



Produced and Published By:  
AGEHI Resource Centre SACHET - Pakistan  
Baber Centre Park Road, F-8 Markaz Islamabad  
Tel: 051-2254933, 2256799, Fax: 051-2255053, Website: [www.sachet.org.pk](http://www.sachet.org.pk)

# Policy Dialogue

## Alternative Perspectives on Certain Traditional / Customary Practices Influencing Health & Population

By  
Dr. Rakhshinda Perveen  
AGEHI Resource Centre SACHET - PAKISTAN



*Engendering Development*

Launched under  
"Alternative Perspectives on Population and Health - Initiative 2008"

## AGEHI Resource Centre

*Engendering Development*

AGEHI (Advocates of Gender Education & Health Information) itself is an Urdu word bearing meanings like knowledge, Awareness, Perception and Insight. The objective of AGEHI is to advocate for Gender Sensitization, Education and Health promotion by disseminating information. AGEHI supports policy and social communication and advocacy on gender issues through a broad range of activities. AGEHI provides technical assistance to programs of SACHET besides managing SACHET'S official website, AGEHI theater group, FADAN (Fight Against Dowry Advocacy Network) and Dosti Youth Advocacy Network.

Editor's Note: 36 Comments

A12 | Daily Times

Sunday, October 11, 2009

## Dowry is a tradition, no need to ban it, decrees CII

**LAHORE:** The Council of Islamic Ideology (CII) has suggested to the government that there is no need to ban dowry because it is tradition, Dawn News reported on Saturday. The CII said in its latest report that there was no need to legislate against the dowry because it was a social tradition, and legislation would just open more ways for police to take bribes. The council asked the government to legally define the terms Vani and Swara and propose legislation against them. These are the traditions practiced in rural and tribal areas in which women are married against their will, to resolve disputes. It also suggested the names of both parents be mentioned on official documents. **DAILY TIMES MONITOR**

The News International, Wednesday, October 8, 2008

-WORLD 11

## 3-year old girl appointed as Nepal's living goddess

KATMANDU: Hindu and Buddhist priests chanted sacred hymns and cascaded flowers and grains of rice over a 3-year-old girl who was appointed a living goddess in Nepal on Tuesday.

Wrapped in red silk and adorned with red flowers in her hair, Matani Shakya received approval from the priests and President Ram Baran Yadav in a centuries-old tradition with deep ties to Nepal's monarchy, which was abolished in May.

The new "kumari" or living goddess, was carried from her parents' home to an ancient palatial temple in the heart of the Nepali capital, Katmandu, where she will live until she reaches puberty and loses her divine status. She will be worshipped by Hindus and Buddhists as an incarnation of the powerful Hindu deity Taleju.

A panel of judges conducted a series of ancient ceremonies to select the goddess from several 2- to 4-year-old girls who are all members of the impoverished Shakya goldsmith caste.

The judges read the candi-



**Matani Shakya, who was appointed as 'kumari,' or living goddess in Nepal, looks on as farewell rituals are performed before taking her to Kumari House in Kathmandu on Tuesday. — AP**

dates' horoscopes and check each one for physical imperfections. The living goddess must have perfect hair, eyes, teeth and skin with no scars, and should not be afraid of the dark.

As a final test, the living goddess must spend a night alone in a room among the heads of ritually slaughtered goats and buffaloes without showing fear.

Having passed all the tests, the child will stay in almost complete isolation at the temple and will be allowed to return to her family only at the onset of menstruation when a new goddess will be named to replace her.

"I feel a bit sad, but since my child has become a living goddess I feel proud," said her father Pratap Man Shakya.

During her time as a goddess, she will always wear red, pin up her hair in topknots, and have a "third eye" painted on her forehead.

Devotees touch the girls' feet with their foreheads, the highest sign of respect among Hindus in Nepal. During religious festivals the goddesses are wheeled around on a chariot pulled by devotees. Critics say the tradition violates both international and Nepalese laws on child rights. — AP

INTERNATIONAL

# THE NEWS

Saturday

August 23, 2008

## 5 women buried alive in name of honour

Rana Khana

ISLAMABAD: Three teenage girls along with their two close elderly relatives were shot at before burying them alive in a desert of Balochistan by their tribesmen in the name of honour.

The shocking reports of this heinous incident reaching the capital from different quarters revealed that the girls studying in classes 10 to 12 intended to marry men of their choice through a civil court by defying the centuries-old tribal traditions. When the feuding elders of Umrani tribe came to know about the intentions of these girls to appear before a local court, they picked them up from their homes along with two of their elderly women relatives. The crying girls were pushed into official cars and driven to a deserted area. There they were pushed out of the cars, made to stand in a square and valleys of their first at them.

