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Editorial

Dear Readers,

The month of March 2022, remained a wholesome month at the Pakistan Institute for Parliamentary Services (PIPS) that organized numerous knowledge-sharing seminars and dialogues for Hon MPs and parliamentary caucuses. PIPS recently hosted a seminar titled YOUTH AND PARLIAMENT in close collaboration of the National Assembly of Pakistan at the Beacon house School Margalla Campus Islamabad on Tuesday, March 8, 2022 that saw an interactive session between the high-level Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) delegation led by Acting Chair of the CPA, H.E. Mr. Ian Liddell-Grainger, MP UK House of Commons and Secretary General, H.E. Mr. Stephen Twigg, former UK MP, faculty and students. Team PIPS also held an absorbing Dialogue on De-radicalization and Peace Building with the CPA MPs and the Young Parliamentarians Forum (YPF) on March 9, 2022.

The salient feature of the month was the high-level Roundtable on Implications of Sustainable Development Goals that saw participation of galaxy of MPs across parties from the platform of National Parliamentary SDGs Taskforce along with area experts and practitioners. PIPS launched its 2nd Edition of its Databook on SDGs-Challenges and Achievements, 2022 at the occasion; an internationally quoted publication. The Institute also assisted the YPF in hosting a landmark National Youth Convention on Peace Building on March 14-15, 2022 that was inaugurated by Hon President of Pakistan Dr. Arif Alvi and concluded by the Hon Mr Asad Qaiser, Speaker National Assembly/ President PIPS BoG. This Issue of the PIPS Parliamentary Research Digest includes detailed report and set of key recommendations of the SDGs Roundtable held on March 10, in addition to articles titled: Gender equality and women empowerment in Pakistan and Reflecting on COVID-19 pandemic and parliamentary response: A case of Commonwealth Legislatures, respectively. We also present excerpts of some of the recent feedback gathered by the PIPS Research & legislation Client Satisfaction System (PRLCSS).

We take this opportunity to wish all our Readers a blissful Ramadan ul Mubarak!

Muhammad Rashid Mafzool Zaka
Director General (Research)



Honorable President of The Islamic Republic of Pakistan Mr. Arif Alvi addressing the participants of National Youth and Parliamentarians Peacebuilding Summit, March 14, 2022 at PIPS

Glimpses of Parliamentary Roundtable on Implementation of Sustainable Development Goals in Pakistan, Thursday, March 10, 2022



PARLIAMENTARY ROUNDTABLE

Implementation of Sustainable Development Goals in Pakistan

Tehseen Khalid

Director (Research)

Sustainable Development Desk, PIPS

The Parliamentary Taskforce on Sustainable Development Goals at the National Assembly of Pakistan in collaboration with the Pakistan Institute for Parliamentary Services (PIPS) organized a *Parliamentary Roundtable on Implementation of Sustainable Development Goals in Pakistan* on March 10, 2022. The roundtable aimed to provide an opportunity to review the efforts of the country in implementing SDGs amongst the august galaxy of Honorable Members of Parliament from UK and Pakistan as well as area experts for each SDG. H.E. Stephen Twigg, Secretary General, Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) and H. E. Ian Lidell-Grainger MP UK House of Commons and the Acting Chair CPA graced the occasion as Guests of Honor while the final session was chaired by Hon. Mr. Riaz Fatyana, MNA and Convener, National Parliamentary SDGs Taskforce. The roundtable was attended by more than 45 participants comprising of Honorable Members of the Senate and the National Assembly from the National Parliamentary Taskforce on SDGs, members of civil society organizations, academicians and experts on SDGs. Pakistan Institute for Parliamentary Services launched 2nd edition of data book on SDGs. Mr. Muhammad Rashid Mafzool Zaka, Director General (Research) PIPS, moderated the session. The proceedings commenced with the recitation of verses of the Holy Quran by Qari Anees-ur-Rehman.

INAUGURAL SESSION:

Honorable Ms. Shandana Gulzar Khan, MNA/ Member of National SDGs taskforce/ Chairperson of the Commonwealth Women Parliamentarians, welcomed the participants and chaired the first session. She acknowledged PIPS support in organizing such roundtables and termed it as the brain of the National Assembly that provides technical & research assistance for informed decisions by the MPs. She recognized that the former Speaker of the National Assembly, Mr Ayaz Sadiq, MNA, and Ms. Marriyum Aurangzeb, MNA, former Convener of the National SDGs Taskforce, deserve appreciation for establishing the SDGs Secretariat in the National Assembly with UNDP support in 2014-15. Initially, it was assumed that the SDGs secretariat would examine the 17 goals before assigning them to the appropriate parliamentary committees. Regrettably, this has not happened because each of the Parliament's committees has its own mandate. Committees provide oversight of the ministries. However, the ministries function under the 1973 Rules of Business, which make no mention of the SDGs. Hence, the SDGs taskforce is an advisory body, and it has taken affirmative actions. She informed that we have established provincial SDGs Secretariats in each province, and that the federal SDGs Secretariat is based in ICT. We have a parliamentary resolution from the previous government from February 2016 that states that these SDGs must be on the center stage. We are still trying to figure out how this is going to work. She mentioned Honorable MNA Ms. Mehnaz Akbar Aziz, who was incredibly successful in getting four child-specific laws out of the SDGs Secretariat with the help of UNICEF. While mentioning the efforts of members of the SDGs taskforce, she also acknowledged the efforts of Honorable MNA Mr. Shehryar Khan Afridi, who took up polio-related problems in his constituency and, through SDGs Secretariat, reduced the incidence of polio in his district, Kohat, in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, from 80% to 40% in five years, especially in such circumstances when polio health workers were under life threat.

She stated that the taskforce is working with the IPU, CPA, and almost every stakeholder because the Secretariat has cross-party representation, different genders and different religions, but it still overcomes these differences for the benefit of the people of Pakistan. She stated that the SDGs secretariat was able to produce the most legislation on SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions), SDG 08 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), SDG 04 (Quality Education), SDG 07 (Affordable and Clean Energy), SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production), SDG 13, 14 and 15. While talking about SDG 5 she stated that the majority of the work on SDG 5 women and girls inequality has come from the desk of Honorable MNA. Ms. Shireen Mazari, Federal Minister for Human Rights. Honorable Senator Sania Nishtar is also working with the SDGs Secretariat to mainstream women into the country's financial policies. Honorable Dr. Aisha Ghuas Pasha, MNA, is also working on it. She stated that the SDGs Secretariat has crossed many of the goals that it set. "We emphasized in our previous term that there should be an SDGs Secretariat both in the CPA and in the UK because we felt that only the UK, the Commonwealth's motherland, should take the lead on this," she said. She suggested that if the CPA may have small branches or units, there must be a way for the SDGs Secretariat in Pakistan to communicate with the CPA Secretariat, given that only eight years have been left to achieve these goals. She also praised the CPA for its excellent service to all Commonwealth countries.

Honorable Dr. Nafisa Shah, MNA/ Member National SDGs Taskforce/ Former Vice President, Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, expressed her thoughts on the topic "Women at the Center of Pakistan's Development Agenda." She stated that the country values the CPA's role in providing an excellent platform over the years for forging a shared global vision to address challenges that our global community faces. "As a parliamentarian, I have also had the honour of serving as the Vice Chairperson on its executive committee for two consecutive terms, and it's been a great experience," she added.

While discussing the women related issues, she highlighted, the entire world celebrated the Women's Day on March 08. Pakistan also marked yet another Women's Day, but more as a protest than as a celebration, as women marched for equality, for basic human rights for basic freedoms to make their own choices over the over their lives and their bodies. She mentioned that Pakistan is one country that is faced with the real challenge of ensuring that women and girls are not just left behind, but left far behind. Illiteracy and malnutrition amongst women is a huge challenge. Pakistan's ranking in Global Gender Gap index is 153 out of 156 countries. She stressed that women must be central to development agenda, both as targets as they remain far behind in all development indicators, but also as active agents. A focus on women and girls is essential to overcome gender gap in development and in the objective of the healthy and progressive society in general. Honorable Dr. Nafisa Shah said that Pakistan's fundamental laws also provide a vision and a commitment where we aim towards these goals. Pakistan has also ratified the Conventions on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). She said that despite our endorsement of SDGs and other international covenants and instruments, and our own fundamental vision committing equal rights, we remain very far from achieving these goals. To achieve these, robust efforts, commitments and interventions are needed in women's strategic rights, such as end to violence against women, and physical rights where we ensure as a state policy to make women central in development agenda. This requires major policy initiatives and changes.

