

Press Conference

Civil Society Organizations rejected World Bank gender report

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Islamabad: after expressing their serious concern, the civil society organizations have out rightly rejected the World Bank Pakistan Country Gender Assessment Report, released on May 5, 2006. They demanded the government not to endorse it. It was maintained in a crowded press conference here on Thursday at a local hotel. Dr. Saba Gul Khattak, SDPI, Dr. Rubina Sehgal, Actionaid Pakistan, Sarwar Bari, Pattan, and Arifa Mazhar , Sungi, jointly addressed the press confrence. They also called upon the political leaders to take notice of the report and pressurized the government to refrain from endorsing it.

They have stated several reasons for objecting the report.

They said that the World Bank is not an institution that premises its policies on a social protection and rights perspective to safeguard the interests of the poor and the vulnerable, rather, as a bank it is interested in lending money to the government to further indebt the country with stringent loans and to pursue policies that promote its' own agenda. Based on this, they questioned the legitimacy of the report prepared by the Bank, which, it claims would influence its' internal and the policies of the National government. They further said that it is beyond the Bank's mandate to make any policy recommendations to National Governments. Such initiatives could be used by the Bank to advise its internal policy but must not be endorsed by the Pakistani government.

Expressing their concern, they said that the process underlying the production of the report was a concern because the report does not reflect the recommendations and issues raised by participants of the World Bank initiated process of stakeholder involvement. For example, participants at the workshops consistently pointed out that the narrow geographic and sectoral focus of the report, i.e. health, education and family laws cannot constitute a comprehensive analysis of women's situation in Pakistan. The report is not representative of the country and not eligible to be called a country report. This report appears to make a mockery of Pakistani women's views, especially those who are deeply involved in and concerned about women's plight in Pakistan

They also strongly objected to the fact that there was a complete disconnect between the background papers authored by Pakistanis and the main report authored by World Bank staff in Washington DC. Hardly any of the issues raised by local authors have been incorporated in the Bank's assessment, thereby, stripping the report of any meaningful understanding of women's issues and policy initiatives required to bring positive change.

They asserted that the World Bank is absolving itself of responsibility for its role in the distorted development scene in Pakistan by focusing on negative cultural practices vis a vis women. Cultural practices do not exist in isolation and are articulated in newer ways and forms in response to existing and evolving economic, social, legal and political policies, they added. . The report fails to connect the perpetuation and exacerbation of misogynist cultural practices with increasing poverty and inequality that result from Bank inspired and motivated policies in Pakistan. The feminization of poverty is a direct result of policies such as the structural adjustment programs and the pursuit of mega projects. Women are the direct victims and survivors of these policies. The pres conference

was participated by the representatives from Actionaid Pakistan, Aurat Foundation (AF), Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP), Pattan, Potohar Organization for Development Advocacy (PODA), Rozan, SACHET, Sungi Development Foundation, Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI), The Network, Women Action Forum (WAF), Savera and Bedari. Ends.

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