



MEETING WITH PARLIAMENTARIANS ON NEED FOR PARLIAMENTARY CAUCUS ON CLIMATE CHANGE

ISLAMABAD: Parliamentarians from different political parties joined together to discuss the importance of green parliamentary caucus for combating climate crisis and facilitate Pakistan in its transition to clean energy resources, in a meeting organized by Rural Development Policy Institute (RDPI) and Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI) on August 4, 2021.

The meeting was organized to facilitate the debate on the proposed Parliamentary Caucus for Energy Transition in Pakistan. Members of the proposed parliamentary caucus on clean energy agreed to continue consultations with all stakeholders for the formation of the caucus. They highlighted the need to explore clean and green sources of energy, keeping in view the best practices followed by different countries.

In her welcome note, Dr. Hina Aslam, Research Fellow at SDPI, Islamabad, referred to the positive response they received from all parliamentarians during the first meeting and spoke about how the overwhelming response generated in the first meeting led to holding the second meeting with a stronger interest in the formation of a green parliamentary caucus.

In his presentation, Mr. Badar Alam, Executive Director, RDPI, highlighted the impacts of climate change and made a case for energy transition in Pakistan. He explained the way clean energy and climate change had become global urgencies due to changing weather patterns, droughts, floods and threats to food security.

“Urgency of climate change cannot be over emphasized”, he said, while giving a brief overview of the caucuses and why these are formed. “The caucus is made up of a small group of people with similar interests. Secondly, what unites this group is its commitment to the cause regardless of the political affiliations of its members,” he added.

Mr. Alam also mentioned different caucuses working on various issues such as foreign policies and women’s parliamentary caucus, which has all female members of National Assembly as its members. There is also a task force for achieving sustainable development goals, while women’s parliamentary caucus has passed various bills. However, there are multiple challenges because members come from different parties and each of them has a different agenda and ideology, which is a major challenge.

“This caucus on energy transition and climate change can bring parliamentarians from across the political divide together because the energy and climate issues can cause harm to all of us. Each one of us would want to resolve these issues,” Mr. Alam emphasized.

While explaining different aspects of a caucus, right from its formation to its structure and its final outcome, he referred to the structure of women’s parliamentary caucus and Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) taskforce, which have already been working in



Pakistan and have passed several bills. He also outlined the best practices being observed across the world for efficient functioning of parliamentary caucuses.

During his presentation, Mr. Alam also touched upon other equally important aspects of the caucus formation including financial challenges, governance structure and mechanism behind the formation of a caucus. “For overcoming these issues, SDPI and RDPI are available as facilitators and providers of these services. But this transition cannot happen in Pakistan without the support of parliamentarians,” he said.

Following the presentation by Mr. Alam, Member National Assembly (MNA) Ms. Nafeesa Shah addressed the audience and said, “The initiative of caucus formation is primarily an initiative led by the parliamentarians. No NGO can promote creation of a caucus. It has to be an internal exercise because the creation of a caucus requires leadership and a set of rules and objectives framed by the parliamentarians themselves”.

“As members belonging to different parties we all have different objectives. What we require from SPDI is that each parliamentarian needs qualitative research every time. So, we get policy briefs that can really make the difference. But before that, the parliamentarians should be asked about their requirements.”

Ms. Shah mentioned that energy was an important issue for Pakistan. “Around 50 million people in Pakistan are without access to electricity and it presents each representative with a set of challenges and opportunities for exploring alternative sources of energy. But this is what parliamentarians have been doing. As far as energy is concerned, it is important to analyze what has already been done and achieved in the parliament,” she added.

Ms. Saima Nadeem, MNA and Convener of SDG 7, mentioned that climate change and energy transition were interlinked to most of the SDGs and Pakistan had 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 said that from the government’s perspective, Renewable Energy was a priority, and that the work was being done on incentivizing the local market and mobilizing local finance.

MNA Ms. Andleeb Abbas said that climate change was an issue of paramount importance. “My request to you is that if we have to make a caucus we need help in staying focused. I think we shouldn’t be reinventing the wheel. We shouldn’t be doing what has already been done. We need to identify major goals. We need to define three major widely important goals which the proposed caucus will achieve. We should highlight what is not being done and should add value to what is being done. We need to think what the external elements are and who the major stakeholders are and how the caucus connects itself with them. Finally, we need to talk about the required budget and human resource,” she said.



MNA Ms. Romina Khurshid Alam mentioned that for a 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. We should have properly defined short, medium and long term goals. While mentioning that Pakistan lags far behind other countries in taking 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.