She also shared some examples focusing on women as central to poverty alleviation by making them the pivots on which social security programs rest. She informed the participants that one such example is the Benazir Income Support Program that provides a successful Social Protection net by giving financial support to the underprivileged people, especially women. Earlier, in the

90s, Pakistan's two times woman Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto introduced women focused institutions to address gender gap in women's access to credit and to expand the space for women's access to justice. Further she introduced a primary health program based on village based women health worker programs which helped combat polio and today is fighting COVID-19. Pakistan today has an impressive infrastructure to provide rural women with credit through its many microfinance banks. There are many other examples of women focused development but these are not enough as the gaps persist. One of these is women's empowerment, and their representation, in public and political service as decision makers.

Dr. Nafisa Shah said that Members of Parliament as representative voices of the people are uniquely placed between the people and governments to promote and adopt people-centred and indeed women-centered policies and legislation. She informed that in 2002, 60 women entered the Pakistani Parliament and transformed the character, the culture and the performance of the Parliament to add to 272 mostly male members. Similar numbers included in the Provincial Assemblies. This led to a radical transformation in the performance of the Parliament at the national and provincial levels with the 20 percent women contributing to nearly 50 percent of the parliamentary business including questions, motions and legislation. She said that today we have also succeeded in convincing political parties to nominate a minimum number of seats to women to contest elections so as to increase this number further and electoral reforms law makes it mandatory. Since 2002, an impressive list of legislations on women's protection in the work place, anti-domestic violence laws in provinces, anti-honour crimes, anti-acid crimes, can be credited to this presence. Pakistan has been able to do away with discriminatory provisions in most of its legislations. Creation of the Women Parliamentary Caucus in the Parliament of Pakistan has ensured effective parliamentary oversight for implementation of international and regional commitments, national policies and programs, and has also played a major role in building consensus on landmark legislations on women's rights. Pakistani women parliamentarians pioneered a special committee for the Millennium Development Goals and now more recently, the National Assembly passed a unanimous resolution adopting the SDGs Agenda as its own national development agenda. The establishment of Parliamentary Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Secretariat, in the National Assembly of Pakistan is unique. The Secretariat enables the legislators to have access to Human Development Index (HDI) data, conduct evidence-based legislation and helps provide effective oversight in the Parliament. In the final analysis she stressed that the biggest challenge is an ideological one, where as a nation we must decide whether women will be partners in development or a patrimonial object. Political will naturally follow once we are able to see women as equal partners and the gaps in the indexes will begin to close fast enough.

Honorable Dr. Aisha Ghuas Pasha, MNA/Member of National SDGs Taskforce, while speaking on the topic "Financing for SDGs and integrating SDGs into national policies" said that "according to the latest International Monetary Fund review, our education expenditures were 3.9 percent of GDP in 2018 whereas it must be 9.6 percent by 2030 if we are to achieve the SDGs. In the case of health, we are currently on 2.8 percent of GDP on health. If the SDGs in the health sector are to be met, we must be at 8.2 percent by 2030. Aside from that, UNICEF estimates that 53,000 Pakistani children under the age of five are dying of diarrhea as a result of poor sanitation and water supply, and that the total investment required to meet these targets is \$40 billion. The COVID-19 has questioned the country's digital infrastructure. They estimated that we needed \$56 billion for digital infrastructure."

She emphasized that the amount of funding required to meet the SDGs is currently beyond our limits. "We can't meet the SDGS because it's too large, so financing is a major issue for us,"

she said. “We are, unfortunately, in the midst of an IMF programme. While they are estimating all of these good numbers for us so that we know how much we need to spend, they are also a part of the programme. We are required to have a budget deficit, according to conditionalities. And while we are meeting the IMF's performance requirement, we also have a budget deficit. We're also cutting our expenditures. She asked the participants that how are we going to meet our financial obligations? Hence, there is an inherent contradiction in the way they interact with us.” She argued that the government cannot achieve the 17 goals and 169 targets, both financially and in terms of capacity. She suggested that the government should reprioritize spending in the right areas so that SDGs can be put forward and budget can be utilized effectively. Furthermore, more resources must be mobilized to support the SDGs. She also cited the example of developing a macroeconomic model while working as Finance Minister in Punjab, one of Pakistan's largest provinces.

Honorable Dr. Aisha Ghaus Pasha stated that meeting the SDGs by 2030 is impossible under these conditions, given the country's severe lack of funding. She suggested that the UN reconsider shifting the deadline for meeting the SDGs from 2030 to 2035. Only then will there be a chance of achieving the SDGs, as the COVID-19 has set the world back 2-3 years in terms of progress on the SDGs. This could be the time for the global community to reconsider the time frame and make it more realistic. She concluded, "Let's just think among ourselves whether we should really go and push for a bigger, larger time frame for the SDG."

Mr. Ali Kamal, Chief SDGs, Federal SDGs Section, Ministry of Planning, Development, and Special Initiatives, shared the measures taken by the Government to ensure national monitoring and support monitoring of SDG progress in Pakistan. He stated that the SDGs Units are operating at national and provincial levels to monitor the progress on SDGs. Recently these units have also been established in Gilgit Baltistan and Azad Jammu & Kashmir. He stated that the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, a national statistical organization in Pakistan, covers 69 indicators in total, the majority of which come from administrative sources. He informed the participants that the government has selected 194 indicators for reporting until 2030, which will be approved by the National Economic Council. He stated that when the country began working with administrative data with national statistical organizations in 2016, it only had data on 21 indicators. However, in its first status report, the country reported on 133 National Indicators. He also stated that the NEC has approved the National SDGs Framework in 2018 in order to establish baselines and targets for SDGs indicators for evaluation. The NEC formed a sub-committee on SDGs on June 10, 2020, with the mandate to regularly monitor SDG activities and report progress to it. The subcommittee has held two meetings to monitor and evaluate progress on the SDGs. The provinces have also developed their own SDGs framework, which is a local framework approved in 2020. He also informed the participants that the Ministry is preparing to launch SDGs dashboard to display national data.

SESSION TWO – ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSIONS:

This inaugural session was followed by a roundtable discussion and presentation of set of recommendations and suggestions by the participants:

Honorable MNA Ms. Zille Huma stated that Pakistan is playing a significant role in implementing SDGs in the country. “We are sensitive and aware of the mission of SDGs,” she said. She endorsed that out of all the SDGs the well-being and the livelihoods and employment opportunities for the people should remain the focus of all of us. She reiterated that Pakistan, as a

frontline state against international terrorism, has done a commendable job, and that we expect the international community to fully support us in our efforts to create job opportunities and livelihoods, so that once there is economic prosperity and less inequity, the people will get their basic rights and flourish, and the SDGs mission will be successful.

Honorable Ms. Nafeesa Inayat Ullah Khattak, MNA/Member SDGs Taskforce, stated that the current Government was confronted with many challenges with respect to education sector in Pakistan. There were three types of educational institutes i.e. Private, government-owned and the Madrassah system. Hence, the nation was divided into three frames of mind. Second, the school infrastructure was severely damaged by earthquakes and floods in 2005 and 2010, respectively; the walls were cracked, the roofs were leaking, and there were only a few washrooms. “We also had ghosts, schools, and teachers,” she informed. “When the previous administration was in office, it did not exceed 2.5 percent of the budget, whereas the education sector required 4.6 percent of GDP at the time. Following the passage of 25A, funds donated to schools by parents for building maintenance were also discontinued. We had a teacher shortage, and teachers were being appointed only on a daily wages. Poverty is another major impediment to children attending school,” she said.

Honorable Ms. Nafeesa Inayatullah Khattak said that the present government has taken a number of initiatives to address these challenges. The government established a single National Curriculum, which is now being used in all three types of schools. The curriculum has been updated to reflect the most recent educational techniques. The government has placed a strong emphasis on teacher training. The government is now taking care of the damaged infrastructure. Many of these schools are now operational in the country. In the fiscal year 2021-22, the budgetary allocation has been increased to 4.6 percent of GDP. Although this is still insufficient, the Standing Committee on Education is in the process of consulting with the Government, and spending is now expected to increase by 10% this year. To address the marginalized class, the government began providing stipends of Rs. 1500 for boys and Rs. 2000 for girls. This stipend is being used by parents to pay a fee and other educational expenses for their children. To address the issue of daily wages, the government gave daily wage teachers the opportunity to pass a test before being regularized, and the government is now appointing more teachers in schools, colleges, and universities. She informed the participants that the government has begun teaching skill development techniques and technical training as a subject in schools and universities for children who are unable to continue their studies for various reasons. NAVTTC also provides training to students in grades 8 and 9.