As the bleeding girls fell on the sand, the tribesmen dragged them into a nearby ditch and levelled it with earth and stones before the girls could breathe their last. As the

Continued on Page 9

## 5 women buried alive in name of honour

Continued from Page 1

two shocked elderly women tried to rescue the hapless girls, they too were gunned down and buried in the same manner. The killers after burying these women returned to their tribe like conquerors without any action against them. The step taken was to send a loud message to rest of the tribe girls.

Rather of these girls lodged an FIR with the police against his own brother, who was said to be the architect of this whole crime. But after some family pressure he withdrew the case and so the blood of those girls was forgiven in the name of centuries old tradition, which does not allow any girl of the tribe to contract marriage of her choice.

Meanwhile, the International Human Rights Watch has accused Abdul Sattar Umrani, the younger brother of PPP Housing Minister in Balochistan Government Mir Sadiq Umrani of being directly responsible for this shocking act of barbarism.

The Housing Minister, Mir Muhammad Sadiq Umrani, confirmed to The News on phone that this was true that three girls and two other women were buried alive by men of the Umrani clan. But he strongly denied that his brother

had to do anything with this act. He claimed that these girls were actually buried alive by their uncle — Sattar Fatah Mohammad Umrani — against whom even an FIR was lodged with local police. But the FIR was later withdrawn by the father of these girls, after he was put under pressure by those who had buried his daughters alive in the desert.

He said the alleged killer Sattar Fatah Mohammad was his political enemy since 1985 and his brother Abdul Sattar Umrani was being maligning only to settle political scores otherwise everybody knew in the area as to who had buried the women alive in the desert. He said he or his brother could not think of doing such kind of act as he was the product of a democratic culture and had paid a heavy price for the same.

Meanwhile, the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) has condemned the killing of five women, including two minors, who were buried alive for having decided to marry men of their choice. According to information received, the five women were Patricia, wife of Umrani Ali Umrani, Jaurat Bibi, wife of Qaiser Khan, Purnia, daughter of Alta Mohammad Umrani, and two other girls

aged between 16 to 18 years. They were at the house of Chundio at Babu Kot village and to leave for a civil court at Usta Mohammad, district Jhalandhar, so that three of the girls could marry the men of their choice. Their decision to have marriage in court was the result of several days of discussions with the elders of the tribe who refused them permission to marry. The names of two younger girls were not ascertained because of strong control of tribal leaders in the area.

As the news of their plans leaked out, Abdul Sattar Umrani, a brother of the minister, came with more than six persons and abducted them at gunpoint. They were taken in a Land Cruiser jeep, bearing a registration number plate of the Balochistan Government, to another remote area, Nusi Abadi, in the vicinity of Babu Kot. After reaching the deserted area of Nusi Abadi, Abdul Sattar Umrani and his six companions took the three younger women out of the jeep and beat them up before allegedly opening fire at them with their guns. The girls were actively injured but were still alive at that moment. Sattar Umrani and his accomplices buried them into a wide ditch and covered them with earth and stones. The two other women were the next of Purnia and the

other, the mother of one minor. When they protested and tried to stop the burial of the minors that were plainly alive, the attackers were so angry that they also pushed them into the ditch and buried all alive. After completing the burial, they fired several shots in the air so that no one would come close to them.

The FIDH requested the Government of Pakistan to conduct a thorough investigation, arrest the perpetrators, try them before an independent tribunal and guarantee their right to a fair trial.

The FIDH said it supports the actions of its affiliated member, the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRC) in favour of women's rights and calls on the authorities of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan to take urgent and concrete measures to end these medieval practices which violate the most basic fundamental rights.

"It is intolerable that heinous crimes like this continue to be perpetrated with impunity in Pakistan. Each year, women of all ages are brutally murdered in the name of honour. The Pakistani authorities must act immediately to ensure that officials are finally prosecuted and tried, and that such crimes will never recur," said Sadique Durrani, FIDH president.



## Dowry: girl goes through hell

By Our Correspondent

SIALKOT, March 3: A married woman was beaten unconscious by her in-laws as punishment for bringing dowry much less to their expectations in Glotiyaan Khurd village, Daska tehsil.

Reports said Shumaila Bibi had married to Muhammad Nawaz about six years ago. From the very onset, quarrelling and torturing over the dowry issue had been her fate. On Monday, Nawaz, his mother Rasheeda Bibi, sister Naeema and brother Shabbir booted her away out of the house after subjecting her to severe torture.

After she fell unconscious, the in-laws threw her in a nearby field. She was rushed to the Daska THQ Hospital in a critical condition.

Sadar police have registered a case against the accused in-laws of the victim.

