

Press Release Notes

Meeting with Parliamentarians on “Proposed parliamentary caucus on Energy Transition in Pakistan”

Organizer: Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI) & Rural Development Policy Institute (RDPI), Islamabad

Islamabad, 4th August 2021, Serena Hotel Islamabad

Parliamentarians discussed the importance of a Green Parliamentary Caucus for combatting the climate crisis and making a way forward for the clean energy transition in Pakistan.

Mr. Abid Qaiyum Suleri, Executive Director, Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI), thanked all the parliamentarians for their positive interventions for a green parliamentary caucus and mentioned that such discussions on these topics eventually lead to fruitful results. Dr. Suleri mentioned that for the proposed parliamentary caucus, SDPI and RDPI can provide secretarial research support, policy briefs, and convene meetings at different forums. So, unless a solution is there, such meeting can continue. He also appreciated the role played by United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in the capacity building of the parliament and the recent initiative of the Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) with the British Council.

Dr. Hina Aslam, Research Fellow, Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI), Islamabad, welcomed all the panelists at the 2nd parliamentary caucus meeting on Clean Energy transition. She highlighted the need for a green parliamentary caucus to combat climate change and the energy crisis. Dr. Hina also mentioned that a positive response was received for the formulation of a caucus in the first meeting of parliamentarians which serves as the basis for this follow-up.

Mr. Badar Alam, Rural Development Policy Institute (RDPI), highlighted the impacts of climate change and the need for an energy transition in Pakistan. He mentioned that the issues of clean energy and climate change have become global urgencies due to changing weather patterns, droughts, floods, and threats to food security. While highlighting the best practices being observed across the world for the efficient functioning of parliamentary caucuses, he also highlighted the structure of the women parliamentary caucus and Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) task force that is already working in Pakistan and have passed several bills. During his discussion, he also mentioned the parliamentarian guide put forward by UNDP that identifies the role of and responsibilities of respective parliamentarians in a caucus. However, the caucus formulation can face critical challenges since the members come from different political backgrounds with each having a separate Agenda. This also poses problems for deciding a governance structure for proper functioning. Mr. Badar proposed that to overcome financial challenges, a working framework, and identifying objectives for the functioning of a caucus can be facilitated by SDPI and RDPI. Since parliamentarians already have shown a high level of commitment, the words need to be quantified into actions.

Ms. Rukhsana Naveed, Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry of Climate Change and member of National Assembly, mentioned that Pakistan has not made much progress on its SDGs due to lack of its implementation capabilities. Ms. Naveed mentioned that under SDG 12, she is working on a “Green stove” project. As opposed to incomplete burning of wood that results in environmental hazards particularly in rural areas, the fuel for these stoves is made up of base materials and has almost zero emissions. Further, these stoves are safer and readily available at a low price. While mentioning her views on unauthorized deforestation, she mentioned that most such areas are now covered under “protected areas” and legislation is now there to impose heavy fines on such activities.

Ms. Nafisa Shah, Member, National Assembly mentioned that for Pakistan, energy is a critical issue since around 50 million population do not have access to electricity. However, the relevant parliamentarians are well aware of such issues and this caucus should focus on the policy gaps that are present in the system rather than doing what is already being worked on. She further mentioned that a Non-governmental Organization (NGO) or a Civil Society Organization (CSO) cannot formulate a caucus and this has to be an internal parliament job or exercise. There is a need for well-defined leadership, structure, and pre-defined objectives for such collaboration. Organizations like SDPI and RDPI can assist in performing qualitative research and providing policy briefs on areas and policy gaps highlighted by the parliamentarians.

Ms. Syma Nadeem, Member of National Assembly and Convener SDG 7 mentioned that climate change and energy transition is interlinked to most of the SDGs and Pakistan has already put forward its targets for uptake of renewable energy through Alternate and Renewable Energy Policy (ARE) 2019. As per the policy, the share of renewables (other than Hydro) in Pakistan by 2030 will increase to around 30%. She further added that from the government end, RE is a priority, and work is being done on how to incentivizing the local market and mobilizing local finance.

Ms. Andleeb Abbass, Member, National Assembly mentioned that to gain a differential advantage a green parliamentary caucus should initially focus on three widely important goals. There are addressing what has been done and what needs to be done for bringing a change, identifying the external elements and stakeholders where caucus connects itself, and the financial model (budget) along with human resource required for establishing and working of the caucus.

