

## **Women Empowerment a must for Social & Economic Development**

“Women constitute approximately 50% of our Population still they are least in the public sphere, particularly the young women because the male-dominated society is biased towards women. A truly empowered woman can make wonders. She is more dedicated, more hard working, more creative and more devoted to the cause. What really required is a fundamental change in our social attitudes toward women. A massive effort is required to make both men and women aware of the need and the benefits of women's empowerment for a better future of Pakistan”.

These views were expressed by speakers at a seminar on the topic of “***We are not oppressed***” organized by ***Women In Struggle for Empowerment (WISE)*** in collaboration with Lahore College for Women University (LCWU) at LCWU on Monday, 18<sup>th</sup> May 2015. Over 200 students and faculty members participated.

Addressing on the occasion, the chief guest, **Ms. Farkhanda Waseem Afzal, Ombudsperson Punjab** explained the importance of the pro-women progressive laws for the protection of workingwomen. She extended concrete support from her office for the compliance of the “*The Protection against Harassment of Women at Workplace Act*”. She urged the senior managements in private and public sector institutions to play its roles in making their organizations gender friendly. She emphasizes zero tolerance against harassment at work places. Sharing salient features of anti-harassment law and the role of Ombudsperson office, she said the formation of inquiry committee and display of “Code of Conduct” is a must. It is easy to adopt and implement, also inexpensive and provides direct access to justice. Terming it key for women development, she said it leads to the higher standards in achieving gender equality.

**Bushra Khaliq**, Executive Director WISE speaking on the occasion, said mere legislation to protect women rights is not enough, government must ensure effective implementation of these pro-women laws as well. She said women and particularly the young girls possess great potential which needs to be explored. She said various factors are at work in limiting women's potential to aspire to positions of leadership. At the bottom of the constraints that women face is the patriarchal system where decision making powers are in the hands of males. And as result if we go through the statistics, nearly 65% of the female doctors don't do jobs after their marriages, 80% of business graduates sit at home after marriages, not even 10 % of the educated women are entrepreneurs and running their own business on their own, their scope of jobs is always limited to teaching, customer care, call centres, designing, training and fashion. They need a fresh break as they could do far better than that. Confining women to the domestic sphere is one of the barriers to their economic empowerment. State priorities must include special initiatives for the women uplift.

Deprivation from due inheritance and property rights contribute to women misery in public and private life. She urged the young women to come forward and claim their due social, economic and political spaces.

**Mumtaz Mughal** of Aurat Foundation was in opinion that there is need to revisit discriminatory, biased family laws. Progressive laws, just social structures and violence free society are a pre requisite for women's over all development and for a social change in the country. Govt. must take immediate steps to stop customary practices based on inequalities and provide social and economic justice to the women through progressive laws.

**Shazia Shaheen, Coordinator Mumkin Alliance** said according to our constitution every segment of the society is equal while women in Pakistan have secondary status in the society and are deprived from fundamental rights e.g., right of free mobility, right of expression, right to choose career and life partner etc. apart from that they are facing many forms of psychological, physical and sexual violence from different actors of the society. It is all because of the existing patriarchal structures and religious extremism prevailing in all the social and economic structures of Pakistan including family, curriculum, legal framework and gender & women specific policies. It is need of the hour to stop domestic violence against women through effective legislation which is pending from a decade. This will lead to sustainable, just and peaceful society.

**Ammara Athar, SP Investigation, Lahore** while addressing she said Police Department needs more women police officers in number, this will help women victim of rape, sexual abuse, honor killing for further exploitation and victimization which is happening right now in hands of male dominated police. These crimes are the main hurdles and barriers in women lives, prosperity and overall development.

At the end of the seminar **Ms Bushra Khaliq, Executive Director, WISE** presented the souvenirs to the guest speakers and certificate of the appreciation among the students. **Ms. Iram Shahid, Head of Social Work Department, LCWU** concluded the seminar.