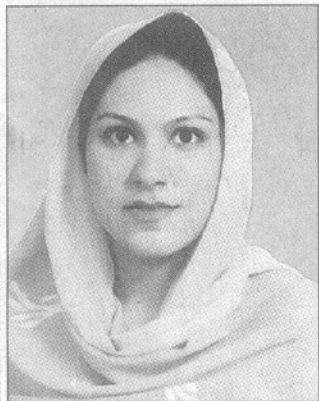


# Women empowerment: bridging the gap of gender inequality



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sition of human rights. A century ago women were often excluded from exercise of civil rights which many men enjoyed and many women never attained the status of full legal adults but now equality is conceivable.

Men across the world have come to terms with women exercising their recently acquired rights in the workplace, politics, and at home. However, the glaring inequalities still remain.

With reference to Pakistan, despite the fact that we have entered into a new era of globalization, advanced technology and high quality education, still the stereotypical thinking of gender biasness prevails in our society and this is not limited to one segment but unfortunately the mindset of all segments of our society. People still consider working women as rebellious and strong headed, forgetting the fact that the first muslim lady, wife of our Holy Prophet (P.B.U.H) was a

working woman too. This cultural and social attitude of our society discourages women to step into professional world and constitutes occupational segregation. Women in our society are supposed to be concentrated in the "feminine" professions such as nursing and teaching. However, women continue to make small inroads into non-traditional fields such as law, information and communication technology and computer science, and engineering, and there is evidence that employers are beginning to promote women more systematically and to introduce family-friendly policies in order to retain them. Women who choose non-traditional jobs can face special constraints in the workplace like isolation, limited access to mentoring and female role models, and sexual harassment.

In Pakistan, now working women are initiating willingly or unwillingly a process of desegregation at the work

place, but which might also influence the whole social and gender order of society. Furthermore, the entry of women into the labor market has fundamentally changed the status of these women, and it has changed existing prevailing concepts and expectations towards working women concerning their way of life, planning career choices and their status in family as well as in the society.

Today there is a pressing need to empower women economically and to create employment opportunities to enable them to survive, prosper and provide support for their families.

Women entrepreneurs do not operate in isolation. They work under the same macro, regulatory and institutional framework as their male counterparts in a free market mechanism in Pakistan. It is necessary to understand the gender biasness existing in our society which limits women's mobility, interactions, active economic

**B**y historical standards, there have been enormous gains in science, technology, knowledge, health, literacy, life expectancy, political participation. But perhaps none has been as dramatic and pervasive in its impact as women's gradual acqui-

# bridging the quality

participation and access to business development services.

Recent global statistics revealed that women continue to increase their share of managerial positions but the rate of progress is slow, uneven, and sometimes discouraging. Also they have to face barriers created by attitudinal prejudices in the workplace. Even in female-dominated sectors where there are more women managers, a disproportionate number of men rise to senior

positions. The rule of thumb is still: the higher up an organization's hierarchy, the fewer the women.

As far as women's share of managerial positions is concerned, the rate of progress is slow and uneven, with their share ranging between 20 and 40 percent in most of the countries.

Men are in the majority among managers, top executives, and higher levels of professional workers whilst

women are still concentrated in the lower categories of managerial positions. Male and female colleagues and customers do not automatically see women as equal to men. Women are required to work much harder than men to prove themselves, and sometimes they have to adapt to "male" working styles and attitudes more when necessary. The problem is compounded by employers' assumption that women, unlike men, are not able to devote their full time and energy to their jobs because of their family responsibilities. However, there is evidence to show that once women attain the upper levels of management, attitudes towards them are not much different to those

towards men.

The banking sector is also beginning to acknowledge that the "gender edge" that women managers can bring to organizations can increase sales and investor appeal. According to a study, an interesting trend in Wall Street is to improve efforts to recruit, train, promote and retain women in executive positions and narrow the gap between men and women executives' pay and power.

National Bank of Pakistan in this regard has also taken several initiatives to induct, train and promote women at managerial level. For that purpose according to the president of NBP more than 300 women have been hired by the bank to fill the managerial positions.