Honorable Ms. Ghazala Saifi, Parliamentary Secretary, National Heritage & Culture Division, stated that the SDGs Secretariat had been able to translate SDGs as one important aspect of the country's development and progress in national and international economic activity over a three and a half year period with the inclusion of all stakeholders. She said that women make up half of our population and youth make up around 70%. She emphasized the importance of developing and improving existing skill development programmes for the economic inclusion of these segments of our society. She suggested that IT-related skills be included in skill development programmes because the country has many talented young people who have been deprived of higher education but have the ability to use these skills. She stated that since the majority of our population uses high-tech cell phones, they have the ability to learn IT-related skills. This will not only increase employment opportunities, but will also aid in the improvement of people's economic conditions. She also suggested that small microbusinesses and workers who do not require training, such as tile makers, pottery makers, artists, and so on, be included in the national

economy. For social inclusion, the government must bring them together through various channels and organizations. The country must channelize them in order to increase exports and the country's economic growth.

Honorable MNA Mr. Lal Chand, Parliamentary Secretary for Human Rights stated that the Ministry works very closely with the SDGs convener and all parliamentarians on human rights issues, including women, children, minorities and transgenders. Several laws have been passed, and a National Commission on Child Rights and a National Commission on the Status of Women have been established. The ministry is working on minorities' and transgenders' rights, and very progressive laws for transgenders have been passed. He said that Honorable Prime Minister of Pakistan Mr. Imran Khan is also taking a number of steps to protect the poor in this country. While discussing about the government's flagship Ehsaas Program, he informed the participants that approximately 280 million families have been registered for the first time under this programme. Furthermore, a digital, national economic and social survey was conducted, and 80 million families were identified, with their children living below the poverty line being offered educational scholarships.

Honorable MNA Ms. Shunila Ruth stated that she is currently working on the Christian Marriage and Divorce Bill, which has been opposed for the past 74 years by various sects of Christian community. She shared that we are working hard on SDG goal 16. She informed that as member of SDGs taskforce, efforts are being made to advocate changing the term "minority" to "non-Muslims," as most Pakistanis believe that minority is a discriminatory word. And, while most people are politically correct and hide behind aphorisms, she refuses to do so. She proudly informed that we are working on the interfaith policy development with the Ministry of Interfaith Harmony in addition to advocating establishment of a National Commission on Non-Muslims, which is currently known as the National Commission on Minorities. As a Member of the National Assembly's Standing Committee on Law and Justice, she is trying to ensure that whatever laws are passed have an identity of not only a Muslim country but it reflects ownership of everyone who lives here and is a Pakistani, so that they must have equality before the law.

Ms. Baela Raza Jamil, CEO, Idara-e-Taleem o Aagahi, appreciated the way Pakistani government's international reporting on the SDGs has been improving due to proactive role of MPs and the SDGs Secretariat. She stated that ITA leads one of the largest citizen-led assessments, the "Annual Status of Education Report," on learning and education inclusion equity for SDG 4, which was launched in 2010. Prior to 2015, it was completely aligned not only with the SDG 4 agenda as a pivotal goal, but also with article 25A, which is the right to education as a fundamental right in Pakistan's Constitution. She said that the work it was doing seemed to fit both the national and global priorities and the government of Pakistan was one of the first countries and the Parliament to accede to it and want to run with it.

She stated that meeting all other SDGs is impossible without a focus on education. Pakistan has one of the best public-private partnership stories to tell, but without resources and post-primary education space, we will be unable to achieve our goal. She argued that education financing should be far more innovative than it is. Data from 90,000 households, over 70,000 students, and 152 districts show that the country is in the grip of a major crisis, which has been exacerbated by COVID-19 for post-primary levels. For the first time in Pakistan, there are more dropouts than never enrolled, with boys dropping out at a higher rate than girls. She stated that the penetration of technology has grown tremendously, and if the targeting is correct and a lot of access to social safety nets is through technology, then technology can address issues of empowerment and access

to entitlements through social safety nets, as well as more opportunities and financing for education.

Mr. Jawad Ali Khan, UN Habitat Program Manager, stated that the National Sustainable Development Strategy was developed while he was working in the Ministry of Climate Change. There is also a document on the National Action Plan for Sustainable Consumption and Production Goal (12). The Ministry of Climate Change has also developed a curriculum to integrate sustainable consumption and production into graduate-level curricula. These documents are already available. He emphasized the importance of rolling them out and putting them into action on the ground. “We can pilot some projects in the socioeconomic sector using resource efficiency methods. The people of Pakistan are extremely devoted, dedicated, and intelligent; they can really produce and showcase Pakistan's success in a few selected areas through this august forum of Members of the SDGs Taskforce and show what can be accomplished,” he said.

Dr. Muhammad Ashraf, Chairman, Pakistan Council of Research in Water Resources (PCRWR), stated during the discussion about the challenges associated with SDG Goal 06 that any country's national security is linked to its food security, and food security is indirectly linked to water security. He said that SDG 6 is about water and sanitation. One of the major challenges is the lack of a baseline for the goal as well as the indicators. Unfortunately, with the exception of 6.3.1, no baseline has been established, and unlike the Millennium Development Goals for Sustainable Development Goals, nations have been given the freedom to establish their baseline as well as aspirational and realistic targets. Unfortunately, we have been unable to develop both aspirational and realistic goals, he said. He argued that “if we don't know where we are now, where we need to go, and what kinds of physical and financial resources need to be put in place, we won't be able to achieve those goals.” He stated that, fortunately, the United Nations University has developed a tool known as the policy support system “PSS,” which we are using to establish a baseline as well as aspirational and realistic targets for all six indicators. These tools are based on six critical components: the individual's and the institution's capacity to work on these goals, finances, gender, DRR, and transparency. Citing the statement of Honorable MNA, Dr. Aisha Ghaus Pasha, he emphasized on effective utilization of funds for achieving SDG targets. While discussing the challenges that the government has faced since the 18th Amendment, he stated that water is now a provincial subject and that there is a lack of coordination among provinces in terms of data collection and sharing. “We will only be able to meet realistic targets, not all targets, by 2030 if these gaps are filled and coordination is improved to create water reservoirs and improved water resources,” he said.

Mr. Mukhtar Ahmed Ali, Executive Director, Centre for Peace and Development Initiatives (CPDI), stated that despite the efforts of successive governments, our Tax-to-GDP ratio remains around 9%, in fact it has even dropped below 9% in recent years. He asserted that government will not be able to meet the SDG targets unless it increases its revenue generation efforts within the country, and the international community can provide support in this area. He said that structural reforms within the systems are more important than revenue generation. “One of the reasons we haven't been able to raise revenues is a lack of structural reforms and political will,” he said. He mentioned that centralization of powers remains one of the major challenges, pointing out that even after 12 years since the 18th constitutional amendment, federal ministries on education and health exist at Federal level that have no reason to exist, implying that resources are being spent that should not be spent. He also stated that the government has not been successful in implementing civil service reforms. He stated that the structure of the section in a ministry inherited from British is almost unchanged, with one person supported by six other people. He

emphasized that authority should be devolved within the Ministry in such a way that a matter can be resolved in two steps, with one officer investigating the matter and the other disposing of it.

While discussing the local government system in Pakistan, he stated that there is not even a single local government in place anywhere in the country, and while KP elections may have been held, those governments are still not functional for a number of reasons. Many of the subjects covered by the SDGs, he suggested, are now under the jurisdiction of local governments and these should be devolved. While discussing government inefficiencies, he stated that nearly 20-25 percent of seats in almost every province are lying vacant in the education sector which makes it difficult to enhance literacy targets. "We have been unable to set up a system in which the recruitment process begins before a vacancy is created, owing to the fact that the system is centralized and recruitment is banned by a Chief Minister at the Provincial level," he said. He believed that system reforms could enable the government to use resources more efficiently, resulting in increased revenue while also increasing international partners' trust that their money is being spent efficiently and effectively.