# Policy Dialogue

## **Alternative Perspectives on Certain Traditional / Customary Practices Influencing Health & Population**

By  
Dr. Rakhshinda Perveen  
AGEHI Resource Centre SACHET - PAKISTAN



*Engendering Development*

---

**Launched under  
“Alternative Perspectives on Population and Health - Initiative 2008”**

The Charter of the United Nations includes among its basic principles the achievement of international cooperation in promoting and encouraging respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language or religion (Art. 1, para.3).

Traditional cultural practices reflect values and beliefs held by members of a community for periods often spanning generations. Every social grouping in the world has specific traditional cultural practices and beliefs, some of which are beneficial to all members, while others are harmful to a specific group, such as women. These harmful traditional practices include female genital mutilation (FGM); forced feeding of women; early marriage; the various taboos or practices which prevent women from controlling their own fertility; nutritional taboos and traditional birth practices; son preference and its implications for the status of the girl child; female infanticide; early pregnancy; and dowry price. Despite their harmful nature and their violation of international human rights laws, such practices persist because they are not questioned and take on an aura of morality in the eyes of those practicing them.

The international community has become aware of the need to achieve equality between the sexes and of the fact that an equitable society cannot be attained if fundamental human rights of half of human society, i.e. women, continue to be denied and violated. However, the bleak reality is that the harmful traditional practices focused on in this Fact Sheet have been performed for male benefit. Female sexual control by men, and the economic and political subordination of women, perpetuate the inferior status of women and inhibit structural and attitudinal changes necessary to eliminate gender inequality.

A number of reasons are given for the persistence of traditional practices detrimental to the health and status of women, including the fact that, in the past, neither the Governments concerned nor the international community challenged the sinister implications of such practices, which violate the rights to health, life, dignity and personal integrity. The international community remained wary about treating these issues as a deserving subject for international and national scrutiny and action. The harmful traditional practices have consequences of the value placed on women and the girl child by society. They persist in an environment where women and the girl child have unequal access to education, wealth, health and employment.

## Disclaimer

The views expressed in this report are those of the speakers, discussants and participants; and do not essentially reflect or endorse the policy, principles, values, practices and outlook of SACHET Pakistan.

## Report Team

Concept, Research & Editor in Chief: **Dr. Rakhshinda Perveen**

Policy Dialogue Organizers:

**Anis Khatoon, Ahsan Kamal, Himayun Rana**

**Rizwan Latif, Touquir Abbasi & Zubair Rana**

Photography & IT support:

**Amir Shahzad**

Report Coordination:

**Mr. Amin Muhammad & Ms. Zartash Moomi**

Documentation & technical review of the Policy Dialogue:

**Mr. Arshed H Bhatti**

## Acknowledgements

AGEHI extends a sincere most thanks to all the friends and allies in media, Citizens sector and academia for encouraging us and translating the dream of doing dialogues on essential development issues outside the technical frameworks of programs and projects.

## Table of Contents

## Page No.

<b>Acronyms &amp; abbreviations</b>	I
<b>Part I Fourth Policy Dialogue</b>	
<b>Section 1:</b> The context and the background of this dialogue	1
<b>Section 2:</b> Why is understanding on alternatives practices on health & population important?	3
<b>Section 3:</b> The expected output of the dialogue	5
<b>Section 4:</b> Summary of the proceedings	6-15
<b>Section 5:</b> Action points for way forward	16
<b>Annexure</b>	
Annex – I: A brief note on the panelist and the chair of The Dialogue	19
Annex – II: List of the Participants of the Dialogue	21
Annex – III: Programme & Agenda of the Dialogue	22
Annex – IV: Media coverage of the Dialogue	23-26
<b>Part II Demystifying gender issues in Pakistani context</b>	29-33

## Acronyms & Abbreviations

<b>AGEHI</b>	Advocates of Gender Education and Health Information
<b>DoSTI</b>	Dare to Sensitize Train and Inform
<b>FAD</b>	Fight Against Dowry
<b>FADAN</b>	Fight Against Dowry Advocacy Network
<b>FPAP</b>	Family Planning Association of Pakistan
<b>FHI</b>	Family Health Organization
<b>ICPD</b>	International Conference on Population and Development
<b>NGO</b>	Non Governmental Organization
<b>PIMS</b>	Pakistan Institute of Medical Services
<b>SACHET</b>	Society for the Advancement of Community, Health, Education and Training
<b>UNRO</b>	United Nations Resident Office
<b>WHO</b>	World Health Organization
<b>YAN</b>	Youth Advocacy Network

## From the Editor's Desk

AGEHI Resource Centre is venturing to demystify some of the essential challenges in the social sector of Pakistan through informed and independent conversations. In 2007, we conceptualized the policy dialogue series on issues of health and population in the peculiar context of Pakistan under the theme "alternative perspectives". The encouragement (mostly non-financial) that this initiative received, revitalized AGEHI team and the initiative continued.

