type and value of microfinance available to women beyond what is currently available. The State Bank of Pakistan and commercial banks can introduce and pilot innovative products for women financing and engage with other Microfinance Banks (MFBs) and Microfinance Institutions (MFIs) to take the successful ones to scale. All MFIs should set aside a percentage of loans for extending microfinance to women with disabilities and to minority women.
- Ensure that MFBs and MFIs have a minimum of 30 percent of their lending dedicated to women, especially in agriculture, livestock, textiles, and garments. Lending should be flexible to accommodate the value-added enterprises that women aspire to, and should be accompanied by financial education and training.
- Corporate social responsibility conditions, enforced through legislation and relevant mechanisms, should ensure above minimum wage incomes, day care centers for women employees, separate toilets and spaces for women employees, and a safe, free of harassment workplace. The government should provide financial incentives to private sector employers to recruit women with disabilities as part of their corporate social responsibility.

- A percentage of all public sector contracts should be set aside for businesses that are women specific, owned or managed by women—especially the small and medium enterprises. This will facilitate the inclusion of small women owned/led businesses who cannot otherwise compete with experienced or large bidders.
- Promote social entrepreneurships that focus on women and disadvantaged groups, as not only beneficiaries, but more importantly as emerging entrepreneurs, funded by government, international and private donors, such that they develop economic skills and provide livelihood opportunities for women.
- A large number of women in the workforce are concentrated in agriculture, livestock and teaching. It is important that special packages be devised to enhance the skills and returns to labour of these women. Value added businesses can be introduced in the agriculture and livestock related sector. Legislative support can be provided to the informal sector, formalizing wages, conducive working conditions and other facilities to strengthen women's economic participation.
- Women with professional and post graduate degrees, such as in medicine, engineering, and information technology, be given special incentives to enter and stay in the workforce. These incentives can be in the form of salaries comparable to those of men, transport and childcare, and assurance of re-employment when career breaks occur due to marriage and childbearing.
- Develop technical training institutions that can equip individuals with skills aligned with market demands, and the rapidly changing technology. These institutions should expand the courses being offered to women, to non-traditional fields, such as micro-electronics, carpentry, plumbing, repair of electrical appliances, and other information and communication technology relevant skills. Particular attention is required for improving access of female trainees with disabilities and from minorities to such institutes, through a percentage of seats allocated for them, and through incentives (direct and indirect), to both the trainee and the institution.

“Uplifting women with the right skills and equal opportunities has high returns.”

STORIES FROM THE FIELD

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Saba Batool | Restaurant Owner

Saba is a restauratrice from Hazara Town, Quetta. As an enterprising young woman, she tried her hand at different businesses. She started with making handicrafts. Soon after, she made a little institute where she trained other women to make handicrafts. After a while, she started a single room restaurant. Saba came up with the idea to start a restaurant during a particularly turbulent and difficult time for her community. She realized that as they were spending all their time within their own neighbourhood, they had no opportunity to go out to eat. Also, quite a few of them found the cost of

eating out unaffordable. So, she decided to make a restaurant that offered delicious meals and a place to hang out for the women of her community.

She received a two-month entrepreneurship training arranged by UNDP. Since then, she has expanded her restaurant from a room within her house to a large hall in the neighbourhood. The restaurant is being run by a group of women. Not only are they catering to their own community, but have also started taking orders for deliveries outside their neighbourhood.

Women's Access to Finance in Pakistan



By Dr. Reza Baqir

Governor, State Bank of Pakistan

Access to need-based, safe and affordable financial services is universally accepted as part of the basic rights of every individual. Promoting equal opportunities for women and men to access financial products and professional endeavours, is critical for sustainable and inclusive economic growth in any country.

A number of efforts have been made to promote women's financial inclusion in Pakistan. These initiatives included adoption of targets for improving women's access to bank accounts, such that at least 20 million adult women have an active bank account by 2023; improving financial literacy of women under the State Bank of Pakistan's (SBP) National Financial Literacy Program; and, provision of loans upto PKR five million for women entrepreneurs under SBP's Refinance and Credit Guarantee Scheme, with 60 percent loan loss coverage. These efforts have yielded some results; however,

we need to do more to reduce the exclusion of women in our financial system, as currently, only 18 in 100 adult women have an active bank account and even fewer have access to credit. This is amongst the highest level of financial exclusion in the world.

As the Governor of the central bank of the country, I strongly believe that women's active participation is crucial to unleash the social and economic potential of our country. This cannot be realized without improving women's financial inclusion and addressing the gender gap within the financial sector. Therefore, SBP has developed a "Banking on Equality Policy: Reducing the Gender Gap in Financial Inclusion". The policy is based on the fact that gender-neutral policies in the financial sector have been insufficient to reduce the gender gap in the sector, and there is a pressing need to view financial sector policies through a gender lens and become gender inten-

“ Access to need-based, safe and affordable financial services is universally accepted as part of the basic rights of every individual. ”



tional.

The proposed policy identifies five key pillars under which actions are targeted towards improving institutional readiness, product development through a gender lens, facilitative approaches towards women, the collection of gender disaggregated data, and prioritizing a gender focus in SBP's policies. The policy recommendations will be applicable on Commercial Banks, Islamic Banks, Microfinance Banks, Development Finance Institutions and Electronic Money Institutions. In addition, we will encourage other regulators like Securities and Exchange Commission of Pakistan, to adopt a similar, yet customized, gender policy for the non-banking financial sector. The five pillars of the policy are as follows:

Pillar 1 - Improving Gender Diversity:

A financial institution cannot adequately address the female market segment without addressing its internal gender imbalance. Currently, only 13 percent of the staff of banks and one percent of branchless banking agents are women. Global evidence suggests that more women working in leadership positions at financial institutions can aid the development of policies and practices for improving gender balance across the financial sector, as well as developing women friendly policies. Further, there is strong evidence that the presence of female representatives at financial institutions' touch points can aid women's adoption of conventional and digital financial services. Therefore, Financial Institutions (FIs) must make a commitment and develop the roadmap to gender diversity amongst overall bank staff and touch points. The policy should aim at having women comprise 20 percent of their work force and also increase the numbers of female agents by 2023.

Pillar 2 - Development of Women Centric Products and Marketing:

To shift from gender neutral to gender inclusive product design, it is imperative that a dedicated team works on gender product design and ways to market the products within our cultural context. Therefore, FIs must create a specialized banking unit, dedicated to development and offering for women, in the context of the various women's segments and life cycle. The policy will require banks to develop and offer women products that are well researched and backed by demand side insights. Moreover, FIs will be required to pace up delivery of financial literacy programs specifically for women.

Pillar 3 - Improved Facilitation for Women Customers:

Women's financial inclusion cannot be improved without understanding their needs carefully. However, women customers, especially entrepreneurs, feel intimidated to visit a bank branch and are not facilitated effectively. Therefore, to enable banks to improve facilitation of women customers and

entrepreneurs, specialized women relationship officers shall be made available at all bank touch points. These 'Women Champions' would also serve as a main contact point for non-financial advisory services and complaint management. These officers will have undergone gender sensitivity training, and must be well versed with the bank's products and the various schemes for women entrepreneurs.

Pillar 4 - Robust Collection of Gender-Disaggregated Data and Target Setting:

The absence of data and targets can dilute FIs' focus on gender in finance, and impede development of informed policies and associated actions for closing the gender gap. Therefore, under the policy, FIs will be instructed to collect and report gender disaggregated data to SBP, related to gender disaggregated outreach of products and services. This data collection will also enable FIs to recognize the opportunities and challenges in women's financial inclusion, and help them in developing internal policies to comply with SBP's gender policy and targets. This data will also assist the SBP with research and analysis on gender, to effectively monitor the progress on policy initiatives and make changes as needed.

Pillar 5 - Policy Forum on Gender:

Policy Forum on Gender and Finance will be established at the SBP to discuss opportunities and challenges in women's financial inclusion, internalize gender mainstreaming within organizations, and review the existing legal and policy framework for identification of bottlenecks in women's financial inclusion. The forum will be hosted by SBP and would include members from Banks, Development Finance Institutions (DFIs), Microfinance Banks (MFBs), Securities and Exchange Commission of Pakistan (SECP), non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and women champions from civil society. The forum will also create space for identifying opportunities and promote knowledge exchange amongst diverse stakeholders to support greater women's financial inclusion.

The policy is currently in the public consultation phase which was launched by SBP on December 21, 2020, to seek feedback from the public at large. Since then, SBP has held several focus group discussions with key stakeholders including, government functionaries, financial institutions, regulatory bodies, academia, business federations, gender policy experts, and women entrepreneurs.

The policy will be launched shortly. It will define SBP's commitment to promoting women's financial inclusion in the country and will continue to develop dynamically. SBP is very determined to laying the foundation and working towards a systemic shift that encourages women's financial inclusion and looks forward to collaborating with all stakeholders on the shared objectives of women empowerment.