Mr. Karim Khan, Associate Professor at the Pakistan Institute for Development Economics (PIDE), spoke about job opportunities and workplace decency. He stated that in Pakistan, in general, there are very few job opportunities for young people. According to official estimates, it is around 11.5 percent, with a higher percentage predicted if graduates are included, around 22 percent. "The implication is that we are unable to capitalize on the demographic dividend that we have been proclaiming for the last two decades," he said. In terms of decency, he stated that the informal sector employs a sizable proportion of the workforce. It accounts for approximately 71 percent of non-formal employment. When compared to formal employment, informal employees are paid very little. For example, according to the ILO, the average wage rate for informal employees is around 12000 rupees, which is less than the minimum wage rate in Pakistan. He proposed that the government should not be the provider of employment, but rather the facilitator of employment opportunities. He proposed developing a market mechanism for a competitive private sector because it is the private sector that can engage the youth. "Let the market do the work, and the government should act as a facilitator," he said. In terms of decency, he suggested that while legislation such as the Industrial Relations Act and Provincial Acts are in place, they must be implemented viz-a-viz minimum wage rates, formal agreements, and work-related injuries, among other things.

H.E. Stephen Twigg, Secretary General of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA), expressed satisfaction with Pakistan's focus on the SDGs. While discussing Pakistan's upcoming Voluntary National Review, he recalled the process in the United Kingdom when the country held its first Voluntary National Review and the engagement of Members of Parliament at the time, when he was still an MP. He expressed keen interest in extending the SDGs deadline from 2030 to 2035, and stated that the CPA will pursue this further with the UN and other organizations. His only reservation was that this extension must not become an excuse for some countries to lose focus.

While reflecting on Honorable MNA Ms. Shandana's suggestion about the CPA and the SDGs, he stated that the CPA identified six cross-cutting themes, including gender, disability and youth, sustainable development, and climate change, and it was very focused on the SDGs and their importance when developing their new strategic plan. He also stated that the CPA Academy is developing a course to support MPs in their work on the SDGs as well as looking into other ways in which information can be provided centrally on some sort of portal that would share

information with MPs and Parliaments all over the world. He commended the Honorable Members of Parliament from Pakistan for focusing women and people with disabilities, and indicated that one of the major tests of any SDG is what difference it will make for people with disabilities because disabled people face some of the most significant financial barriers, stigma and discrimination in countries all over the world. He praised Pakistan's achievements in the field of education, adding that he was also involved in the establishment of the International Parliamentary Network for Education. He also stated that the COVID crisis and its impact have made an already-tall mountain even taller. He appreciated Honorable Senator Sania Nishtar for her role in providing social protection to Pakistanis by leading the *Ehsaas* programme in Pakistan and representing the region at the CPA's Working Group on Human Rights. He also appreciated the Pakistan Institute for Parliamentary Services for developing a comprehensive publication on SDGs.

H.E. Ian Lidell, Grainger MP, Acting Chair, Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, stated that the CPA's entire work has centered around sustainability. He said that the CPA is a family of 54 nations with approximately 180 Parliaments that work closely together to support, understand, listen to, and help parliamentarians and parliaments all over the world. He congratulated Team PIPS for remarkable piece of work in the form of a publication on SDGs that he believed is essential technical assistance to the MPs and the taskforce.

He stated that one of the most difficult challenges is that the GDP required meeting each of these targets. He said that it makes no difference if you are from the world's largest economy or one of the smaller ones, the country must decide which bits it has and the most important goals that it wishes to achieve. He stated that one of the country's major problems is a lack of investment. Yet he expressed the hope that as the world has digitalized, many new avenues of communication have opened up. He believed that trade can be used to generate GDP. Pakistan has a large economy that is well-suited for inward investment. It is a stable country and its people are well respected around the world. He stated that the Pakistani community has built extensive infrastructure in the United Kingdom. He suggested that the Pakistani embassy can play a role in persuading people to invest in Pakistan. He stated that COVID-19 has had an impact on all economies around the world. It has made things much more difficult and the recovery period may be much longer than we anticipated.

Salient recommendations:

1. **Global Community to reconsider the deadline for meeting SDGs:** UN should reconsider shifting the deadline for meeting the SDGs from 2030 to 2035. Only then will there be a chance of achieving the SDGs, as the COVID-19 has set the world back 2-3 years in terms of progress on the SDGs. This could be the time for the global community to reconsider the time frame and make it more realistic.
2. **CPA Branches/ Units dedicated to SDGs should be developed:** CPA should establish small SDGs Units/ branches so that SDGs Secretariat in the Pakistan can liaise to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.
3. **prioritize spending viz-aviz SDGs:** Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, SDG progress has stalled for the past 2-3 years. Therefore, the government must reprioritize spending in the right areas so that the SDGs can be put in place and the budget can be utilized effectively. More resources must also be mobilized to support the SDGs.
4. **Increased access to livelihood and employment opportunities:** Out of all the SDGs the well-being and the livelihoods and employment opportunities for the people should

remain the focus of the Government. The international community should support Pakistan in its efforts to create job opportunities and livelihoods, so that once there is economic prosperity and less inequity, the people will get their basic rights and flourish, and the SDGs mission will be successful.

5. **Inclusion of IT related Skills in Skill development programs:** The vast majority of Pakistanis own high-tech cell phones and have the ability to learn IT-related skills. Therefore, IT-related skills should be included in skill development programmes. This will not only increase job opportunities, but will also help to improve people's economic condition.
6. **Creation of a framework for the social inclusion of micro-businesses into the national economy:** Microbusinesses and workers who do not require training, such as tile makers, potters, artists, and so on, should be included in the national economy. For social inclusion, the government must bring them together through various channels and organizations and develop a framework through which they can be channeled in order to increase exports and economic growth.
7. **Utilization of innovation and technology to ramp up social safety net:** Penetration of technology has grown tremendously in Pakistan, and if the targeting is correct and a lot of access to social safety nets is through technology, then technology can address issues of empowerment and access to entitlements through social safety nets, as well as more opportunities and financing for education.
8. **Emphasizing on Education Financing Innovation:** Education financing should be far more innovative than it is now, with the government focusing on public-private partnerships. Such collaborations provide governments with a variety of innovative mechanisms for increasing access to education while also improving the quality and efficiency of education at all levels.
9. **Implementing existing SDG 12 plans and policies:** There is a document on the National Action Plan for Sustainable Consumption and Production Goal (12). In addition, the Ministry of Climate Change has produced a curriculum to integrate sustainable consumption and production into graduate-level curricula. The government should disseminate and implement them on the ground. Through the august forum of Members of the SDGs Taskforce, the government can pilot some projects in the socioeconomic sector using resource efficiency methods and showcase Pakistan's success in a few selected areas.
10. **Establishing a baseline for SDG targets and indicators:** One participant asserted that, with the exception of 6.3.1, the baseline for the goal and the indicators are lacking. A baseline is required to understand where things are starting, as well as at least one other data point to assess progress. He stated that the UN University has developed a tool known as the policy support system "PSS," which they are using to establish a baseline as well as aspirational and realistic targets for all six indicators. However, the country should prioritize establishing a baseline for each target in order to track progress toward each goal.
11. **Increasing Revenue Generation Efforts:** In Pakistan, the tax-to-GDP ratio remains around 9%, and has even fallen below 9% in recent years. The government will not be able to meet the SDG targets unless it increases its revenue generation efforts within the country, and the international community can support in this regard.
12. **Introducing structural reforms in government Institutions:** A lack of structural reforms is one of the reasons the government has been unable to raise revenues. Centralization of powers remains one of the major challenges, and even after 12 years since the 18th constitutional amendment, federal ministries such as education and health

exist at the federal level for no reason, implying that the government is spending resources that should not be spent. The structure of the section in a British-inherited ministry is nearly unchanged, with one person supported by six others. Therefore, authority within the Ministry should be devolved in such a way that a matter can be resolved in two steps, with one officer investigating the matter and the other disposing of it.

13. **Decentralizing the development agenda and increase local government autonomy:** There is not a single local government in place anywhere in the country, and while KP elections have been held, those governments are still not functional for a variety of reasons. Many of the SDGs' subjects are now under the jurisdiction of local governments and should be devolved. Furthermore, the autonomy of the local government system should be increased so that spending priorities can be planned and executed precisely, resulting in better public services for citizens.
14. **Creating a market mechanism for a competitive private sector:** The government should create a market mechanism for a competitive private sector because it is the private sector that can engage the youth. The government should not be the provider of employment, but rather the facilitator of employment opportunities.
15. **Enforcing workplace decency laws:** Legislation such as the Industrial Relations Act and Provincial Acts are in place; these must be enforced. in terms of minimum wage rates, formal agreements and work-related injuries, etc.
16. **Focusing on trade to generate GDP:** One of the country's major problems is a lack of investment, and as the world has digitalized, many new avenues of communication have opened up. Trade can be one of the ways to generate GDP. Pakistan has a large economy that is well-suited for inward investment. It is a stable country, and its people are well respected all over the world. Pakistani embassies in other countries can help to persuade people to invest in Pakistan.