The current report is outcome of one such effort. It is divided into two parts; the first part contains alternative perspectives as articulated by some leading voices about certain abuses and violent practices against women, girls and the powerless which are practiced and perpetuated in the name of culture and tradition. The irony is that these cages in the name of care are socially endorsed for the sake of (male constructed, flawed and anachronistic notion of) honour. Eventually, such subtle and obvious expressions of violence have an impact on the health and happiness of a society.

The second part contains a selection of some of our earlier work produced from the forum of AGEHI Resource Centre, on issues of gender based violence and discrimination. The idea is to connect the diverse spectrum of our readers (from policy makers to nameless, faceless but interested and concerned citizens) with the realities at the ground and compulsions at higher levels of decision making.

Alternative Perspectives is a modest effort to inform the authorities and experts on social sector development specially health and population that until and unless attentive listening is not afforded to the real voices of concerned communities, their actual needs will not be determining the standard operating procedures and visible and genuine progress would not be possible.

Glossy reports, immaculate English, impressive data, contemporary jargons, fashionable slogans will only embody disingenuous promises that would not lead us anywhere, as they have not to-date.

Wishing you happy reading and practical thinking!

**Dr. Rakhshinda Perveen**  
8th October 2008



# Part I

## Fourth Policy Dialogue

### **Section 1**

#### **The context and the background of this dialogue**

The Society for the Advancement of Community, Health, Education and Training (SACHET) as a non-government welfare and development organization seeks to make meaningful and lasting interventions in areas central to the progress of human development, which encompasses different dimensions of socio-economic progress.

Two key elements that have the greatest bearing on human development, socio-economic progress and personal fulfillment of individual wo/men - particularly in a developing country like Pakistan - are popular knowledge about and practices of health and population. The knowledge and practices have a symbiotic relationship: both contribute to each other, and thereby both can inform, refine as well as corrupt each other. That is, flawed knowledge can lead to malpractices; and unhealthy practices can generate inadequate and wrong knowledge.

All knowledge is product of an intriguing interplay of observation, curiosity, experience, speculation, assumptions and limitation of human faculties and capacities in particular social and cultural settings. The human limitations keep changing with progress in collective knowledge and individual access to such knowledge.

The sharing of knowledge is perhaps the best way to correct a body of (individual or collective) knowledge as well as to regenerate and disseminate the right knowledge. This is the spirit with which SACHET set up its knowledge generation and knowledge sharing wing AGEHI (Advocates of Gender, Education and Health Information) in 2000.

AGEHI is Urdu word for knowledge, awareness, perception and insight. The objective of AGEHI is to advocate for gender sensitization, education and health promotion by disseminating technically exact and culturally sensitive information in a sensible manner. In this pursuit, AGEHI supports policy and social communication and advocacy on gender issues through a broad range of activities.

In line with its mandate, AGEHI set out to hold a series of interactive dialogues in earlier 2008, on alternative practices in health and population. The first dialogue was held on 12 February 2008, at national day for women, on the subject of 'understanding adolescent and youth reproductive health issues in Pakistani context'.

The second dialogue was on the subject of how to end dowry, which was in line with SACHET's Fight Against Dowry (FAD) campaign. The third dialogue was in end June, near the international population day (11th July) with a purpose to inform the forthcoming health policy.

On 23<sup>rd</sup> September, SACHET held its fourth dialogue on "alternative practices on certain traditional customary practices influencing health and population". This report is built upon the discussions, deliberations, sharing and reflections of the dialogue.

---

## Section 2

### Why is understanding on alternatives practices on health & population important?

In any social setting and life of a society, different streams of practices run parallel to each other. These practices are about the way we understand, live, protect, promote as well as risk our lives, knowingly or inadvertently. In pre-historic times, with primitive means of communication and interaction, such parallels were equal the number of tribes. Gradually, with maturing of civilizations and advancement of communication, people started sharing what they knew – right or wrong – and what they were curious about. This was beginning of a dialogue between diverse practices and perspectives. From this must have sprung the endeavour of research which caused the generation of more and more exact knowledge in due course.

Although today the world has become very complex, and the knowledge is very advanced, but it seems the access to such knowledge and its benefits have a class act. People with right education, resources, and affordability benefit more than those who do not have the entitlements like education, access and ability to interpret and see through the jargonized and technologically wrapped information.