Ms. Romina Khurshid Alam, Member, National Assembly mentioned that for strong evidence-based planning, Pakistan still lacks the availability of credible data sets along with authentic analysis on demand and consumption patterns of the country. Ms. Alam further mentioned that for the long-term sustainability of the caucus, it should have good institutional strength with properly defined goals for the short, medium, and long term. While mentioning that Pakistan lags behind other countries in bringing such initiatives, she also highlighted the possible role of think tanks and CSOs in building the technical capacity of the parliament and evidence-based policy formulation.

Ms. Rubina Khalid, Member, Senate of Pakistan mentioned that most of the climate change issues Pakistan is facing are due to human activities. Ms. Rubina particularly highlighted the illegal activities of the Timber mafia and that the actual accountability of such activities should be on people implementing the timber laws. She further highlighted the encroachment activities and illegal construction that are hindering the natural flow of water and other resources.

Ms. Shazia Sobia Aslam Soomro, Member, National Assembly highlighted the rapid increase in infrastructure buildup in Islamabad. She mentioned that a few years back Islamabad used to look greener, however, recently it has observed an increase in housing societies and large commercial buildings. Ms. Shazia further highlighted that tree and their environment-friendly nature should be analyzed before plantation. Some families of trees consume a large quantity of underground water thus leading to water scarcity in the region.

Mr. Sher Ali Arbab, Member, National assembly while highlighting the importance of caucus mentioned that for the effective working of a caucus, the parliamentarians need to show their interest since, without a proper drive from the government end, more such meetings will happen without any actual outcome. He further highlighted that Pakistan needs to have a caucus on climate change since impacts on food security, water scarcity, and energy crisis are issues on hand and there is no further room for political errors. Further highlighting the significance, Mr. Sher mentioned that a caucus has a proper scope and can take any debate on a top policy level.

Ms. Sitara Ayaz, Member, Senate of Pakistan highlighted the role of the provincial government in green caucuses. She mentioned that after the 18th amendment the rights are with provinces and hence such initiatives should be taken at a provincial level as well. She further mentioned that policy gaps in Pakistan are very unfortunate. Policies should be easily implementable and based on variations present within the country.

Mr. Faisal Javed, Member, Senate of Pakistan mentioned that previously there was a caucus on climate change which wasn't effective. Discussion on such initiatives does happen but unless there is an action plan and a destination, Pakistan will move aimlessly without any destination. He mentioned that the vision of Prime minister Imran Khan on Climate change is very clear and Pakistan has already taken a leap forward in this area. Efforts of Pakistan were appreciated by World Economic Forum and United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) provided Pakistan the opportunity to hold this year's World Environment Day. While highlighting the importance of a green parliamentary caucus, he mentioned that it needs to have three important features. First is to have a proper goal and objectives, second is to analyze where it wants to reach, and third is stirring the ministry for its implementation since a caucus alone can only give recommendations.

Ms. Aliya Hamza Malik, Member, National Assembly mentioned that ARE policy targets of Pakistan to achieve 30% energy through renewables are very ambitious and realistic. Pakistan is already being known across the globe due to its leadership in green diplomacy. Pakistan has initiated an ecosystem restoration fund and introduced a Green Euro Bond. She echoed the idea of formulation a green parliamentarian caucus and mentioned that such actions are being taken for the betterment of our future generations.

Ms. Shahida Rehmani, Member, National Assembly mentioned that the concept of climate change and clean energy transition is being hindered due to the role played by different mafias operating within the country. She further mentioned that new housing societies are being formulated across the country with illegal encroachments. Zigzag technologies are not being implemented and this would lead to further natural disasters.

Ms. Saira Bano, Member, National Assembly also highlighted the illegal activities and functioning of different mafias present within Pakistan. She mentioned that as per the best practices the newly designed airport was constructed far from the housing colonies but after its construction, the housing societies are starting to build near those areas. She further mentioned that in Sindh, subsidized housing schemes are being developed by destroying the agricultural fields.

Ms. Ammara, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) added that the parliamentary task force is being facilitated by UNDP. She further mentioned that based on their previous engagements, they are happy to facilitate any such initiatives.

Mr. Nadeem Ahmad, Policy Manager of Climate Change, Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) mentioned that climate change is a development priority in the UK for this year and the coming four years. In this year's Conference of Parties (COP), the delegation of Pakistan will be led by Prime Minister Imran Khan. Mr. Nadeem further mentioned that there is a campaign being hosted by the UK presidency with energy transition as the main theme. In that council, three ministerial sessions have been attended by Mr. Malik Amin Aslam. The purpose is to analyze how countries that want to move towards renewables can be supported. The UK along with other countries is pooling the money and countries like Pakistan will submit proposals for making a business case for the energy transition.

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