CONCLUSION: In his concluding remarks, **Honorable Mr. Riaz Fatyana, MNA/Convener, National Parliamentary Taskforce on SDGs**, thanked the Honorable Mr. Ian Liddell-Grainger, Acting Chair CPA, and Honorable Mr. Stephen Twigg, Secretary General CPA for visiting Pakistan on behalf of the Hon Speaker National Assembly of Pakistan Mr. Asad Qaiser and all Members of the cross-party Sustainable Development Goals Task Force at the National Parliament of Pakistan. He stated that the Commonwealth is a big family and that we can learn from each other's experiences, and that we should strengthen our cooperation amongst ourselves in relation to our own efforts to implement the SDGs in Pakistan.

He stated that the SDGs secretariat is the largest parliamentary forum of Pakistan, with over 63 Members of Parliament. The forum is also interacting at the provincial level, and provincial SDG taskforces have also been formed in Pakistan. He mentioned that the SDGs Parliamentary Taskforce has constituted various Goal-wise committees that have managed to engage with stakeholders to promote SDGs as part of the national narrative. The Ministry of Planning, as well as its counterparts in the provinces, have now established sections tasked with implementing the SDGs throughout the country. He stated that the SDGs secretariat serves as a link between Parliament, the executive, civil society organizations, and academia. He stated that the SDGs Secretariat not only works with government institutions to integrate the SDGs into national policymaking, but also introduces, scrutinizes, and reviews legislation related to the SDGs. He said that the COVID-19 pandemic has had a negative impact on the functioning of parliaments all over the world, and that Pakistan's Parliament has also experienced periods of lockdown. He informed that the SDGs Secretariat is planning to organize the third Asian Parliamentary Seminar

on the SDGs at the end of September 2022. He invited the distinguished delegates to the important seminar. Lastly, he thanked all of the Honorable Members as well as the experts who contributed to the PIPS handbook on SDGs, for attending the roundtable. He commended the professional services of team PIPS as well as staff members of SDG taskforce for organizing such a high-level discussion on SDGs in such a short period of time.

Mr Muhammad Anwar, Executive Director PIPS, presented the Institute's Mementoes to the Hon MPs from CPA along with recent set of PIPS publications including the SDGs Databook 2022 to all participants. The second edition of the PIPS databook on SDGs was officially launched at the event. Mr. Muhammad Rashid Mafzool Zaka, DG (Research), acknowledged the learned experts who contributed chapters on each of the SDG goal. He informed the Honorable Members that the first edition of the book was utilized and quoted at the United Nations once Pakistan presented its country report. He specially recognized Ms. Tehseen Khalid (Director Research) for her unmitigated resolve in leading the initiative of preparation of the book. He also appreciated all members of Team Research comprising Mr. Muhammad Hanif Khan (Deputy Director Research), Ms. Fakiha Mehmood (Deputy Director Research), Mr. Jimshaid Asghar (Assistant Director Research), Mr. Muhammad Rizwan Manzoor (Assistant Director Research), Ms. Laraib Kiani, Mr. Areeb Shirazi & Ms. Adeela Shahzadi (Young Parliamentary Officers, PIPS) for their untiring efforts in data collection and editing of the publication, which took around five months. Honorable MPs from the United Kingdom and Pakistan lauded the efforts of all leading experts and the PIPS Research Wing in compiling the comprehensive data and analysis pack for MPs. The roundtable concluded with a group photo of all participants.

OPINION

**Gender Equality and Women Empowerment in Pakistan:
Challenges and way forward****Zohra Yusuf**

Former chairperson Human Rights Commission of Pakistan and Council member HRCP

Overview

Pakistan is among the very few countries where women continue to be in a minority. The reasons have their root and reality in the lower status accorded to them, which in spite of some legislative efforts, have brought no change. Patriarchy, both in attitude and practice, still remains unchallenged. While the situation is dire for Pakistani women, the consequences of this neglect of almost half the population bring shame to the country every time global rankings and reports reveal the precarious condition of women in Pakistan. It is ranked by the Global Gender Gap Index 2018 as the sixth most dangerous country for women and the second worst (ranked 148th) in terms of gender equality.¹ In spite of some improvement, the country scores high on maternal and child mortality rates in global rankings. Moreover, there is little realization that women's health and economic empowerment can make a huge contribution to the country's own development goals.

The Sustainable Development Goals, signed off by all member states of the United Nations in September 2015, follow the Millennium Development Goals of 2000 which had identified eight goals with seventeen targets. The SDGs, comprising of seventeen goals and 169 targets, provide both opportunities and challenges in addressing wide-ranging issues of equality: socio-economic, political and personal. In fact, although SDG 5 is specific to women and girls, all seventeen goals have a direct bearing on women's lives and well-being as they crosscut issues of economic, political and social status.

It is commendable that Pakistan became the first country in February 2016 to integrate SDGs into its national development agenda with endorsement by the National Assembly. However, the results on the ground do not reflect the commitment demonstrated in 2016, although this commitment has been reinforced with the setting up of the SDG Support Units at all levels of governance.²

It should also be noted that Goal 5 has, regrettably, not been considered a top 'priority' goal by Pakistan. It forms a part of the second set of priorities. The target for achieving all sustainable goals is 2030, which means that in less than a decade the status of women and girls in Pakistan has to make significant and meaningful improvement. Moreover, there are several omissions regarding women and the girl child in Pakistan's National Baseline & Targets for 2030 (based on the first set of priorities).³

An analysis by Shirkat Gah (Women's Resource Centre) identifies certain areas of omission that have a direct impact on the status and well-being of women. These include lack of recognition of women's role in agriculture and access to land. There is also a lack of acknowledgment of women's right to reproductive health by ensuring universal access to sexual and reproductive healthcare services.⁴

In fact, recognition of a woman's right over her own body has needlessly been made a matter of 'honour'. Consequently, women continue to suffer from ill health due to unplanned pregnancies and childbirth.

¹ European Parliament, *Violence against women on the rise in Pakistan*, Parliamentary Questions, accessed on 12 March 2020

² Government of Pakistan, *Pakistan's Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for SDG, Voluntary National Review* (Pakistan: Government of Pakistan, 2019).

³ Shirkat Gah, *UN Overview Agenda 2030 & SDGs* (Shirkat Gah)

⁴ Shirkat Gah, *UN Overview Agenda 2030 & SDGs* (Shirkat Gah)

So how can Pakistan go about taking both policy and practical measures that would bring the country closer to achieving SDG 5?

A way forward has been suggested by Shirkat Gah's publication, *Measuring Post-2015 Development in Pakistan*: "The realization of the SDG agenda demands the synchronization of all the various parts and cogs. A stepped approach is needed, starting with benchmarking the current situation and setting national priority targets, involving all stakeholders at different levels (statisticians, executing bodies, planning commission, etc.), inviting expert inputs for various aspects of implementation, related data collection, monitoring and review processes, generating and allocating necessary resources, and addressing gaps through transparent and accountable means in a continuous loop. Actions must be regularly reviewed for responsiveness, and remedial measures and further improvements adopted."⁵

The synchronization and involvement of stakeholders at all levels, referred to above, reflects an overarching approach to the achievement of the objectives of the nine targets identified.⁶ These are:

1. End all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere

While the above may appear idealistic and unachievable, a practical and sustained strategy needs to be initiated. Since discrimination starts at the home, awareness and motivational campaigns in the mass media, supported by door-to-door visits by lady health workers (or a new team force) should be a starting point. From the home to places of learning and employment, a woman's life journey should be tracked to determine the areas of discrimination. Starting with the curriculum, all gender discrimination material – including stereotyping of the female role – needs to be corrected or replaced. In fact, content that elicits surprise and debate can prove to be more effective in learning to overcome discrimination – for example, a male family member shown doing household chores is likely to provoke discussion and encourage learning. Needless to say, this also requires an attitudinal change in teachers so their training needs to encompass policy changes.

2. Eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation.

Sadly, the number of sexual crimes and domestic violence against women is rising instead of subsiding in Pakistan.⁷ This target calls for both legislation and effective and proactive law enforcement. While there has been positive legislation in the last decade or so, weak enforcement erode the beneficial effects of such legislation. The National Assembly elected in 2008, perhaps, passed the most progressive laws to improve the status of women and to address violence against them. These included: legislation against harassment at the workplace, tightening of laws against acid attacks as well as outlawing customary practices that were detrimental to women's rights and status. Although enforcement has remained weak, the passage of these laws demonstrated the state's commitment to upholding the rights of women. At the same time, all the provincial assemblies, passed laws against domestic violence.