Women's Economic Employment: A Game Changer for Pakistan

By **Sharmeela Rassool**

Country Representative
UN Women Pakistan



As we celebrate International Women's Day and Women's History Month, the focus is on women's leadership achieving an equal future in a COVID 19 World. The theme is deeply interlinked with the pandemic and more important than the response in overcoming its impact on all of us, is the disproportionate impact it has had on women and girls. At the heart of theme is women leadership, representation, and power of decision making at all levels of the society.

Despite the bleak situation created by the pandemic, there has also arisen an opportunity to learn, the fact that leadership styles and diversity make a huge impact. We see from

examples in Pakistan and the rest of the world, that women leaders at all levels of the society fared significantly better in controlling the disease and caring for their people.

Women's economic empowerment is central to realizing women's rights and gender equality, in order to recover better and equal from the pandemic. Being nearly half of Pakistan's population, women's contributions to the economy are immense. Whether in businesses, through formal or informal jobs, agriculture, or unpaid domestic or care work, women's economic empowerment is the driving force for economies.

“ We must support and ensure that women reach their fullest potential, sending a clear message that a woman's “place” is everywhere. ”

Women today are contributing in almost all walks of life and progressing. In our work we have come across many women trail blazers across Pakistan, working tirelessly to help uplift their communities. Many do not know these heroes. To mention a few, Farheen Sarwat, along with a team of emergency doctors and nurses, is playing a critical role as a frontline responder against the COVID-19 pandemic since February 2020. Samina Kausar, runs a stitching centre with other women in Sialkot to provide for her five children after leaving her abusive drug-addicted husband. Sahar Iqbal, a farmer from Pakpattan, worked a waterlogged barren land into a productive landscape to provide women with better wages.

According to the Asian Development Bank, Pakistan could raise its gross domestic product by as much as 30 percent if it can close the gender gap. This gender gap entails a plethora of challenges that are holding back women's trajectory in the economic sphere.

In the face of the ongoing pandemic, women have withstood the worst of COVID-19's economic and social consequences. Women-led micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises are bearing the brunt of the economic downturn from COVID-19, compounded by more limited access to financing and capital.¹

In addition, women's economic participation and advancement depend on social norms of whether a woman can work, what kind of work she can do, and the expectation of balancing domestic and care work along with her paid work. This along with patriarchy, reduces women's agency to make choices and decisions for themselves. For instance, 41 percent of women indicated that they make decisions regarding their health care jointly with their husband, 37 percent reported that such decisions are made mainly by their husband, and 10 percent said that they mainly make these decisions on their own.²

Women face many other challenges that become obstacles in their active economic participation, such as mobility, harassment at workplace, lack of information on registering busi-

nesses, and lack of sharing in care-giving responsibilities, etc. We need an accelerated effort and adopt large-scale, inclusive policies that address the deep-rooted social and economic gender inequalities that have become more pronounced during the COVID-19 crisis.³

The inclusive path of women's economic empowerment is the way forward. It acknowledges that economic growth at its fullest potential, cannot be achieved unless women, along with men, are given the right to their economic resources, decision making, equality in certain laws, and a conducive environment while removing other structural barriers. We must support and ensure that women reach their fullest potential, sending a clear message that a woman's “place” is everywhere.

“ No country prospers without the engagement of women. We need women's representation that reflects all women and girls in all their diversity and abilities, and across all cultural, social, economic, and political situations. This is the only way we will get the real societal change that incorporates women in decision-making as equals and benefits us all. ”

- Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka
UN Women Executive Director
on International Women's Day 2021



1. Monash University (2021), “For women in Asia, the post-COVID picture is one of new challenges, and opportunities.” Available at <https://lens.monash.edu/@politics-society/2021/03/08/1382921/for-women-in-asia-the-post-covid-picture-is-one-of-new-challenges-and-opportunities>
2. Pakistan Demographic Health Survey 2017-18
3. Uzma Quresh (2020), “Women and girls must be at the center of Pakistan's COVID-19 recovery.” World Bank Blogs. Available at <https://blogs.worldbank.org/endpovertyinsouthasia/women-and-girls-must-be-center-pakistans-covid-19-recovery>

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Women's economic development not only has the potential to drive Pakistan's economic growth and increase productivity, but is central to achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

”



Women as Agents of Change



By Maheen Rashid

Economic Policy Analyst
UNDP Punjab SDG
Support Unit

For far too long, women have been excluded from not just public spaces, public decision-making and leadership roles, but also the economy—especially in high-skilled jobs and managerial positions—due to deep rooted gender-based discrimination and the unfounded belief that women are unequal to men.

Women are not only disproportionately affected by the most pressing challenges of our time—climate change, COVID-19, economic crises and gender based violence (GBV)—but they also possess ideas and leadership to solve these problems. Many research studies identify women as effective agents of change and one way of increasing their voice, agency and participation is through their inclusive and equitable participation in the economy—or “Womenomics”.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) adopted by world leaders in 2015—including Pakistan—embodies a roadmap for progress that is inclusive, sustainable and leaves no one behind. This blueprint for humanity aims to achieve sustainable development keeping social, economic and environmental dimensions of

development at its core. Gender equality has been placed at the very center of this agenda and crosscuts across a large majority of goals and indicators.

Given that women and girls are over half the world’s population and its potential, their development is interlinked with all human development. When their lives are improved, it not only benefits them, but has measurable benefits that reverberate across society. According to the UN Women Fact Sheet, globally, women and girls are over-represented among the poor, as 330 million live on less than USD 1.90 a day, which is 4.4 million more than men. Access to decent work and regular income in the hands of women contribute not only to poverty reduction (SDG 1), but also support better educational, health and nutrition outcomes for women, girls and others dependent on them (SDGs 2, 3 and 4).

Economically empowering women has shown to considerably reduce poverty, as women lift not only themselves, but their families and entire communities out of poverty. As poverty declines, so does gender inequality, since choices are made at the expense and well-being of women during conditions of poverty.¹

1. Esther Duflo (2012), “Women empowerment and economic development.” Available at <https://economics.mit.edu/files/7417>



For instance, the needs and wellbeing of the male child in matters of food, nutrition, education, healthcare, etc. may be prioritized in societies that have a strong preference for the male child. Globally, in nearly two thirds of countries, women are more likely than men to report food insecurity and in Pakistan, women are 11 percentage points more likely than men to report food insecurity.² Similarly, there is a strong correlation between women's economic development and reduction in fertility. While maternal mortality depends on several factors, it is less likely to occur if individuals are economically secure as they may have better access to healthcare facilities (SDG 3).³ In this way, gender intersects with all 17 Sustainable Development Goals and investment in

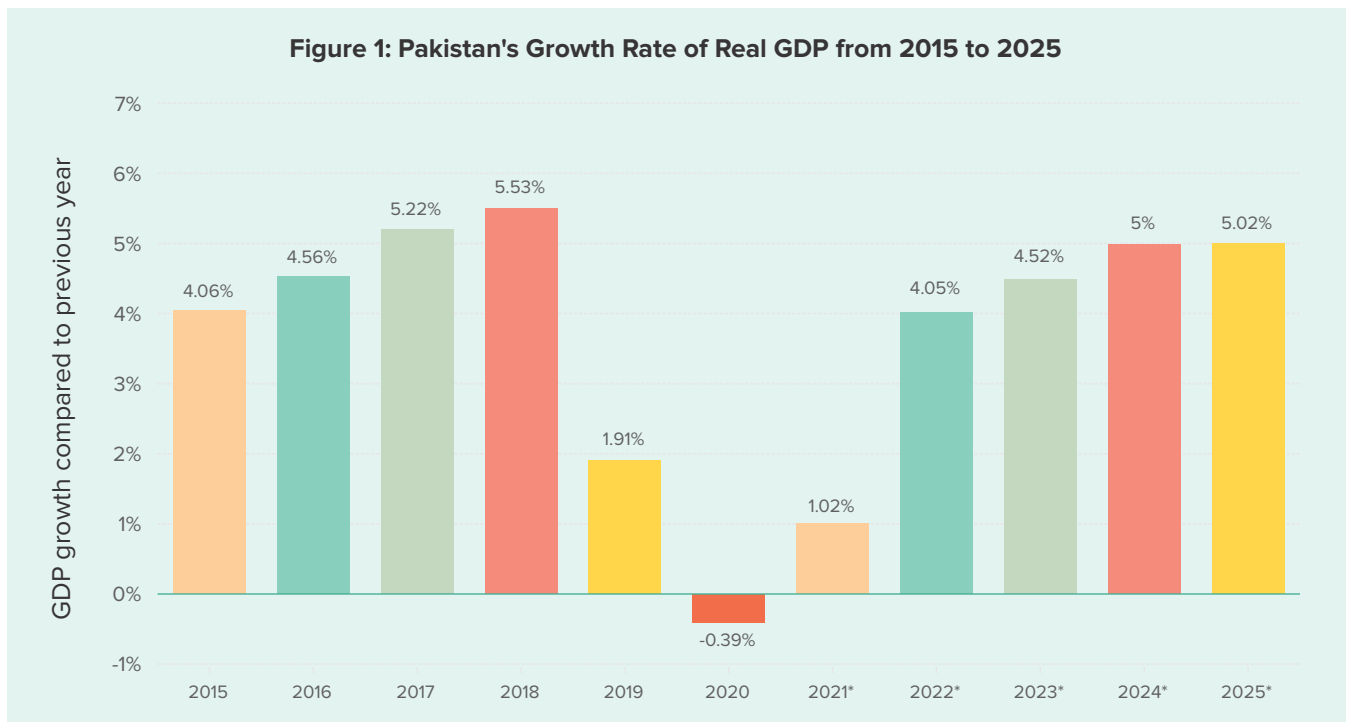
women's economic development can drive down gender inequality. However, this alone is not sufficient and must be supplemented with a comprehensive gender strategy.

