



Press Release

Karachi, August 29: In Pakistan, women make up a majority of the agricultural workforce, but their contribution remains unacknowledged in policy and public debates. Women agricultural workers undertake difficult physical labour, working long hours in unsafe conditions and are paid lower wages compared to their male counterparts. They also have fewer opportunities than men, with unequal access to resources such as land, technologies and extension services.

The National Commission on the Status of Women (NCSW) and Collective for Social Science Research (CSSR) hosted a group consultation to share the findings of their studies on rural women and explore possible ways of advancing the rights of women agricultural workers at The Beach Luxury Hotel. The group included female parliamentarians, researchers, practitioners, opinion-makers and members of community organizations. They focused on how policy and legislative reform can improve the rights and well-being of women agricultural workers.

Dr. Yasmin Zaidi, Director of Centre of Gender and Policy Studies (CGaPS), presented the findings from the Status of Rural Women in Pakistan report 2018. She reported that approximately 53 percent of women who work are unpaid and 60 percent of these belong to rural areas.

Haris Gazdar, Pakistan's lead researcher for Leveraging Agriculture for Nutrition in South Asia (LANSA) and Director of CSSR, reported findings from the Women's Work in Agriculture and Nutrition (WWN) Survey 2015-16. The survey found that 46 percent of children between 0-3 months are stunted in rural Sindh. He said that this indicates that the battle against malnutrition is already lost when the child is born, and that women's health, work and well-being become central to child nutrition. The report also found that lack of education, household poverty and food insecurity are strongly associated with women's participation in agricultural work.

Participants then discussed how rights and well-being of women agricultural workers can be prioritized in legislation and policy.

Nafisa Shah, MNA and member of PPP, reiterated her commitment to represent women at the national level. She vowed to work jointly with other female parliamentarians present to take the issue of recognition of women agricultural workers to the Assembly floor. She said that labour policies and laws need to apply to female agricultural workers. She also emphasized forming women cooperatives at the state level for greater financial inclusion and political representation of women. She mentioned the need for strong policy instruments and political will to ensure landownership and land titles for women.

Tanzeela Qambrani, MPA from Sindh and member of the PPP, said that actions need to be taken to ensure that women can access and use credit, especially microfinance.

Mehnaz Akbar, MNA and member of PML-N, proposed strengthening the Women's Parliamentary Caucus so that problems of women agricultural workers (and their children) are discussed as a priority at the provincial and national levels. She also discussed sensitizing local governments so they are better able to address issues faced by women agricultural workers.

Khawar Mumtaz, Chairperson of NCSW, discussed the need to redefine women's work so all provinces can move towards counting and recognizing it at an official level. All participants agreed that there should be a forum or Task Force dedicated to taking these issues forward.