Press clippings about the SAAAW plenary workshop to feedback evidence-based working group recommendations, Lahore 11 June 2004

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METROPOLITAN

'Emancipation of women vital to development'

By Our Reporter

LAHORE, June 11: Punjab Human Rights and Women Development Minister Ashifa Riaz Fatyana has said women would get their rights by promoting understanding and awareness and not confrontation with men.

She was speaking at a one-day workshop on "Social audit of abuse against women" here on Friday.

The minister said gender discrimination always began at home when even the educated mothers discriminated between their sons and daughters. Parents wanted a son because they believed that he would support them. They don't pay attention to educate their daughters, she added.

Ms Fatyana said emancipation of women was necessary for social development as they comprised half the population. One-half of society was dragging the other which it had incapacitated due to lack of awareness of the economic realities.

She said the rights of women had been protected in the Holy Quran as well as the constitution. A rigorous imprisonment for three months had been prescribed for harassing a woman and six months for slapping her in an ordinance promulgated in 2002.

United Nations Gender Support Programme senior adviser Dr Socorro L. Reyes said gender violence was a global problem so was the failure to address it effectively through the formal criminal justice system. Very few cases of physical aggression, sexual abuse and harassment were reported, fewer still reached the courts and much fewer ended in convictions because the victims rarely used the formal mechanisms of police and courts for seeking justice because of high cost and delay by police and judicial authorities.

She said the UNDP recommended support for alternative dispute resolution mechanisms like conciliation committees and community supported mechanisms for tackling the gender violence problem in the countries where disadvantaged groups were reluctant to approach the courts due to case backlog, complex procedures, high cost of litigation, illiteracy and cultural barriers.

She said studies in Pakistan had revealed that nearly two-thirds of women had experienced some form of abuse, including beatings, acid throwing, burning and rape, but only a few cases had been reported to police. A recent survey by Social Abuse Against Women revealed that only 3 per cent victims contacted the police and only 2 per cent had ever gone to the courts. Women said men could get the cases filed by bribing the police but they did not have the money for the purpose.

She said a research had revealed that 60 per cent of women felt ashamed, embarrassed and humiliated while attending the courts, 80 per cent disadvantaged as litigants and 84 per cent humiliated by excessive staring and remarks in courts.

She supported the dispute resolution through the conciliation courts and Insaaf committees set up under the Local Government Ordinance. The informal jirga system had not worked for women because it had enforced seclusion and submission to men many of whom controlled them violently. Sindh High Court had banned all jirga trials in the province due to involvement of karo kari killings.

Dr Anne Cockroft said 95 per cent of 23,431 women, 8,102 elderly ladies and 1,572 interviewed by a research group had revealed that 95 per cent considered staring by women as abuse, 91 restriction on activity, 97 slapping and use of foul language. Mothers-in-law were also blamed for instigating violence against their daughters-in-law by some. Abuse often affected the family life.

Provincial Social Welfare and Women Development secretary Saeed Ahmad Khan said ensuring conviction of the culprits was more important for discouraging violence against women than the enhancement of punishment.

He said the government was taking steps for increasing employment opportunities for women in the public sector.

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Provincial Minister Ashifa Riaz Fatyana, Saeed Khan, Dr Socorro, Dr Anne and Ms. Roohi sitting on the stage at a seminar on 'problems faced by women' organised by the Women Development Department, Punjab – Staff Photo.

Abuses against women

Religious leaders intervention sought

BY OUR STAFF REPORTER

LAHORE—"Mechanisms within the local government system should provide for a remedy to let the women have a safe and acceptable place in the society, enabling them to report abuse and seek justice", the Minister for Women Development Mrs Ashifa Riaz Fatyana said Thursday. She was speaking as chief guest at the "workshop for feedback of policy recommendations from findings of the Social Audit of Abuse Against Women" organised by Community Information Empowerment and Training (CIET).

The Minister stressed the need for involving opinion leaders — religious and secular scholars — in effecting a change in social attitudes towards taking serious notice of abuses against women. "There is a need to convince other family members about the importance of the woman's work and income as a source of support for the whole family," maintained the Minister.

She underscored establishment of "centres where women can report abuses and look for acquiring skilled training and such things as micro-credit", adding, "economic empowerment of women must also include increase in their literacy and negotiation skills."

Dr Socorro L. Reyes, Senior Gender Adviser UNDP dilated upon the problems when cases of abuse are not reported — "only 3 per cent of the women had ever contacted the police and only 2 per cent had ever gone to the courts." This happens because the attitude of the police towards the affected party is highly discouraging. She pleaded for seeking the cooperation of the Musalihat Anjuman as people have confidence in such informal institutions in respect of resolving their disputes. Dr Reyes suggested: "the courts should refer settlement cases to the Musalihat Anjuman through the union Nazim."

The discussion at the workshop focused on economic, education and socio-cultural factors pertaining to abuse. Other issues highlighted on the occasion pertained to problems about reporting abuse, gender violence and alternative dispute resolution. Ms Naureen Naqvi, Dr Anne Cockcoft and Mr Saeed Ahmed Khan also addressed on the occasion.

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Provincial minister Ashufta Riaz, Dr Socorpo and other address a seminar held to highlight problems faced by women. —The News photo