Focusing on women's increased economic development and inclusion in the workforce might help Pakistan realize its development goals faster. The 2017 Population Census estimates that Pakistan's population is projected to rise to 307 million by 2050. The country needs an annual GDP Growth of 6-10 percent to meet the demands of a rapidly growing and urbanizing population. Pakistan's GDP growth rate has been on the decline since 2018 (Figure 1), however, the COVID-19 pandemic has brought the onset of an economic crisis, as Pakistan's GDP growth rate fell to negative 0.39 percent in 2020.⁴

Including women in the workforce would not only help increase the economic growth rate, but also decrease the dependency ratio. It would also help increase productivity growth, economic diversification and household income available for family consumption. Not to mention, it would have a positive impact on other development outcomes: improved nutritional needs, education, health, and climate change outcomes for women, their dependents and families, and a possible reduction in fertility rates which could help control Pakistan's rising population.

However, for women to become catalysts of change for Pakistan through economic empowerment, there are key sectors and areas that need to be heavily invested in:

- **Informal Sector and the Unpaid Care Economy:** Primarily an agrarian economy, Pakistan has a large proportion of its labour force employed in the informal or casual labour sector. This is especially true for women, who are more likely to be employed in the informal sector, working in agriculture, livestock, textiles and home-based work. Women are also twice more likely than men to be contribut-



2. UN Women, Fact Sheet, "Turning Promises into Action: Gender Equality in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development." Available at <https://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2018/sdg-report-fact-sheet-central-and-southern-asia-en.pdf?la=en&vs=3552>

3. Esther Duflo (2012), "Women empowerment and economic development." Available at <https://economics.mit.edu/files/7417>

4. Statista. (2020). Pakistan - gross domestic product (GDP) growth rate 2025. Available at <https://www.statista.com/statistics/383729/gross-domestic-product-gdp-growth-rate-in-pakistan/>

ing family workers and spend 2.5 times more time on unpaid care and domestic work. Not only is domestic and home-based work not incorporated in measurements of the female labour force participation rate, but if assigned a monetary value, it would constitute between 10 to 39 percent of the GDP.⁵ In these sectors, especially in developing economies, employers are subject to lower regulations, women are more vulnerable to lower pay, job losses, and gender-based violence.⁶ It is therefore essential to create evidence-based policy solutions for workers in the informal and unpaid care economy. Some such solutions include formalizing informal jobs, increasing regulations on informal sector employers, ensuring provision of equal pay for equal work, improving wage transparency to reduce the gender wage gap, protecting women against harassment and gender based violence through legislations, mass awareness and strong implementation mechanisms of these laws.

- Increased Investments in Healthcare (SDG 3) and Education (SDG 4):** Investing in girls' education and healthcare creates the greatest gains, not just for girls and women, but entire communities. Globally, 15 million girls of primary-school age will never get a chance to attend school compared to 10 million boys. Pakistan has one of the largest out-of-school children population in the world, approximately 22.8 million children, where a majority are girls. According to Human Rights Watch, over 32 percent of girls of primary school age are out-of-school compared to 21 percent of boys and by sixth grade, over 59 percent girls are out-of-school compared to 49 percent boys. Increasing women and girls' educational attainment directly contributes to their economic empowerment and inclusive economic growth as they can acquire the skills, education, and technological knowhow necessary for securing decent work, especially high-skilled high-value jobs. When speaking to the healthcare needs and wellbeing of women, if women are not healthy, they will be unable to participate meaningfully in the labour force. Maternal health, family planning and basic access to primary health care services, are areas in dire need of investment. Hence, both education and healthcare are enablers of women's economic empowerment and participation.
- Social Protection:** It is imperative that investments and sound policy programs be established to ensure women have access to social safety nets (such as Benazir Income Support Program), pensions, unemployment benefits, maternity protection and cash relief programs (Ehsaas Emergency Cash Program). Most people in Pakistan have been exposed to income losses, job losses, food insecurity and economic hardship as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, but women who are more vulnerable, have been hit harder and therefore, need to be protected.

In addition to the aforementioned sectors, it is also crucial to address the root causes for women's unequal economic participation in Pakistan and alleviate socio-cultural constraints on women's freedom to choose whether or not they enter the labour market.

Some areas for policy level solutions include addressing the patriarchal mindset through awareness and community sensitization campaigns, addressing barriers to mobility, concerns of safety, availability of childcare facilities, and the elimination of all forms of Violence against Women (VAW) at the household, community and institutional level, that serves as a



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major obstacle.

Some of the challenges in this regard include lack of significant data on women-related indicators and lack of trend data which make it hard to not only monitor progress, but create effective evidence-based policies. Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic has reversed some of the progress made on gender equality and women's rights, as the crisis exacerbated and further pronounced pre-existing inequalities. Increased incidence of VAW, poor health, food insecurity, school closures, and increased poverty—especially for women employed in the informal sector—were prevalent across the world, but especially in developing countries, like Pakistan. Another persistent challenge is the operation of government stakeholders, private sector, non-profit sector, and academia in silos, which prevents progress on the economic development of women and achieving gender equality.

However, the incumbent government has begun undertaking a consultative approach for the passage of bills, and creation of policies. This could be a great opportunity to engage Pakistan's growing civil society and create synergies across all sectors to achieve the SDGs. Another opportunity is the government's political ownership and buy-in for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which would aid Pakistan in implementing and localizing SDGs, whilst achieving its national development goals.

Pakistan has a long way to go to close its gender gaps, but if it invests in the education, healthcare and social protection of its women and girls, and focuses on women's participation in the formal sector in high-skilled high-paying jobs, it could be headed in the right direction. Scandinavian countries such as Iceland, Finland, Sweden and Norway have topped the Global Gender Gap Index for progress towards closing their gender gaps. This success may be attributed to long-standing equality in education, health, a large proportion of women in the labour force, with small salary gaps and strong representation in high-skilled jobs.⁷

5. Diane Elson (1999), "Labor markets as gendered institutions: Equality, efficiency and empowerment issues." *World Development*, vol. 27, No. 3, pp. 611–627.

6. Kochhar, E. (2019), IMF research on closing the Gender Gap – IMF finance & Development Magazine: March 2019. Available at <https://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/fandd/2019/03/closing-the-gender-gap-dabla.htm#:~:text=Malawi%2C%20Namibia%2C%20and%20Peru%20revised,substantially%20in%20all%20three%20countries>

7. Worley, H. (2014), "Top 10 Countries Closing Gender Gap." Available at <https://www.prb.org/global-gender-gap/>



INTERVIEW

Najy Benhassine

Country Director
World Bank Pakistan

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When women have as equal an access to economic opportunities as men, they will dedicate more of their household budget to their children's education, save more money overall, have children that are less likely to become sick or be undernourished, as well as boost the overall global economy. ”

How is womeconomics central to achieving Agenda 2030?

Gender equality and empowerment of women and girls is central to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Without the full and active participation of women in the workforce, countries will find it hard to meet their development targets and promote economic growth. 'Womeconomics' also directly impacts two SDGs: Gender Equality and Decent Work and Economic Growth, and indirectly impacts the other SDGs.

Women's economic empowerment is a prerequisite for sustainable development. According to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), investments in gender equality produce the highest returns compared to all other development spending. Women's higher earnings translate into higher investments in children's education, health and nutrition; and when more women work, economies grow. Hence, when women have as equal an access to economic opportunities as men, they will dedicate more of their household budget to their children's education, save more money overall, have children that are less likely to become sick or be undernourished, as well as boost the overall global economy.

In light of the above, the World Bank, in its Pakistan @ 100 initiative, has identified inclusive growth as one of the key factors to the country's successful transition to an upper-middle income country by 2047. The country's inclusive growth targets require women's participation in the workforce to rise from the current 25 percent to 45 percent. Hence, investments in human capital such as health and education, implementing gender sensitive policies especially at workplaces, and transforming social norms, will promote women's economic participation and put Pakistan in the direction of growth and prosperity.