In such asymmetry, the power relations in a family, group and society - which are exercised through culture, custom, tradition and law - also come to play their role. That is, the more powerful in specific familial, cultural, social, legal and or political setting become less at risk, and the less powerful – or the powerless - are more exposed to the hazards of ignorance and vagaries of anachronistic practices related to health of an individual. In Pakistan, women, young and the illiterate experience more disadvantage.

Since alternative and parallel practices tend to benefit different persons differently, and since all alternative practices are neither beneficial nor harmful, it is necessary that there is a platform where we can talk about them; challenge what is harmful; refine, what is beneficial, and thus contribute to democratization of knowledge to ensue equality of access and equity of its benefits and positive impact.

This is the very urge to help understanding what is misunderstood, and what needs to be challenged for reform from within that we held this dialogue. We believe that the mainstream (the scientific, evidence based and technically exact) and the side-stream (alternates that influence common practices) of knowledge must interact and cross over to produce common good that can reduce hazards and increase benefits, democratically, justly and freely.

In our view, education and information sharing in health and population are the measures which have the potential to benefit the maximum number with minimum disagreement, therefore we should premise our development and progress efforts in this equation. That's what AGEHI stands for, that is what we strive to do; and hence this dialogue.

---

### **Section 3**

#### **The expected outputs of the dialogue**

The convening of the dialogue envisaged the following six expected outputs:

- 1) To provide different voices & divergent views amiable platform for interaction;
  - 2) To look at the alternatives practices in health and population that matter for the good or disadvantage of individuals, particularly young and child bearing women;
  - 3) To help challenge the ignorant & anachronistic practices in health and population;
  - 4) To bring the experts, policy makers, practitioners and common persons on an inclusive and interactive platform;
  - 5) To record & disseminate the results of the deliberations of this dialogue through mass and alternate media; and,
  - 6) To offer recommendations to policy makers, practitioners/ health service providers and media.
-

#### Section 4

### Summary of the proceedings

The proceedings of the dialogue started with recitation from Holy Quran, followed by a welcome note by Dr. Rakhshinda Perveen. She announced and elaborated the topic of the dialogue viz. "Alternative Perspective on Certain Traditional/ Customary Practices Influencing Health & Population of Society.

She shared with the participants that AGEHI had taken the Alternative Perspectives Initiative as a passion with the hope to receive intellectual and moral support of active players and partners in the development sector. She highlighted the importance of offering an interactive platform to alternative perspectives that matter and directly influence the health and happiness of our society and country.

She underscored that SACHET strongly believed and tried its utmost to practice culturally appropriate communication that was socially accepted, scientifically exact and gender sensitive. This obviously being a tall order, SACHET's biggest challenges was to choose between the right answers and honest answers. However, in the course of deliberations, it was hoped that this very initiative would initiate series of dialogues among all those who matter and who could make difference by giving them the courage to articulate empathetic alternative choices for the communities who needed easy access to information and services in the areas of health and population, she said.

She then welcomed the panelists and thanked the participants who joined the 4th policy dialogue at SACHET gallery.

Dr. Rakhshinda Perveen setting the context of the dialogue, briefly introduced SACHET, which was set up as non-profit voluntary organization in May 1999, to work in the fields of gender, education, health, advocacy, and training; with main emphasis on advocacy on social health combined with service delivery in basic health needs of the disadvantaged persons.

In her opening presentation, she said that there was reason, not rationality behind AGEHI's initiative of dialogue on alternative perspective. She said there were by default unequal relations between those who were taking advocacy initiatives and between those who were funding them. The initiatives mostly were muffled in the name of safety first and ensuing technical barriers. Thus those who dared to dream were made to appear like caged crocodiles and

alternatives were made to look like unrealistic urges. Citing the advancements in clinical, medicinal and health science, she said there was need for scientifically exact, socially acceptable, culturally appropriate and gender sensitive interventions.

She spoke about various customary practices that influence health and population in a society. She gave examples how women in the name of culture and tradition were denied their femininity and the males tried to control women and their sexuality as may be evident by the ritual of making women ugly in different tribes across the globe.



She said after the ICPD 1994, human rights perspective was introduced and mainstreamed in the development thinking, and new concerns were brought under the umbrella of population and health. This was the time when culture was addressed from the perspective of human rights and cultural critique surfaced. She mentioned three aspects in this regard viz. legitimacy, coherence and cultural critique. The cultural critique, she informed sought its legitimacy from the premise of equality of freedom and that personal freedom had its own value, that freedom should not be taken as relative freedom where some persons enjoyed more freedom than others.



She said the real struggle was to discern between the right and the honest answers, and search for alternative perspectives was an attempt to explore the level of courage among us if not the valid responses.