There were other attempts, too, to provide justice to women survivors of violence. In 2016, the Criminal Laws Offences Relating to Rape was amended to improve investigation and prosecution. Under this amendment, the courts were to decide rape cases within the time limit of three months. However, it is regrettable that conviction in rape cases remains an abysmal 3% or less. Lack of empathy among police and prosecutors continues to add to the rape survivor's trauma.

In 2020, the government promulgated the Anti-Rape (Investigation & Trial) Ordinance. It has several positive aspects, including provision for witness protection and free legal aid for survivors. The much-

⁵ Shirkat Gah-Women's Resource Center, "Measuring Post-2015 Development in Pakistan", January 2016, <https://shirkatgah.org/shirkat/?p=13914>.

⁶ www.undp.org

⁷ European Parliament, Parliamentary Questions, 12 March 2020.

criticized and regressive two-finger virginity test has been disallowed and no aspersions are to be cast on the victim's character, while the trial is to be completed within four months.

However, the provision for chemical castration of the offender has detracted from the otherwise progressive intent of the Ordinance. As critics have pointed out, it is an inhumane and degrading form of punishment and contrary to several of Pakistan's international obligations. Moreover, it has been proven that certainty of punishment is a more powerful deterrent rather than severity of punishment.

The Supreme Court's directive on 28 March 2021 that a woman's character is not to be questioned during rape investigations and trial must be followed in letter and spirit.

3. Eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation

Child marriage is widespread across Pakistan although Pakistan committed itself to the Convention on the Rights of the Child decades ago. The issue is also related to inconsistency in the definition of the child. While the CRC identifies a child as anyone below eighteen, this definition has met resistance from religious groups and parties who maintain that when puberty is attained, a child becomes an adult.

Other regressive traditions, such as "*watta satta*," and often decisions by "*jirgas*" add to the vulnerability of the girl child who is always in danger of being married off at the altar of customary practices.

Since laws related to marriage come under the provincial domain, the Sindh Assembly became the first to increase the age of marriage to eighteen in 2014. Other provinces have yet to legislate to increase the minimum age to eighteen. Meanwhile, a bill moved by Senator Ms. Sherry Rehman in 2019 to increase the minimum age for marriage to 18 (as per commitment under SDG) remains pending in the Parliament.

Apart from underage marriage, forced marriages are rampant in Pakistan. However, its worst manifestation is seen in the cases of girls from religious minority communities. Members of the Hindu community claim that about a 1000 underage girls are forcibly converted and married off every year. While there is no independent verification of this claim, it must be recognized that conversions and forced marriages do take place; in fact some cases go up to the superior courts. Similar cases of Christians frequently surface, primarily in the Punjab.

4. Recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies and the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family as nationally appropriate.

In a traditional and patriarchal society where change is slow and progress is countered with regression, recognizing the value of domestic work and care of the family is an uphill task. It seems an insurmountable goal to be achieved by 2030. However, a beginning can be made by raising awareness and acceptance of the value of women's work within the home and family. This can be done through both the mainstream and social media using a mix of entertainment and education.

5. Ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in **political, economic and public life**

In spite of the fact that Pakistan has had the honour of electing the first Muslim woman Prime Minister, political empowerment of women remains a challenge over three decades later. Women remain bound by loyalty to political leaders for selection on women's seats in Parliament and their

role within political parties is rarely of leadership. However, in spite of drawbacks, women have proved to be more productive and progressive members of parliament – both in terms of initiating rights-based legislation and participating in parliamentary proceedings.

Nevertheless, women's participation in the political process is weak. Voters' data for each election shows significantly lower turnout for women voters, in spite of efforts made by the Election Commission as well as civil society groups. Writing in *Dawn*, Umair Javed notes that out of Pakistan's 106 million or so registered voters, only 44% are women. He points out that "... the lack of engagement by political parties also contributes to voting outcomes. Survey data from 2018 reveals that women were three times less likely than men to have been mobilized by political parties ..."⁸

Moreover, at the time of elections, women are prevented from voting in certain parts of the country as per agreements reached between political rivals. Cultural traditions as well as male dominance keep women away from the polling booth. As columnist Javed writes, "Even if women are registered, female turnout tends to be lower than male turnout across the country. The male-gap in voter turnout in the 2018 elections stood at 9.1% with 11 million more men voting than women."⁹

6. Ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights as agreed in accordance with the Programme of Action of the ICPD & the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome documents of their review conferences.

United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) recognizes sexual and reproductive health as a fundamental human right which also leads to reduction in poverty and improving the long term health prospects of women.¹⁰ Sadly, long term and firm commitment has been absent with the result that Pakistan continues to have the third highest rate of maternal, fetal and child mortality in the world. The contraceptive prevalence rate also remains at a low 26% although 96% women are aware of contraceptive methods, indicating that the needs for birth spacing are not being met.¹¹

A further setback to women's reproductive health is due to early marriages, even in parts of the country where the legal age has been raised to eighteen. Early marriage leads to early pregnancies and lack of contraceptive use means frequent pregnancies.

Sadly, women's reproductive and sexual rights is an area where the resistance is strongest to bringing about change and giving women the right to better health prospects. The government of Pakistan has also failed to meet its commitments under the Programme of Action of the ICPD & the Beijing Platform for Action as well as the outcome documents of their review conferences.

7. Undertake reforms to give women equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to ownership and control over land and other forms of property, financial services, inheritance and natural resources, in accordance with national laws.

Women constitute only 20% of the 'paid' labour force in Pakistan¹². However, much of a woman's work is not recognized. These include those who are home-based workers or part of the informal economy.

There is little realization by policy makers that the key to improving a woman's status is through economic empowerment. The belief persists that it is culture and tradition that are holding women back. If Pakistan is to meet the goal of giving women equal rights to economic resources, it must create

⁸ Umair Javed, "Women and political inequality", *Dawn* March 08, 2021

⁹ Javed, "Women and political inequality."

¹⁰ United Nations Population Fund, "UNFPA & Sustainable Development Goals", <https://www.unfpa.org/resources/unfpa-sustainable-development-goals-0>.

¹¹ UNFPA & Sustainable Development Goals

¹² GoP, Implementation of the 2030 Agenda, Voluntary Review 2019.

an enabling environment for women's economic betterment. While the State Bank of Pakistan has recently taken the initiative of directing banks to encourage women to open and operate bank accounts, a lot more has to be done.

Firstly, the guarantee of a safe and conducive work environment is likely to get more women come out for jobs. Factories must ensure childcare facilities as prescribed by the amended Factories Act. The creation of the right work environment has to be supplemented with provision for mobility. Women who go out to work must have access to safe public transport, as well as access to markets if they are producers of any goods – agricultural or otherwise.

The other aspect of women's work is the hired domestic help whose services are neither regularized nor recognized. Women working in homes as maids and cleaners continue to be the most exploited and vulnerable to violence and abuse. In the past few years, there have been several cases of torture of maids (some minors) at the hands of their employers from the more affluent and influential segments of society, leading to deaths as well.

While certain civil society organizations are working for the rights of domestic workers, it is time for the government to initiate steps for their welfare and recognize their rights as workers.

An analysis of current income-generation options available to women needs to be undertaken. Women's bank and designated branches at some banks have not made any dent in women's economic status. Microfinance was seen as the solution to all of women's economic problems but reports suggest that loans are, to a great degree, being misused by male members of the family.

Both the IMF and the World Bank have pointed to the tremendous economic growth potential for Pakistan if women are financially empowered.

8. Enhance the use of enabling technology, in particular information and communications technology, to promote the empowerment of women.

This particular SDG target, if achieved, could revolutionize women's participation both in education and the economy. While there have been some small scale initiatives to include women in the rapidly developing information technology sector, what is needed is a sea-change in attitudes and policies. Women's use of technology for economic purposes has remained, primarily, an urban phenomenon. However, with imagination and planning, women outside the urban sphere can be trained in the use of technology.

The ability to use technology can have a beneficial impact on women's lives in many ways, including access to information about health as well as economic activities such as farming. Technology also allows women to work from home and this aspect, in itself, provides a solution to many of the obstacles women face in going out to work. A comprehensive, well-thought plan for women's greater inclusion in the area of information technology is needed, both at the federal and provincial levels.