What challenges exist in ease of doing business and entrepreneurship, for women in Pakistan?

In the Doing Business 2020 report, Pakistan is commended as one out of the ten economies that improved the most regarding ease of doing business after implementing regulatory reforms. However, despite improvements, women still face several challenges. Pakistan still lacks an enabling business and entrepreneurship environment for women, which prevents them from fully participating in the country's economy. Hence, it is critical to discuss issues related to business and entrepreneurship for women, when discussing Female Labour Force Participation (LFP) in Pakistan.

Challenges:

Pakistan has one of the lowest rates of women entrepreneurs in the world—only eight percent of micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) are owned by women—and there are large gaps in women's access to finance. Both socio-cultural and regulatory constraints in Pakistan perpetuate low female participation in entrepreneurship.

For example, studies show that 50 to 70 percent of the loans given to women clients are used by their male relatives. In addition, many microfinance loan/field officers perpetuate gender discriminatory practices towards women, such as requiring them to provide at least two male guarantors which can act as a barrier for women. Also, nearly two-thirds of women borrowers must obtain written permission and signatures from their husbands before they can qualify for a loan or open a bank account. Inheritance laws continue to limit women's access to assets, affecting initial endowments for business and their ability to access loans using collateral. Furthermore, discrimination based on gender or marital status is not explicitly prohibited.

It is crucial to focus on key gaps such as lack of a gender responsive policy on MSME, limited access to finance, networks and markets etc. This will increase the number of women led businesses and engage more women economically.

Examples of Recent Reforms:

Punjab has adopted inheritance laws' reforms to improve women's access to their inherited agricultural land and urban property that can also improve their access to finance. Additionally, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and the federal government have enacted different inheritance laws' reforms to support women's access to their inherited land and property. Provinces such as Sindh and Balochistan should move in this direction and implementation is key to enable women to have more economic independence.

Similarly, Securities Exchange Commission of Pakistan launched a digital Secured Transactions Registry in 2020. This will facilitate small and medium enterprises and agriculture sector borrowers, especially women owned businesses, who do not own land/property, to secure credit from financial institutions.

Suggest a long term 'gender-inclusive and gender-supportive' strategy that can be implemented by multiple private and public stakeholders.

While most women face constraints in accessing work in

Pakistan, solutions at the policy level must not be developed using a 'one size fits all' approach. Hence a long term 'gender-inclusive and gender-supportive' strategy should include:

a. Investing in Human Capital: Investing in girls' education is an important precondition to increasing female labour force participation:

- Focus on keeping girls in schools at secondary and beyond secondary level to improve their chances of economic participation, in addition to better human capital outcomes.
- Investing in women's reproductive health and population control.

b. Tackling Social Norms: Social norms seem to be the most powerful factor in determining women's interactions with the public sphere and the workforce, by restricting women to the home or only allowing access to certain occupations deemed suitable. These norms can be tackled through:

- Media campaigns;
- Behavior change interventions at the community level; and,
- Empowering women in public leadership as role models.

c. Facilitating Awareness: Women can benefit from information on how to find job opportunities or build on their skillset which can be remedied by greater access to information. Awareness can be facilitated by:

- Job seeking platforms for women, and,
- Professional networks for mentoring.

d. Facilitating Safer Workplaces and Infrastructure: Infrastructural reform to facilitate transportation and safety of public spaces remains a key area for action to support female LFP. Additionally, workplace environments where access to facilities such as childcare, flexible work hours, dedicated transport and separate rest areas for women, are more conducive to women's work. Specific measures include:

- Safe and harassment free public transport;
- Childcare options, flexible hours, rest areas and separate toilets; and,
- Effective implementation of the sexual harassment policies and laws in the public and private.

e. Increasing Women's Representation at All Levels in Public and Private Sector Institutions: Women's representation in both public (5.6 percent) and private sector (10 percent) is very low. Following measures can be taken:

- Responsive hiring strategies to encourage more women to apply;
- Supportive, harassment free working environments for female staff; and,
- Strategic outreach effort.

f. Supporting Women's Businesses: A stark disparity between entrepreneurship outcomes for men and women

indicates a need for providing women with more convenient access to finance, internet access and business development trainings. Supporting women's businesses can be done through:

- Increasing access to financing options, and,
- Facilitating access to technology, and financial and digital literacy.

g. Evidence Based Policies: Data collection, transparency and legal reform to protect the rights of women workers can support the development of responsive policies boost female LFP and recognize the contribution of informal workers. The World Bank has been supporting the government in their efforts to develop and/or amend laws to provide women workers with enhanced rights and benefits. This initiative has been undertaken under the Securing Human Capital Investments to Foster Transformation (SHIFT) Development

Policy Credit (DPC), and involves provincial labour departments as partners to develop legislation for rights of home-based workers in all provinces, and to support amendments to other labour laws to create conducive environments for women workers in the formal sector. There should be:

- Robust measurement of female LFP.
- Legal reforms to support women informal workers including home-based workers and agricultural workers, conducive work environments for women in the public and private sector.
- A sustained effort is required to improve not only the quantity of opportunities for women, but also the quality by promoting women's employment opportunities across multiple productive sectors and creating conducive workplaces.

The Role of the World Bank Group

The Pakistan Doing Business (DB) initiative: Supporting the inclusion of gender as a priority cross-cutting theme across four indicators resulting in the governments of Sindh and Punjab starting to tap gender disaggregated data for their registering property indicator.

On the private sector side, gender is mainstreamed in International Finance Corporation (IFC) operations. The organization works on increasing and improving employment opportunities for women through its advisory services. Some of its achievements include:

- Peer-Learning Platform on Family-Friendly Workplaces with the Pakistan Business Council (PBC): IFC and PBC led a collaboration with 13 companies between June 2019 and October 2020, focused on enabling employer-supported childcare and other family-friendly policies for better retention of women in the workforce. IFC and PBC also conducted a series of workshops and webinars on how to make workplaces more family-friendly during COVID-19 and beyond, as part of the Peer-Learning Collaboration, but also open to the public. These workshops addressed critical themes like, flexible work, working parent resource groups, parenting skills, COVID-19 and GBV etc.
- Enabling the growth of women-owned businesses through gender-lens investments:
 - In 2019, IFC invested into Sarmayacar, supporting start-ups in Pakistan through one of the first VC funds in the country. Women Entrepreneurs Finance Initiative (We-Fi) was brought in with the aim to catalyze the fund's outreach and financing to early stage, high impact women-owned or managed tech start-ups.
 - IFC launched a case study on how one of IFC's We-Fi investees Sarmayacar, is enabling women entrepreneurs in Pakistan, and thereby enabling job creation. With additional We-Fi investment support through IFC, Sarmayacar has increased its pipeline of women-owned companies from 10 percent to 42 percent.
 - IFC also collaborated with the World Bank team on representation from Pakistan for the OneSouthAsia webinar series on the adverse impact of COVID-19 on women entrepreneurs in South Asia-where one of Sarmayacar's women-led portfolio companies (Dot & Line) joined as a speaker.
- Client Advisory with Serena Hotels, Pakistan: IFC client Serena Hotels became the first Pakistani company to gain certification from Economic Dividends for Gender Equality (EDGE)—the world's leading appraiser of gender equality in business. IFC worked with Serena to reach this milestone and continues to deepen workplace reforms in the future-with the aim to enable more recruitment and better retention of women. The certification followed a 12-month partnership between IFC and the Pakistan Business Council that included the development of a program to identify and address barriers to women's employment.

Women's entrepreneurship is key to promoting economic gender equality in the country. IFC aims to continue focusing on women-led businesses in Pakistan through We-Fi investment and thought leadership which will have a multiplier effect, including further job creation in the country.

STORIES FROM THE FIELD



© UNDP Pakistan

Hamna Akram | Lawyer

Hailing from Orakzai district in the former FATA, Hamna is the first woman lawyer in her family. When she chose to study law, some members of her extended family tried to dissuade her because they felt it was a male dominated field.

She has been practicing law for two years. In the course of her practice, she found that though there are many experts in the

fields of civil and criminal law, there were not many practitioners of tax law. So, when she learned about the tax law training conducted by UNDP, she jumped at the opportunity. This two-month training opened a new professional avenue for her and she chose this to be her field of expertise. She is now practicing tax law and is one of the very few women in an already sparse number of tax lawyers in Peshawar.



INTERVIEW

Xiaohong Yang

Country Director
Pakistan Resident Mission
Asian Development Bank

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Women are challenged everyday by inadequate infrastructure which increases their time poverty. ”

How is womenomics central to achieving Agenda 2030?