She reminded the participants of the objectives of the dialogue and expected outcomes; which have been recorded in the previous sections of this report.

The participants were shown a short documentary about SACHET, its rationale of putting emphasis on gender and poverty; and the genesis of its Youth Advocacy Network (YAN)<sup>7</sup> that was launched in 2003, along with a highlight of some of its theatre based advocacy activities and events.

Before handing over to the Chair, Kishwar Naheed, Dr. Rakhshinda Perveen commented that an alternative perspective was a reality and reflection on it was an attempt to explore the validity of the alternative. This, she said required courage and consistency.

Quoting the nobel laureate, Amrtya Sen, Dr. Rakhshinda said that that was value in personal freedom and it was very important that there was no discrimination in freedom as a right. She said the recognition of personal freedom as every one's right will make our national policies and local practices pro-people, as against their being pro traditions and anti-women.

Kishwar Naheed, the famous writer, poet and activist introduced the panelist (see Annex I), and invited Mr. Rauf Klasra to share his views. The chair floated the question that how we could bring change in our society and how we may find solutions to our problems!

Mr. Rauf Kalsara speaking candidly shared his views on the practice of dowry highlighting how this practice was pro-men, and how it disfavoured our near and dear women.

Sharing his personal experience, he stated that dowry to our sisters had an ulterior motive of not parting with the family property in the form of sisters' share which was their legal right and it had religious endorsement, albeit the tradition and practice tended to work at cross purpose. He said he believed the practice and institution of dowry was perpetuated for our own convenience.

To save and serve men's power interests in the economic and political domain, they devise emotional and symbolic tactics to exploit women's rights and privileges in the name of sacrifice, he said.

He related Benazir Bhutto's assassination an extension of this male dominated attitude, from the hands of the powers that were. He said feudal system still existed and had strong social roots which would not easily permit the agents of change to operate, assert and succeed; particularly when they happen to be women.

Due to illiteracy people were practicing and promoting those cultural practices which were not acceptable on civilized and rights based parameters. He said that the educated people were at the forefront in promoting and consolidating such exclusive practices, and they had erected strong and solid cultural barriers in brazen violation of inalienable constitutional and human rights in Pakistan.

In this regard, according to him, media was the best source to bring change in our society and media was doing its best but not as freely and fearlessly as it was apparently perceived by common people. He narrated the background hazards of reporting courageously on the incident who had dared to express their desire and freedom.



From left to right: Dr. Rakhshinda Perveen, Mr. Fayaz Baqir, Ms. Kishwar Naheed, Prof. Dr. Syeda Batool Mazhar, Mr. Rauf Kalsara

He said subsequent to the murder of Saima Waheed, a few years back in the office of Asma Jehangir, when a resolution was moved in the Senate, a majority had opposed it. But today, a majority was on the other side, when a similar resolution was moved in the Senate over the live burial of women in Balochistan.

Mr. Fayaz Baqir said that there was problem with the mainstream also, which manifested itself in as basic things as provision of clean drinking water, education and health. He said the system was so porous that it did not have the absorption capacity of meager funds. Our government was not spending budget in health and education sector properly, and this was the main reason that our institutions were not functional and not performing in a responsive and efficient

manner. In our country 90% of diseases prevailed due to contaminated water and nobody was concerned about it. He added that, we as a nation were not serious and sensitive towards our problems. He said we were unable to spend what was available with the government, and in the wake of that asking for donors' money was no less than a mockery of the self.

He said we needed to develop our perspectives and opinions based on research and observation, not what others told us.

He said the men in the name of tribal, traditional and custom did not have a consistent stance. There was evidence that they would ignore tribal values and traditional practices when it suited them, and they would ignore the dispensation of justice and rights based distribution of resources and privileges to women, when it did not suit them.

He said the raison d'être of the institution and practice of Jirga was to facilitate peace and dispense justice. But now a days, Jirga was instrumental in denying rights, awarding punishments, and contributing to conflicts.

Punishment and death were not solutions to anything, he said. Quoting Bertrand Russell, he said flexibility on one's stance was indication of one's knowledge, as the famous philosopher had said, "I won't die for my ideas because I may be wrong!"

Concluding his comment, he said we need to institutionalize and practice democracy in every day life; but, he warned, democracy was not merely an embodiment of elections, parliament and a government. It was actually the encouraged presence of difference of opinion in the face of voice of the majority.

Dr. Batool Mazhar, said that from her experience she had felt that we were people with few sources of fulfillment and the best satisfaction we derived from producing more and more children.