9. Adopt and strengthen sound policies and enforceable legislation for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls at all levels.

This is a critical SDG target as it forms the foundation for the achievement of all other goals. This involves intervention at all the life stages of a girl child – from birth to adulthood. From ensuring birth registration to the provision of adequate healthcare and nutrition, to equal opportunities in education and economic activities to bodily and marital rights, this all-encompassing target requires a strong commitment from the state at all levels of its institutions.

Enforceable policies, supported by legislation, is required. Since many of the issues concerned, such as education and health, come under the jurisdiction of provinces, greater coordination and cooperation are necessary. Moreover, in Pakistan, while legislation has been an easier goal to achieve, enforcement

is weak and sometimes, non-existent. Hence, a monitoring mechanism must be put in place by each province and the Centre to ensure effective implementation of legislation.

Pakistan has one of the highest rates of school dropouts of girls. The poor infrastructures of most schools, as well as girls' mobility, are among the reasons. Necessary investment, both in financial and management terms, must be made by provincial governments that are equally committed to achieving the targets set by SDG. Though this target crosscuts with SDG 4 (Quality of Education), the issue needs to be seen from the perspective of girls' education. Only 63% of women between the ages of 15 and 29 are literate.¹³

The Technical Committees instituted by the provinces can also play a more proactive role in ensuring that targets of SDG 5 are met. Currently, there is little awareness of the contribution of these committees in meeting the SDG goals.

Way Forward

- i. **Raising awareness:** apart from periodic reports, there is little sharing of information on the actions taken at all levels to meet the SDG goals. It is imperative that a high profile is maintained in the media so that the entire country is aware of the progress being made and the challenges to be met.
- ii. **Ensuring ownership:** this is related to the above recommendation. It is vital that the responsibility of achieving goals is not limited to the government alone. Communities and families need to be involved and made aware of the role they can play in bringing about change in the status of women in their own families/communities. Collective responsibility is necessary.
- iii. **Parliamentarians' role:** elected members of Parliament owe it to their constituents to bring about awareness of SDG 5 and provide leadership in their areas. The concept of joint responsibility must be supported and carried forward by parliamentarians in their constituencies.
- iv. **Giving priority to economic and bodily rights:** these two aspects of rights in the context of women's status and the achievement of SDG 5 need to be accepted and policies/actions formulated accordingly. Economic empowerment of women lead to the resolution of several issues related to their status. Bodily rights are imperative if parameters of health, economy and the future of the country are to be considered. The galloping population of Pakistan spells disaster for the country's future and it is only by ensuring women have the right to take their own decisions regarding marriage, pregnancy and number of children that the situation can be retrieved.
- v. **Bold approach:** above all, the entire approach to women's rights and status in meeting the targets of SDG 5 must reflect a break with the past. Too often, women's rights and status have been sacrificed by the political leadership to appease religious and tribal sentiments. A strong commitment means the will to stand up to pressures in attaining the SDG targets.
- vi. **Empowering NCSW:** The National Commission on the Status of Women needs to be revitalized and strengthened. Currently, it is without a Chairperson.

¹³ UN Women, *The Young Women in Pakistan, Status Report 2020*, <https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2020/11/young-women-in-pakistan-status-report-2020#:~:text=The%20total%20population%20of%20Pakistan,sex%20ratio%20towards%20equal%20numbers>.

OPINION

Reflecting on COVID-19 and Parliamentary Response: a case of Commonwealth Legislatures

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As the Covid-19 started, the world was shut down into a global curfew. This had an unprecedented impact on all the activities around the world major and minor. There were huge challenges to Commonwealth Parliaments and governments as health systems struggled to cope with the global health catastrophe, and the rapid spread of Covid-19 prompted widespread lockdowns, school and business closures, and job losses. The Coronavirus epidemic has had a massive influence on all Commonwealth Parliaments activities. Commonwealth parliaments and staff have had to modify and prioritize national as well as international activities, which was the need of the hour. This article will reflect on the interference of coronavirus in parliamentary activities. In addition to this, the responses of Commonwealth parliaments and parliamentarians to Covid-19 and how can they have an impact on Covid-19 recovery.

Any crisis or conflict demands a great deal of attention from every governance system, therefore making the deliverance of democracy a challenge. Parliament is the central institution of representative democracy and its ability to function during a crisis is a challenge for every democratic system. Thus, response to the crises shows the strength and longevity of a parliament. This is because deliberation and decision-making by elected representatives are the foundations of parliaments. When legislators deliberate and make decisions in normal circumstances, they have time to listen to their constituents, consult with opposition and civil society, and discuss alternative points of view before making any decision. However, the breakout of COVID-19 and its rapid spread as a worldwide pandemic that has infected almost all the countries has triggered a state of emergency in numerous Parliaments and legislatures around the world. During these difficult testing times, decisions may need to be made promptly. It was challenge for Members of Parliament to have face to face access to people during COVID pandemic.

Delivering Parliamentary Democracy: A Challenge

The challenge for democratic institutions has been to produce the essential functions of democracy that have been disturbed by Covid-19. The core functions are accountability, representation, and the ability to make laws. Many Commonwealth Parliaments adopted different ways to ensure good governance. As Sally West, Usher of the Black Rod, CPA Victoria Branch said during the CPA Webinar:

“It was really useful to see what other Parliaments are doing at the moment.”¹ Committees were usually the first to be digitalized since they are much easier to convene remotely, and even parliaments that are mostly working physically with lesser staff nevertheless conducted committees online. For example, the Norwegian Parliament permitted committee meetings to be held online using Microsoft

¹CPA, *Annual Report and Performance Review 2020: Supporting Commonwealth Parliaments during unprecedented times in 2020*, (CPA, May 2021).

Teams, but they have also taken practical steps to reduce the number of MPs present at plenary meetings and during voting to 87 from 169.² In the United Kingdom, select committees have been operating digitally.³

Hearings and arguments on matters relating to Covid-19 are limited at committee meetings. In addition to this, the president of the Storting and one MP from each of Norway's nine parliamentary party groups have formed a Coronavirus Special Committee, however, they do not meet remotely. New Zealand's Epidemic Response Committee, on the other hand, was established with and chaired by opposition leader Simon Bridges, as well as a majority of opposition members on the committee to scrutinise the executive.⁴

Voting is a significant part of the Parliament's activities and contributes to democratic governance. The development of a voting app in the United Kingdom is a fascinating innovation, with the first remote vote taking place on May 12th.⁵ The app is protected by two-factor authentication and runs on Member Hub, a service that MPs and staff are already familiar with. Moreover, by decreasing the number of members participating in proceedings, the Australian Parliament facilitated social distancing. This was accomplished through a quorum voting, in which only a representative percentage of MPs will attend.⁶

Despite this progress, Parliaments and Members of Parliament were confronted with a particularly complicated and contradictory set of threats to their functions. Commonwealth Parliament Association provided a guide to help them through this process. According to Article 1(1) of the CPA Constitution, the "aims of the Association are to promote knowledge of the constitutional, legislative, economic, social and cultural aspects of parliamentary democracy, with particular reference to the countries of the Commonwealth."⁷ In order to assist the Commonwealth Parliaments during these tough times, the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association took several actions in terms of Covid-19 issues. In May of 2020, CPA put together the model law of independent parliaments, designed to create a legislative template for commonwealth parliaments. It is to help Commonwealth Parliaments in their jurisdiction to create cooperate bodies and parliamentary commissions that have independent powers and structures to enable parliaments to

² Stortinget, *The Storting steps up its coronavirus measures*, 2020, accessed February 14, 2022, <https://www.stortinget.no/en/In-English/About-the-Storting/News-archive/Front-page-news/2019-2020/the-storting-steps-up-its-coronavirus-measures/>

³ UK Parliament, "Select Committees," UK Parliament, <https://www.parliament.uk/about/how/committees/select/>

⁴ New Zealand Parliament, "COVID-19: What is the Epidemic Response Committee?" New Zealand Parliament, March 30, 2020, Available at: <https://www.parliament.nz/en/get-involved/features/covid-19-what-is-the-epidemic-response-committee/>

⁵ Edward Scott and Nicola Newson, (2022). "House of Lords: timeline of response to Covid-19 pandemic," House of Lords Library, March 01, 2022, <https://lordslibrary.parliament.uk/house-of-lords-timeline-of-response-to-covid-19-pandemic/>

⁶ Parliament of Australia, "COVID-19 Australian Government roles and responsibilities: an overview," Parliament of Australia, May 19, 2020, https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/download/library/prspub/7346878/upload_binary/7346878.pdf

⁷ The Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, 1949

function effectively.⁸ Particularly, to give them the administrative operation on financial resources which is necessary to adapt in the crises like Covid-19.