Achieving agenda 2030 is unimaginable if half of the world's population (women) is denied of economic opportunities. Women's economic empowerment may directly or indirectly contribute to achieve almost all 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Empowering women economically will help countries increase economic diversification and boost their economic growth. McKinsey Global Institute report finds that USD 12 trillion could be added to the global GDP by 2025 if gender gaps are narrowed. Evidence suggests that companies with increased women representation at the board level have performed better compared to those with the lowest representation. It is also estimated that gender gaps cost the economy some 15 percent of GDP. OECD estimates that if female employment rate is raised to the level of Sweden, countries could boost their GDP to over USD six trillion.

Women in Pakistan are mostly found in the informal economy and traditional sectors, while engaged in low-paid and unpaid care work. In Pakistan, more than 60 percent of women's workforce is in the agriculture sector, majority as unpaid family workers. Research indicates that they constantly lack access to modern agricultural technologies and knowledge. Women are challenged everyday by inadequate infrastructure which increases their time poverty. For instance, in rural areas, women mostly work manually hence have less time for income generating activities.

Economies of countries like Pakistan could significantly benefit from increasing women's financial inclusion, women's access to decent and higher-skilled employment, and improving the level of women's readiness to access capital markets. Increased investments in labour-saving infrastructure (such as safe access to water) could help improve women's abilities to access economic opportunities. Efforts are required to diversify the skills of women while increasing their participation in science, technology, engineering, and

mathematics (STEM), and other related fields. All these measures could directly contribute to SDG 1: No Poverty, and SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth.

Similarly, increasing women's capacities and skills in green energy such as solar technology, could help countries achieve SDG 7: Affordable and Clean Energy, and SDG 13: Climate Action. Women are the primary managers of water and solid waste at the household level, thus ensuring their participation as "active partners" could significantly contribute towards SDG 6: Clean Water and Sanitation. Investing in women and girls' education, health, and awareness raising can help countries achieve Goal 3: Good Health and Well-Being. Research indicates that promoting women's education and skills can improve nutrition and encourage women's health seeking behaviour.

There are direct and indirect costs of Gender Based Violence (GBV), such as medico-legal services, crisis centres/shelters and rehabilitation of GBV victims. Indirect costs include lack of productivity and earnings of women who are victimized. Countries can save billions if GBV policies and laws are effectively implemented.

What challenges exist in the ease of doing business and entrepreneurship, for women in Pakistan?

a. Socio-cultural constraints: Women in Pakistan are largely socially constrained and are bound to take permission from their family, particularly male family members, for starting any business or participating in any economic activity. Being less literate, and with limited exposure and skills, women are less confident and hence are mostly risk averse: they tend to take the whole family into confidence before entering into any business venture. Women are expected to be the "primary caregivers" at home, hence have little time for networking, seeking mentorship and developing market linkages. Women's mobility is also constrained given the socio-cultural barriers—according to a survey, more than 70 percent women reported that they are not allowed to visit a bank alone.

b. Lack of access to financial services and products: Compared to men, women are less likely to have a bank account. There is lesser trend of women borrowing from formal financial institutions such as commercial banks. Lack of credit history and inadequate collateral/assets makes it difficult to borrow loans. Compared to 68 percent men, only 13.3 percent women reported to owning any asset. Research also suggests that even if women own any asset, they have limited control and the decision of selling or investing it for business purposes rests with male family members. Women also find bank environments unfriendly and less supportive to their needs.

c. Women businesses in Pakistan are mostly unregistered and operate in the informal economy: Thus, they are less advantaged to access capital markets. Moreover, women-led businesses are less diversified. In Pakistan, women entrepreneurs are concentrated in small scale low profit and traditional businesses such as; food and culinary services, beauty salons, handicrafts, jewellery, fashion design etc. Commercial banks and government funded financial programs find these less attractive and sustainable with more risks. Women also tend to avoid business registration processes which are cumbersome and involve several trips to different offices, taxation, and other requirements. Moreover, women have limited access to the information of registration processes and incentives linked to it.

d. Lack of training and skills: Women, especially in rural areas, lack access to quality training and skills development opportunities related to enterprise development. Given their restricted mobility, they are less likely to be connected to markets and mainstream businesses.

Suggest a long term 'gender-inclusive and gender-supportive' strategy that can be implemented by public and private stakeholders.

The following facets may contribute towards a long term gender-inclusive and gender-supportive strategy:

a. Conducive work environment: All public and private institutes to effectively implement anti-sexual harassment (at workplace) policies. Day care facilities and other required support should be provided to working mothers. Gender-inclusive human resource (HR) policies and procedures should be promoted to encourage women's recruitment, retention and equal access to capacity building and skills development programs offered by the institutions. Women should be provided with the choice of flexible working hours to maintain work-life balance.

b. Improved readiness level of women in non-traditional sectors: Women's readiness level to reap the economic returns offered by investments in non-traditional sectors is quite limited. Women's ability and skills, in order to be mainstreamed, would need to be improved through increased participation in STEM fields. This could be done by conducting gender segregated skills' gap analysis, improving perceptions about women's participation in technical and non-traditional fields, promoting women-led enterprises in non-traditional sectors, and improving the working environment and support networks to encourage women's recruitment in these sectors.

c. Better transportation facilities: Mobility is one of the key challenges for women's access to decent employment. Women should be provided with safe and affordable transportation facilities or allowances so that they can easily access their workplaces.

d. Enhanced investments in ICT infrastructure, skills development and digital tools: COVID-19 has highlighted the need for comprehensive and robust ICT policies and strategies with a particular focus on e-commerce which has become the driving force for SME growth and also a great opportunity for women-owned businesses. During COVID-19, it was encouraging to note that many women in Pakistan started their businesses online and were successful in operating from home, while keeping work-life balance. Women, however, are currently less likely than men to use or own digital technologies. Women-owned firms are less likely to adopt and implement information and communications technology (ICT) tools and services. Addressing gender-specific constraints to ICT access is crucial to capitalize on the potential of digital trade and e-commerce.

e. Increased knowledge sharing and support networks: All public and private institutes should create knowledge sharing mechanisms to ensure exchange of good practices and experiences. There is a need to strengthen support networks within and outside organizations for building women's confidence and capacities, so that they could become more competitive and advance in their careers.



Pioneering Microfinance in Pakistan

Roshaneh Zafar

Founder and Managing Director
Kashf Foundation

I am a development economist and worked with the World Bank before establishing Kashf Foundation. During my tenure at the World Bank, a lot of my work revolved around meeting women from low-income households and listening to their stories.

When I interacted with these women, one of the messages that resonated within me was that the economic empowerment of women was critical for the long-term sustainability of families, communities and society in general.

Finally in 1996, I set up Pakistan's first specialized micro finance organization with a vision to economically and socially empower women micro entrepreneurs. I am proud to say, since its inception, we have come a long way and Kashf has disbursed over PKR 145 billion in loans to over two million women micro-entrepreneurs.

Economic opportunity is a basic human right and access to financial services is essential for the self-actualization of low-income women. However, unfortunately in Pakistan, a majority of women are deprived of this right.

Kashf Foundation was established with the vision to provide women micro entrepreneurs with an array of localized and value driven financial products to economically transform their lives. Our clients are testament to the fact that if you increase women's access to

finance, it creates a virtuous cycle for it allows them to improve their lives by increasing their incomes and enhancing their capacity to pay for their families' food, education and healthcare. In addition, access to financial services contributes to women's autonomy and reduces their vulnerability at the household and business level.

At the macro level, women's access to finance is also a driver of economic growth, social inclusion and reducing gender inequality. This is also corroborated by a third party impact assessment undertaken by Semiotics Consultants (Pvt) (2019) which highlighted that as a result of their increased access to Kashf's financial loans, women micro entrepreneurs were able to increase their average revenue by 37 percent and experienced a 43 percent increase in monthly profits, compared to prior to the loan. In addition, around half of the women reported they could consume better quality food and 82 percent of the women micro entrepreneurs reported their decision-making authority had increased.

Undoubtedly, the women of Pakistan are extremely talented and have the resilience and the dynamism to transform their lives. Providing them the tools and the wherewithal to build on their innate capacity, in a women centric manner, has been one of the core lessons of our work.

“
Economic opportunity
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low-income women.

”

Leading Financial Inclusion

Ali Sarfraz

Chief Executive Officer
Karandaaz Pakistan



A not-for-profit company promoting access to finance for micro, small and medium-sized businesses through a commercially directed investment platform, and financial inclusion for individuals by employing technology enabled solutions.

I lead Karandaaz Pakistan, a company focusing on increasing financial inclusion of the unbanked population using digital financial services, and improving access of finance to SMEs using innovative financial models. My professional journey encompasses experience in private, public and not-for-profit sectors, in senior operational and strategic positions.

Karandaaz has a strategic objective to increase the financial inclusion of women through better access of appropriate financial services. In order to meet our objective, we have a gender strategy which cuts across all our projects and programmes. A gender marker is used to assess the impact of our interventions on the financial inclusion of women. We have also launched an innovative programme called “Women Ventures”, which focuses on providing growth capital to women owned- and led- SME businesses. Karandaaz has the largest portfolio of its kind in Pakistan.