Recalling from her experiences, she said that we lived in a society practicing and following very old, invalid and archaic practices in the name of tradition. Our people, especially women were the most marginalized segment in our society and were not aware of their health needs. During their pregnancy, women were made to



Ms. Kishwar Naheed, Prof. Dr. Syeda Batool Mazhar

suffer both in the name of tradition and by their own ignorance as well. She said during their pregnancy they were denied a balanced diet because of the notions of thanda and garam (hot and cold affects of certain edibles).

After the panelists shared their views, participants were shown documentary Fight Against Dowry (FAD). Dr. Rakhshinda spoke on how dowry related violence was a development issue but ignored by the majority of development partners and practitioners. She said dowry was a culturally constructed violence against women.

#### Excerpts from FAD

*"I think that this whole dowry business is a terrible curse the poor and the middle class put themselves into all kinds of hot days, they borrow money and then inbound age for the rest of their life to pay for the marriage, especially of their daughters."*



Dr. Nafees Sadiq (United Nations)

*"This reduces also the status of the girl, the value of the girl in the family is further reduce, I mean so parents don't want to have girl because this is an added burden for them. Country cannot progress unless you know girls & women in a society have equal rights to boys & men, country needs all of its population to participate equally without discrimination".*

*"There is no way that any reasonable person will support the dowry demand specially violence associated with dowry. There are different modes of violence like burning of the women but the parents of the bride groom can play very important role to protect the bride. Further our legislators should take measures against this-dowry and related violence"*



Dr. Mehtab Karim  
Agha Khan University Karachi



In the documentary the youth expressed that dowry was very harmful and avoidable custom of our society and there were instances of dowry related killings in the garb of stove-explosions that allegedly burnt brides, who had brought less or insufficient dowry, to death.

The Chair said that it was complex issue and had various layers and contours to it. It was deeply embedded in our society and psyche, and several elements were intermixed under the banner of dowry.

Ms. Kishwar Naheed shared her valuable and personal observations which spoke volumes about the plight of women, and the sub human conditions they were forced to live in. Their conditions had direct bearing on their reproductive health, reproductive choices, physical and mental well being.



L to R: Dr. Rakshinda Perveen, Mr. Fayaz Baqir, Ms. Kishwar Naheed

She narrated a story each from the length and breadth of the country, starting from Turbat where women were suffering from loss of fertility because of the unhygienic practices during their menstruation cycle. In Tharparkar, women were drinking alum-cleaned water which was causing corrosion of their denture and bones.

In Kohat, Hangu, and Lassbella there was custom whereby the newly wed was required to bring along 200 suits. In Loralai, because of valvar, women could only marry their cousins. In Rajun Pur, honor killing was order of the day because of property considerations; and in Mianwali, Eesa Khel and Moosa Khel, police was helpless as tribal codes reined supreme.

She said women are not allowed the same rights over their bodies as men had enjoyed for centuries and generations. Recounting her personal experience, she narrated how her educated and enlightened colleagues and friends had reacted to her poem "farewell to uterus".

She said when this poem was published only a few people appreciated the agonizing denial of right to choose behind it; and a majority dubbed it as vulgar and obscene.

After Chair's comments, the floor was opened for participants. Below is a summation of the interaction and reflections.

#### **Dr. Naseer Nizamani - FHI Pakistan**

All traditions are not bad; some are beneficial also. But we never promote our good traditions. For example exclusive breast feeding for six months is a good tradition and it is beneficial for the health of both mother and her child. Therefore, we need to highlight the alternatives which were working and had proven benefits. We must take initiative at our own behalf and our struggle can bring change in our society.

#### **Mr. Zulqarnain - ROZAN**

We never talk openly and publicly about our problems. We think we don't need to discuss our problems. There are misconceptions in our society and still people believe in them due to lack of education and lack of awareness. We must take this initiative from our homes then we will be able to bring change in our society.

#### **Dr. Syed Rizwan Ali - PLAN Pakistan**

Every thing is possible and every thing can be changed. Things improve with time and effort. We therefore need collective efforts to make things better and as a nation we can thus bring change in our society. Unfortunately, we are divided on the bases of religion, class, caste, etc. Every one has their own priorities.

#### **Mr. Yasir Niazi - Islamabad Medical & Dental college**

We never talk about causes, we never talk about education, and we never introduce sexual education. We can't resolve our issues in a limited time. We need to work hard and the people of the country must be educated and made aware about their problems. We must review our education curriculum.

#### **Ms. Shugufta - Concern**

Focus should be on human rights. Why NGOs are unable to overcome the issue they addressed? We must change and improve our communication strategies.

**Ms. Rabia - Voice of America (Balochistan)**

In our society, every law is for women and women are the most oppressed segment of our society. Civil society can't do anything without support and cooperation of parliamentarians. We must promote education and education is the key to bring change in our country.