Future of Parliamentary Practices

It was noticed that many commonwealth parliaments suffered in adapting to the Covid-19 situation were partly because of not having sufficient autonomy and independence, financial control, administration and resources. Another fact of struggle is that many parliaments do not have the necessary bodies such as the parliamentary commission. To cater to this issue, the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association conducted research among its members and released the "CPA Toolkit for Commonwealth Parliaments and Legislatures on the COVID-19 pandemic and delivering parliamentary democracy" in April 2020.⁹ The toolkit included different actions and recommendations that both Parliaments and Parliamentarians can adopt in order to continue to fulfill the legislature's responsibility of scrutinising legislation and delivering democracy.

Albeit many difficulties and disruptions faced during these two years, some major lessons also came into the highlight. First and foremost, every governance system should prepare to incorporate new technologies and adapt to the existing rules to accommodate the new reality. Secondly, it has become necessary to require the opposition's support to pass emergency legislation expeditiously. Thirdly, need for swift communication between party leaders and members in order to ensure timely response.

In addition to this, it is an agreeable fact that digital deliberative democracy can generate an accessible and transparent audit trail to legislation. The UK Parliament brought innovations in Democracy programme which was a promising start towards deliberative democracy in the country.¹⁰ One of the ways is by sharing models for more participatory decision-making in times of such huge crises.

The CPA has delivered the model law to reinforce the independence and autonomy of the parliaments in order to ensure the efficient delivery of democracy. Throughout the benchmark assessments, CPA has noticed that many of the Commonwealth Parliaments do not have the required independence to carry out actions on their own. According to Sustainable Development Goals 16 and 17, institutions such as Parliaments must be strong and effective which can be ensured only if they have the required autonomy.¹¹ This also meets the requirements laid down by Latimer House Principles and the Commonwealth Charter, which emphasises that separate powers are required to ensure that the parliaments are independent of judiciary and executive.

⁸Matthew Salik, *Model Law For Independent Parliaments-Establishing Parliamentary Service Commissions for Commonwealth Legislatures 2020* (CPA, 2020), https://www.cpahq.org/media/usdnwcqp/model-law-for-independent-parliaments_final.pdf

⁹ Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, *COVID-19 Delivering Parliamentary Democracy, CPA Toolkit for Commonwealth Parliaments*, (CPA, April 2020), <https://www.cpahq.org/media/gb1athp1/cpa-toolkit-covid-19-coronavirus-e-version.pdf>

¹⁰ GOV.UK

¹¹ Balakrishna Pisupati, *Commonwealth and Sustainable Development Goals*, (New Delhi: RIS, April 2018), <http://fledgein.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/CHOGM-Commonwealth-SDGs-Published.pdf>

The guidelines of 'CPA Toolkit for Commonwealth Parliaments and Legislatures on the COVID-19 (Coronavirus) pandemic and delivering parliamentary democracy' and Model Law of independent provides useful insights for MPs and Parliamentary Institutions in order for them to have an impact on Covid-19 recovery. Taking into consideration that Covid-19 has highlighted the need for parliaments to be independent, autonomous and well-resourced institutions.

In addition to this, as policymakers gradually return to practices, they should not overlook the power of the new democratic-technological nexus. Members of Parliament can apply what they have learned, as well as the expertise of the digital democracy and deliberative democracy communities, to increase public trust in government institutions and open up traditional processes to more deliberation as it will enable people to bring closer to the source of democratic power. By this time, many MPs have acquired new skills, tools, and experiences that enable them to broaden the democratic discussion to a far bigger audience. On a larger scale, digitalisation trials provide insight into how a future and potentially radical reinvention of democracy, including the dismantling of existing power systems, might appear.

Conclusion

Two years of worldwide pandemic unveiled the fact that official planning for such a disaster was often insufficient. Parliaments have been obliged to adopt new techniques of examination, deliberation and voting. The immediate issue was to remotely reproduce old procedures but the situation has provided a rare opportunity to innovate. Commonwealth parliaments will play a key role in examining how and why planning has frequently fallen short, as well as highlighting and learning from successful methods.

In general, it appears that a more consistent catastrophe planning system is required as well as constant scrutiny of such plans by parliaments. Countries in the Pacific region, in particular, that have experienced frequent natural catastrophes and implemented adequate planning mechanisms, including legislative supervision, should be studied and emulated. Ultimately, longer-term 'big questions,' such as whether the globalised and complex, integrated nature of contemporary human civilization is endangering not only the climate but also human health must be addressed. Last but not the least Parliaments should once again be the venue for such national and transnational debates.

Excerpts of Feedback/Comments made by Honorable Members of Parliament and Dignitaries
PIPS Research and Legislation Client Satisfaction System (PRLCSS) – March, 2022

March 10, 2022: We are really moved and rather impressed by the multiple, research, legislative, capacity building and outreach services and team work at the Pakistan Institute for Parliamentary Services. It is indeed a great asset. I congratulate PIPS on launching the second edition of PIPS Databook on SDGs (2022), which is an enormous research work that I look forward to read.	Honorable Mr. Ian Liddell-Grainger MP UK House of Commons, and Acting Chairperson, Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA)
March 10, 2022: PIPS has a thoroughly professional research outfit; we are really grateful that team PIPS worked in unison with the National Assembly of Pakistan's Parliamentary SDGs Taskforce to successfully organize such insightful Roundtable with MPs, academia, area experts and members of civil society. It surely helped all stakeholders in reviewing Pakistan's progress on implementation of Sustainable Development Goals.	Honorable Mr. Riaz Fatyana, MNA and the Convener, National Parliamentary SDGs Taskforce, National Assembly of Pakistan.
March 10, 2022: Pakistan Institute for Parliamentary Services (PIPS) is the brain of the Parliament, which has always provided technical research and advice as timely assistance in MPs' parliamentary and legislative work.	Honorable Ms. Shandana Gulzar Khan, MNA, Chairperson CPA Women Parliamentarians
March 10, 2022: Hats off to PIPS and SDGs Secretariat in the National Assembly for organizing such a commendable Parliamentary Roundtable on Implementation on Sustainable Development Goals; The researched based analysis by the fellow Members of Parliament (MPs), civil society and experts provided make it a unique and comprehensive parliamentary dialogue with international MPs.	Honorable Dr. Ayesha Ghaus Pasha, MNA/Member SDGs Taskforce
March 9, 2022: As a center for Parliamentary excellence PIPS has already been serving legislatures across Pakistan through their quality research, capacity-building, legislative, and outreach services since its inception.	Honorable Makhdom Zain Hussain Qureshi, MNA and President YPF
March 8, 2022: PIPS outreach program with the Youth of Pakistan is so fascinating as it inspires future leaders to engage with the Parliament and engage in voluntary socio-political work for the country.	Honorable Mr. Stephen Twigg, Former MP UK House of Commons, Labour Party and presently Secretary General, Commonwealth Parliamentary Association.
March 8, 2022: Brilliant to work with the Pakistan Institute for Parliamentary Services (PIPS) to co-host the Seminar on Youth and Parliament with an illustrious panel of MPs from UK House of Commons and PIPS leadership. It was very useful to the students as future leaders knowing the democratic vision of the Quaid e Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah and contemporary Parliaments	Ms. Ayesha Ansar, Principal, Beacon House College Programme, Margala Campus, Islamabad
Feb., 18, 2022: PIPS is a quality driven Parliamentary Research Think Tank that has lot to offer to knowledge and analysis to the regional counterparts; We look forward to cooperation between PIPS and the Kazakh Parliamentary Think Tank in due course of time.	H.E Mr. Yerzhan Kistafin, Ambassador of Kazakhstan to Pakistan meeting with Executive Director, PIPS

PIPS SEMINAR ON YOUTH AND PARLIAMENT at the Beacon House College with Hon. Members of Parliament from Commonwealth Parliamentary Association and UK House of Commons, March 8, 2022



Glimpses of Dialogue on Anti Extremism and Peace Building by Young Parliamentarians Forum (YPF)
at the Pakistan Institute for Parliamentary Services (PIPS), March 9, 2022





Honorable Speaker National Assembly of Pakistan/ President PIPS BoG Mr. Asad Qaiser addressing the participants of National Youth and Parliamentarians Peacebuilding Summit, March 15, 2022 at PIPS



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