Through our investment in Pakistan Microfinance Investment Company (PMIC), Karandaaz provides microfinance loans to individuals and micro businesses, majority of whom are women or owned by women. We are also engaged with the EHSAAAS programme to provide access of fully transactional digital accounts to women beneficiaries. Moreover, we also piloted digital experiments and A/B testing with commercial entities to gauge the impact of innovative solutions in increasing the financial inclusion of women.

There is a body of research that establishes that economic empowerment and financial inclusion of women is positively correlated to growth and development. Unfortunately, in Pakistan, a majority of women are not formally engaged in the financial sector which is reflected by low bank account ownership and thus limited access to credit.

However, there are encouraging signs

of the engagement of women in financial services for example; roughly 49 percent of microfinance beneficiaries are women. More women are participating in the formal labour sector, especially in I.T., banking and telecommunications. For Pakistan to meet its goals of economic prosperity, it is essential that the full potential of women is realized.

There are a lot of challenges for women when it comes to financial inclusion. Labour force participation rate of women is less than a quarter of the total labour force participation rate. Majority of women who work in the informal sectors of the economy and their contributions remain undocumented. Only eight percent of Micro Small and Medium Enterprise (MSME) owners are women, whereas, only six percent women owned MSMEs have access to finance, and only one percent of women are engaged in entrepreneurial activities as opposed to 21 percent of men.

Financial inclusion is important for women to access credit and investments for their businesses. It also enables women to save and invest surplus income in assets which can help them withstand sudden economic shocks. Several barriers and challenges that inhibit female financial inclusion include mobility constraints, lack of CNIC to prove identity, low agency over assets, minimum financial literacy and legal and regulatory barriers, etc.

Tackling these hurdles requires the direct action of policy makers, regulators and the society. These challenges can be overcome with time through the following actions: collecting gender disaggregated data to develop customized value propositions tailored to women’s needs and gender-smart products, designing gender unbiased ecosystems, educating women on financial products and supporting the development of fintech companies that could create new mechanisms to serve women’s financial needs.

“
For Pakistan to meet its goals of economic prosperity, it is essential that the full potential of women is realized.”



The Retail Giant

Seema Aziz

Founder and Managing Director
Sefam (Bareeze)

Founder and Chairperson
CARE Foundation

“
You cannot live up to
the full potential of a
country if 50 percent
of your population is
not contributing to
the economy.”

Hailing from a non-business and a traditional family with no prior experience or formal education on entrepreneurship, my journey into fashion retail began with three big Swiss embroidery machines which my father got post retirement. These were known as the ‘Ferrari’ of the embroidery industry back then. My brother and I saw this as an opportunity and decided to start manufacturing Swiss quality embroidery in Pakistan. Despite facing a lot of criticism on trying to produce import quality embroidery in Pakistan with limited resources, we kept going. The belief in this dream enabled us to tackle challenges head on. Today, 30 years later, Bareeze is a symbol of pride for the country and the most recognizable fashion retail brand here and abroad.

I firmly believe that if you believe in yourself, you can overcome any challenge. The biggest fear is in your mind. Education is equally important to complement this belief. Women in

society get inspired by seeing the confidence of other working women. For instance, in the beginning I used to man our shop myself. This encouraged other women to change their perception about this work in a positive way. Women wanted their daughters to be my intern or work with me at the shop. I was able to change perceptions just by leading with example.

In my opinion, women integration in economic spheres of life is very important for Pakistan. You cannot live up to the full potential of a country if 50 percent of your population is not contributing to the economy.

My advice to all the aspiring women entrepreneurs or those who want to enter the workforce would be to believe in yourself and go after your dreams. You need to fight your own battles and take charge of your destiny and break barriers!



Breaking the Glass Ceiling

Zeeshan Hasib Baig

Chief Executive Officer and Country General Manager
Careem Pakistan



Careem has been able to bring a revolutionary change in the way millions of people think about mobility, especially women. ”

I possess over nine years of experience in strategy, transformation, and operations, having worked in over 20 countries across the Middle East-North Africa region, Europe and South Asia.

Since commencing operations in Pakistan, Careem has been able to bring a revolutionary change in the way millions of people think about mobility, especially women. This was done by addressing a very basic need that people thought was too big to change, even with the best technology in the world.

For women, Careem has strived to provide safe and secure mobility which was unavailable in the past owing to a lack of transport infrastructure. This has enabled and empowered women to break stereotypes and smash glass ceilings in their personal and professional lives. For this purpose, we ensure that all our Captains are trained and educated on topics like gender sensitization, as well as making thorough background checks before they are on-boarded. Currently we have almost 750 women Captains who are also earning a livelihood via Careem.

We faced quite a few challenges since we entered Pakistan back in 2016. These included, introducing the concept of ride-hailing in a market like Pakistan; convincing people that this model was feasible given the current mobility

infrastructure; operating as an Online Marketplace (OMP) which meant no regulations on registering as a formal company; the lack of technology literacy among the masses; and, fluctuation in fuel prices, to name a few. However, with the right people and the right mindset, Careem has worked tirelessly to tackle all the challenges head on, keeping our values and mission aligned.

Women are key players in our society and in our organization. Almost 20 percent of leadership roles in Careem globally are led by females. All of Careem's policies encourage women to actively participate, lead teams and move mountains. Women working at Careem are breaking stereotypes by leading functions such as Tech, Legal, Care, Communications and Human Resources.

Before 2016, there was little concept of women traveling alone, let alone providing mobility to men! The shock factor of seeing a woman behind the wheel is something Careem has been aiming to erase as we believe it should be an ordinary thing to see a woman drive. However, with the acceptance of Careem and its business model, we are now providing safe and hassle-free mobility to thousands of women daily, all while encouraging them to reclaim public spaces and enroll in jobs known to be predominantly male-oriented.



Setting New Boundaries

Hina Usmani

Former Vice President
The Institute of Chartered
Accountants of Pakistan (ICAP)

I was raised in a family where working women were rare. However, with my family's encouragement, I chose commerce at a time when medicine was considered the first-choice profession for women. Even my father initially was skeptical of my entrance into a man-dominated profession. However, his pride on my achievement as the first woman chartered accountant of the Zuberi family, has been a hallmark memory for me.

As one of the very few women in the CA profession, during my four years professional training at Ford Rhodes Robson Morrow, I felt like I had to consistently work extra hard to offer my best performance in the fear of losing opportunities. After nearly a decade of working and excelling in my career, I resigned as the Executive Vice President in First Women Bank in 2004. One of the main reasons was the pressure of 'balancing' both professional and domestic responsibilities at that time.

I obtained a practicing license and continued freelancing at a time when work from home was a rare phenomenon. Later, I joined hands with a few like-minded women and founded the first all-women-led CA practicing firm in Pakistan under the name Usmani & Co. Chartered Accountants (UCO).

In my experience, many women with brilliant entrepreneurial abilities are unable to sustain businesses for long due to lack of financial know-how. Part of our work includes equipping them with the relevant skillset that can encourage them to explore alternative opportunities thereby giving them greater control over the terms of their work.

A huge barrier women face in working are pressing family commitments. In my firm, I introduced the concept of working from home way back in 2013. This is in

line with my belief that a workplace policy should equip women at work with facilities that ease the social burden of their gender.

These kind of initiatives not only uplift women who have been excluded from the workforce, but also provide support to small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Before COVID, these words were alien, inefficient and unattainable. Now, the world is relying and functioning entirely on this.

I have also been bestowed with the honour of being elected as the first woman Council Member at ICAP, with unanimous support of all members in 2017, and in 2019, was elected as the first woman Vice President (VP). This was a very challenging role and required high-stake decision-making and multiple responsibilities.

Currently, my professional focus is on two aspects: first, to promote women's participation in our professional sphere, and second, to work for the uplift of the small and medium practices (SMPs) to support SMEs in Pakistan. I believe the two are interlinked and policy interventions that combine the interests of both can facilitate the empowerment of women. My recent selection as technical advisor in The International Federation of Accountants (IFAC) Small and Medium Practices (SMP) Advisory Group, would help in achieving the desired objectives.

To achieve career advancement, women should be technically strong, digitally transformed, and possess the required skillset essential to climb-up the ladder. However, the corporate sector needs to ensure the provision of basic facilities such as day-care centers, adequate maternity leaves, flexible working hours, equal pay, and equal growth opportunities, trusting the capabilities and importance of women in leadership roles.

“
To achieve career advancement, women should be technically strong, digitally transformed, and possess the required skillset essential to climb-up the ladder.”



The Tech Dynamo

Jehan Ara

President, Pakistan Software Houses Association for IT & ITES (P@SHA)
Founder of The Nest I/O

Member of the Prime Minister's Task Force on I.T and Telecom

“
Access to capital is something that we want to address through raising a scale fund that we intend to make available in the form of loans or grants to women who want to grow their businesses, but are of no interest to Venture Capitalists.”