Speaking on the occasion, Senator Rukhsana Naveed said there were many things that were being mentioned but the fact is that we haven't been able to meet minimum standards to achieve a healthier environment for all. Sharing the details of green stoves project that she is running, the senator said, "Waste can be reused as fuel after treatment. I have experimented by installing small units and we can install more at different places. These stoves have no poisonous emissions while the incomplete burning of wood causes premature deaths and diseases. These stoves are more economical and are environment friendly."

MNA Dr. Shazia Soomro said, "I think we have policies but the problem arises when it comes to the implementation of those policies". She also highlighted the rapid increase in infrastructure buildup in Islamabad, adding that a few years back Islamabad used to look greener, but recently the city has seen an increase in housing societies and large commercial buildings.

Ms. Soomro further suggested that those trees should be planted which are environment friendly 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 and plantation of those trees should be prohibited.

Highlighting the importance of caucus for energy transition, Mr. Sher Ali Arbab, MNA, mentioned that for the effective working of such a caucus, the parliamentarians need to nurture their interest in the subject at hand. Second most important thing in this regard, he said, was the willingness of the government. "We can have as many meetings we want but nothing positive will come out of it if the government does not support our initiative."

Supporting the idea of the caucus, he linked the issue of climate change with food security, water scarcity and energy crisis. The debate around climate change, he opined, had linkages with multiple related fields and therefore, there was no further room for political errors. Given the gravity of the situation, it is important to build forums where we can have this opportunity to debate complex issues and be aware of their potential policy implications. "A caucus, I think, is the right forum with a lot of scope when it comes to influencing the debate on a top policy level," Mr. Arbab added.



While agreeing with Mr. Arbab's suggestion to influence the debate at the top level, Senator Sitara Ayaz began her talk by highlighting the role of the provincial government in green caucuses. "The power to initiate debates and formulate policies has been devolved after the 18th amendment. Now the provinces have also some say in whatever policy is made at the top level," she said, adding that the rights were with provinces and hence such initiatives should be taken at the provincial level as well. She further mentioned that certain policy gaps in Pakistan were very unfortunate. "Policies should be easily implementable and be reflective of the situation present within the country."

Senator Faisal Javed also highlighted the importance of a green parliamentary caucus. "The proposed caucus should have three important features. First, to have a proper goal and objectives; second, the situation analysis; and third, it should be able to coordinate with the ministry for its implementation since a caucus alone can only give recommendations," he suggested.

The senator shared his observation about a similar caucus which couldn't work and argued that discussions on such initiatives do happen but it is all useless unless there is an action plan and a destination. He claimed that the vision of the incumbent government on climate change was very clear and Pakistan had already taken a leap forward in this area.

Ms. Aliya Hamza Malik, MNA, questioned the perception that policy targets of Pakistan to achieve 30% energy through renewable sources were very ambitious. "As far as I know Pakistan is already being appreciated across the globe for its leadership in green diplomacy. Pakistan has initiated an ecosystem restoration fund and introduced a Green Euro Bond," she said supporting the idea of a green caucus.

Appreciating the timeliness of the meeting, she said it was important to take it forward and extended her help in making it viable. "On my part, I consider it very important because the climate related issues have far reaching consequences," she added.

MNA Ms. Shahida Rehmani underlined the danger posed by various powerful mafias operating in the country. "These mafias have vested interests which get threatened when we talk about climate change issues or the transition to renewable energy sources," she said. She further mentioned that new housing societies were being built across the country through land encroachment. "If we fail to put an end to these criminal activities, we should better be prepared to face more natural disasters and calamities."

Endorsing Ms. Rehmani's views, Ms. Saira Bano, another MNA, also highlighted the illegal activities of different mafias operating in Pakistan. She mentioned that as per the best practices the newly designed airport was constructed far from the housing colonies but after its construction we can see the mushroom growth of housing societies around the new airport. She further mentioned that in Sindh, subsidized housing schemes were being developed by destroying the agricultural fields and expressed her concern over it.



Ms. Ammara Durrani, who was representing United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), said that the parliamentary task force was being facilitated by UNDP. She further said that based on their previous engagements, they were happy to facilitate any such initiatives in the future.

Mr. Nadeem Ahmad, Policy Manager of Climate Change, Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) mentioned that climate change was a development priority in the UK for the coming four years. In the ongoing year's Conference of Parties, the delegation of Pakistan will be led by Prime Minister Imran Khan, he said.

Mr. Ahmad further mentioned that there was 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," he said.

In the end, Mr. Abid Qaiyum Suleri, Executive Director, 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 said that for the proposed parliamentary caucus, SDPI and RDPI could provide secretarial research support, policy briefs and convene meetings at different forums. So, unless a solution is there, such meetings can continue, he opined.

He also appreciated the role played by UNDP in the capacity building of the parliament and the recent initiative of the FCDO with the British Council.