I have been spearheading efforts at P@SHA for the past 16 years, during which I actively developed the P@SHA brand and created linkages with local and international partners. I work towards empowering communities through the use of Information and Communication Technologies.

I have also been engaged with various national level Advisory Boards and several universities and am the President of 'Bolo Bhi', a research based civil society organization that focuses on open access. A member of the World Bank Advisory Group on Gender Diversity, I have recently been appointed as a Member of the APAC Content Advisory Board for TikTok.

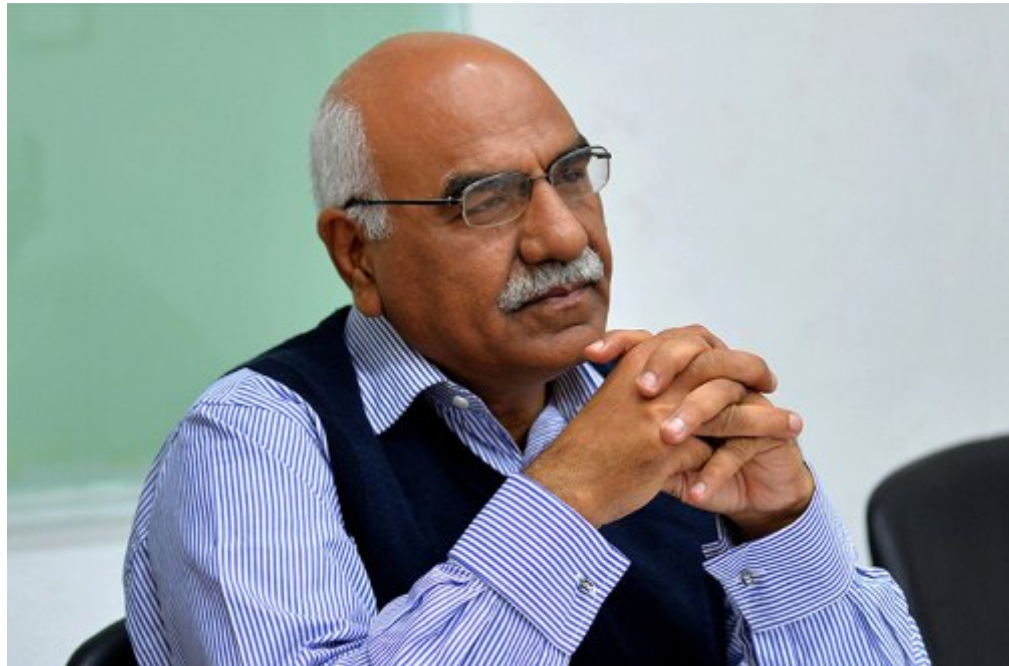
The Nest IO-a technology incubator, accelerator and community innovation space-was set up in January 2015, with the support of Google for Entrepreneurs, to help provide a platform to aspiring technology businesses in the buzzing city of Karachi. Since then, The Nest IO has incubated 200+ startup businesses and created a strong community of young people.

Some of us have carefully and selflessly nurtured the entrepreneurial ecosystem in Pakistan over the last two decades or so. During that journey and across 12

cohorts at Nest I/O, there were multiple women led startups that went through the program. They faced unique challenges in setting up and growing their businesses. These challenges included, amongst other things, lack of support, resistance from families, facing social taboos, harassment when they ventured out to markets, a lack of financial exposure and expertise, and difficulty in accessing funds.

Through the Nest I/O, there were efforts to address some of these challenges, through mentoring and coaching. Developing role models has also been a strategy that has been deployed. Access to capital is something that we want to address through raising a scale fund that we intend to make available in the form of loans or grants to women who want to grow their businesses, but are of no interest to Venture Capitalists.

Advocacy through the use of cutting-edge technology is one of my passions. Cyber Crime, Privacy Data Protection legislation and Internet Freedom, are some of the things I advocate for. Technology has enabled me to bring together young people on a common platform. Using social media, I highlight the need for harnessing technology to combat social problems, for the empowerment of women, and to advocate for legislative reform.



Man on a Mission

Dr. Amjad Saqib

Founder and Executive Director, Akhuwat Foundation

“

Women entering the workforce is both a social and economic issue, and needs to be dealt carefully by engaging families, faith leaders, and government leaders alike, in creating ease for women in this regard. ”

The Akhuwat model entails the spirit of sharing and solidarity with the most marginalized and underprivileged sections of society. With close to PKR 124 billion in disbursed amount in the form of interest free loans to around 4.4 million underprivileged families, Akhuwat remains the largest such institution in the world.

At Akhuwat, we have a non-discriminatory gender policy when it comes to loan recipients. Interestingly, around 42 percent of the businesses that have grown out of Akhuwat's loans are led by economically active women.

Akhuwat has also recently started working with the government of Punjab for better management of 300 public primary schools. These schools house more than 90 percent women teachers and we are working to ensure that remains the case. Our consistent efforts have resulted in a massive increase in the enrollment rates of girl students- from 6000 to more than 48,000, all within a year.

The microfinance sector faces multiple challenges at different levels in the entire eco-system: at lending, regula-

tory, compliance, human resource, capacity issues, and taxation. However, these challenges are not particular to lending to women only.

I believe you cannot deny economic participation to 50 percent of the population in the country. In my opinion, for women aspiring to enter into businesses, it is essential that they acquire requisite education, a marketable skill set, and possess the willingness to tackle challenges head on. Women entering the workforce is both a social and economic issue, and needs to be dealt carefully by engaging families, faith leaders, and government leaders alike, in creating ease for women in this regard.

Women are the nurtures of society and future leaders; their presence in the workforce and participation in decision making at the legislative and policy level is essential. All women out there aspiring to become businesswomen must be fueled by a vision and be prepared for putting in hard work. With integrity, will to excel, and willingness to take risks, there can be nothing stopping them from succeeding.



Setting the Path for Digital Finance

M. Mudassar Aqil

President and Chief Executive
Officer, Telenor Microfinance
Bank/Easypaisa



I am currently Director on the Board of Pakistan Microfinance Network and have served as President and CEO of FINCA Microfinance Bank.

Telenor Microfinance Bank has always actively focused on financial inclusion of unbanked Pakistanis. Empowering women through a host of financial services has been a key focus, equipping them to kick-start their own businesses. Moreover, partnerships with Pakistan Bait-ul-Maal have provided financial literacy and a stream of readily available resources.

Through our unique portfolio of digital loans and digital payments platforms such as EasyPaisa, we have made it possible for women to make their own financial decisions.

This model also supports women in overcoming most of the challenges they face while making payments or doing financial transactions. Our digital payment solutions enable women beneficiaries of poverty alleviation

programs to receive funds instantly in their mobile wallets, in a secure and transparent manner.

Pakistan has a diverse landscape with varying cultures which means that the techniques needed to tap audiences in rural as well as urban areas may differ. Women tend to remain excluded from the formal financial ecosystem due to various hurdles which are difficult to bypass.

Meanwhile, lack of financial knowledge is also a major obstacle to overcome in efforts to improve financial inclusion. However, our experience has proved that technology and collaboration between different players, can help in overcoming these challenges and pave the way for financial inclusion and innovative product development.

I believe women can achieve anything once they get the right opportunities and have the right resources at their disposal.



Empowering women through a host of financial services has been a key focus, equipping them to kick-start their own businesses.





Sale-ing High with Ambition

Syeda Nausheen Iqbal Jaffery

Head of Sales
Nestlé Professional-Pakistan Market

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The assumption that
conventional
professions are the
only successful or
'pride-worthy'
professions for girls,
is a concept that
needs to change.”

Recognized as 'Top 25 Leading Women of Nestlé world', Nausheen brings 17+ years of diverse and rich professional experience in cross functional areas including Marketing, Sales, Business Excellence and Finance. Nausheen also recently got featured as "Women of Substance", by the Women Development wing of the Punjab Government.

I have been associated with Nestlé Pakistan Ltd for the past 17 years. Through campaigns such as 'Bones Strong Tau Main Strong' and 'NESVITA Women of Strength', I was able to educate college going women about the importance of their physical and mental wellbeing, and having ambitions in life.

As a member of Nestlé's 'Gender Diversity Committee', I ensure a no-discrimination workplace policy is

practiced. As Head of Sales for 'out of home business', I have ensured gender empowerment through the employment of 40 percent of women in the field.

Challenges exists in all fields and the corporate world is no different. Traditionally it is perceived as a male dominated field, but I believe that women are doing exceptional work in this field. We need to encourage more women to step up.

As a country, we need role models and showcase inspiring stories of women in the workforce. While at a macro level, we should educate people and change their perception of working women. The assumption that conventional professions are the only successful or 'pride-worthy' professions for girls, is a concept that needs to change.



The Wellness Guru

Mantahaa I. Tareen

Founder, Mantahaa Pvt. Ltd
Lifestyle and Wellness Management

“
It is imperative that the government recognizes the significance of this industry, not just as a form of leisure, but as a necessity. If you don't raise a healthy population, you risk shrinking the workforce.”

Pioneering Zumba in Pakistan, was just the beginning of my dream to empower women and lift them out of the poverty trap. You see, my purpose as a wellness coach is transforming lives, with weight loss just being an added advantage.

Each 45 minute session that I partake with my clients, is focused on exploring their actual needs. In a way, it is almost like a psychotherapy session, whereby I aim to investigate the 'mental' translating through the 'physical'. My theory is to work on mindsets before anything else.

I use preventative medicine as a means to empower women's mindsets and instill within them, the power to achieve. I was once visited by a cancer survivor who had lost direction in life following such a debilitating health and mental battle. I worked on her, night and day, to build strength, both physically and mentally. Her gradual build-up of resilience was the fuel to my perseverance. Fast forward: she is now a professional motivational speaker, out changing the lives of others hit by the same battles as she once was.

In a society like ours, the weakness in some women comes from co dependence; financial dependence, social dependence and cultural dependence. The reality is that women need to uplift each other and not have a need to look elsewhere. Realizing a severe dearth of

this 'womanhood', I took it upon myself to build a tribe of women who are positive, strong and lift each other up every time one of them falls. Despite having several opportunities to open a commercial setup for my food business where I could have made a fortune, I opted on partnering with a female client who had good skills in the kitchen. She needed financial stability and a little uplifting in her social status to feel good about herself. While I took another route, she continues to walk the path I paved for her.

Working with women nationwide has given me an opportunity to work beyond Karachi, where I currently live and train. As part of my endeavour to empower women and make them economically self-sustainable, I offer pro-bono trainings. For instance, I have trained several women in Hyderabad to become professional trainers. They are now successfully running their own small preventative medicine initiatives, and not just earning, but also transforming other women's lives.

Cultural restrictions in our society place a lot of limits on the movement and freedom of women. But I am hopeful that these limitations will eventually lose momentum and with that, I keep working towards my cause of empowering women hailing from all strata of society and all walks of life.

TWITTER CHAT



Women's limited mobility serves as an obstacle to economic growth. Since 2019, **#UNDPinPakistan** has supported **#Gender** Desks in newly Merged Districts, Sindh & South Punjab. The Gender Desks serve to link local women to govt service providers & enhance mobility!
#InternationalWomensDay

Knut Ostby
Resident Representative
UNDP Pakistan
[@knutostby](#)

In addition to innovative thinking, will of stakeholders, financial inclusion & actionable interventions, what is also needed to "change mindsets" is advocacy & awareness on the importance of **#womenomics** & how it creates tolerant & progressive societies! **#ActforEqual**

Fiza Farhan
Global Development Advisor on women empowerment & climate change
[@fiza_farhan](#)



As a start, let's invest in **#digital skills** for Pakistan's women & girls so they can leverage the power of **#technology** for themselves & their families. We need every woman in Pakistan to be digitally literate! **#DAP**
#InternationalWomensDay

Sadaffe Abid
Founder, CIRCLE
[@sadaffeabid](#)



Championing women's participation in the economy is not just about the economy or growth. It is about principle and amplifying an inclusive value system and creating a new social contract.
#Womenomics

Osman Siddiqi
Head of Impact, Arifu
[@osmsiddiqi](#)



Women need access to workplaces which are suitable and safer through strict implementation of the Protection against Harassment of Women at the Workplace laws and zero tolerance policy against all forms of sexism and harassment. **#Womenomics**

Maleeka Ali Bokhari
Parliamentary Secretary for Law and Justice
[@malbokhari](#)



#Womenomics can only be secure if women's labour rights are protected. This means no gender pay gap, contracts protecting employment rights, implementing minimum wage, especially for women domestic workers, max 8 hours workday and paid maternity leaves!

Usama Khilji
Director, Bolo Bhi
[@UsamaKhilji](#)



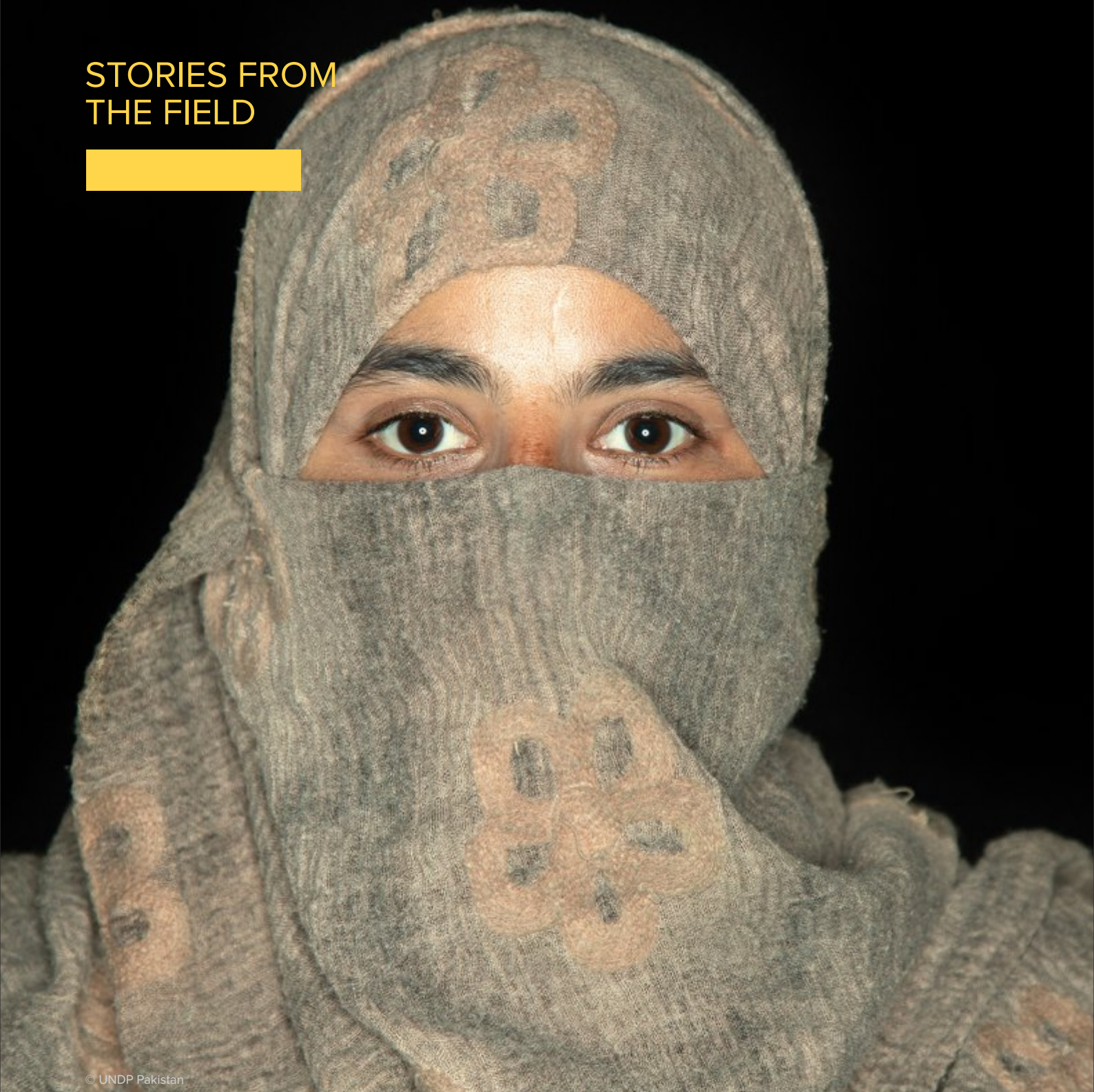
#COVID_19 recovery responses have shown tremendous innovations in our education and health sectors, which are the big employers of women. That's the space that needs more R&D to explore linkages between innovation, growth and inclusion.

Ammara Durrani
Assistant Resident Representative
Development Policy Unit
UNDP Pakistan
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On March 4th, the UNDP Pakistan Womenomics Twitter Chat engaged policy leaders and experts who highlighted priority areas for improving women's participation in Pakistan's economy.



STORIES FROM THE FIELD



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Rameela Durrani | Entrepreneur

Rameela is a social activist and entrepreneur from Swat. She has been a part of UNDP's Digiskills program.

She is a socially aware young woman who had been working in the field of education for her community. In addition to that, she was interested in starting a business. On a personal trip to the United States, she received many compliments on the traditional clothes that she wore. That gave her the idea that the

local handicrafts of her region were a marketable product. Based on that experience, she started her own dress design and production business. She also felt that this could be a good opportunity for her to involve other women from her community and provide them with an income-generation opportunity. Her training in Digiskills provided her with the know-how of digital marketing. She is currently marketing her products locally, but plans to reach out at national and international levels.

DEVELOPMENT ADVOCATE
PAKISTAN