**Dr. Kalsoom kakar –Save the Children (US)**

We have to change our rules and laws which are not effective to bring change in our society.

**Ms. Perveen Hayat- Sungi**

Without political will and support we can not do much as individuals to bring change in our society. As for as the issue of dowry is concerned, most of the parents are giving dowry to their daughter without any pressure from the society and some times the women also demand dowry as their right from their parents. There is emotional aspect of gift related to dowry as well.

**Dr. Asma- FPAP**

We need to take practical steps to improve things around us and to ably address the issues that will lead to a reformed society.

**Mr. Fayaz Baqir- UNRO**

We must take initiative from ourselves. Self determination and self struggle is very important to bring change in the society.

**Mr. Shabhat- Plan Pakistan**

We must strengthen our belief system. Without believing in our cause, we can not do any thing to promote and bring change in the society.

**Dr. Ibrar- FM Radio**

We need strong political system. We don't need feudal based democracy.

**Prof. Dr. Batool Mazhar- PIMS**

(In response to Kishwar Naheed's comments on 'farewell to uterus'), we need to understand and realize that there are certain body parts in a woman which embody her femininity, like her breast and her uterus. When these body parts are



removed even due to fatal illness, there is a deep trauma a woman undergoes. *Ms. Kishwar Naheed concluded the policy dialogue with key message that we must leave our old traditions which were harmful for the society and particularly women, and we must take initiative from our own family to bring change.*



## **Section 5**

### **Action points for a way forward**

The following points emerged as action points to move forward, and in making this country a better place for women regarding their reproductive health and choices.

- Social sector needs to recognize that health and population are developmental and political challenges
- Increase in literacy, awareness and education will correspondingly decrease the ignorance about health and population challenges and by corollary will help decrease women's suffering in these two areas
- Education is a key to development, progress and equality, in countries like Pakistan
- Reproductive health education should be part of curriculum in the school
- NGOs and development partners need to do continuous advocacy with the government in the areas of health and population, and,
- There is need to make the political and democratic system strong so that the state can make pro-people, and pro-women policies, and the social and cultural practices do not add to the misery of the poor and the powerless.

# **ANNEXURE**

## Annex - I

### A brief note on the panelists and the chair of the Dialogue

**Kishwar Naheed** is one of the best-known feminist poets of Pakistan born in Bulandshahr, Uttar Pradesh, India in 1940. In a field dominated by traditional male voices, Naheed, writing in Urdu, was a pioneer of a new, distinctively feminine voice and has produced over the span of thirty years a body of work that is innovative, defiant, political, and self-aware.

She born into a traditional family that moved to Lahore, Pakistan during the 1947 Partition of the sub-continent, she had to fight to pursue an education in a milieu where women did not go to school and "were not allowed to speak to boys." She studied at home and obtained a high school diploma through correspondence courses, but went on to receive a master's degree in Economics from Punjab University.

Her first collection of poetry, *Lab-i goya*, published in 1968, won the prestigious Adamjee Prize of Literature. She also wrote for children and for the daily *Jang*, published her autobiography in 1994, and in 2001 saw her collected poetic work released in a 1312 page volume entitled *Dasht-i qais men Lail'a*. Her daily columns in *Jang* were also collected and published in 1999. Her poetry has been translated into English and Spanish and her famous poem "We, sinful women" gave its title to a path-breaking anthology of contemporary Urdu feminist poetry translated and edited by Rukhsana Ahmad, published in London by The Women's Press in 1991.

Kishwar Naheed has held the position of Director General of Pakistan National Council of the Arts before her retirement, has edited a prestigious literary magazine *Mah-i naw*, and has founded an organization named *Hawwa* (Eve) whose goal is to help homebound women become financially independent through cottage industries and the marketing of handicrafts.

---

Source:- Library of Congress New Delhi-The South Asian Literacy recording project

**Prof. Dr. Syeda Batool Mazhar** received her secondary school education from presentation Convent Rawalpindi and did her HSC from St Joseph's College Karachi. She graduated from King Edward Medical College Lahore. She acquired membership from the Royal College of Obstetrics and Gynaecologist U.K in 1992. Joined Pakistan Institute of Medical Sciences (PIMS) in 1993 as Assistant Professor of Obst and Gynae. Presently working as professor of Obst and Gynae in MCH centre PIMS Islamabad since November 2002. She was awarded FRCOG in September 2005.

Her special interests are safe motherhood, preinvasive cervical cancer and menopause. She has actively participated in Health education programs organized by the media on women's health. She has presented several research papers both at national and international forums? She has authored / coauthored more than 25 articles in reputable national and international medical journals. She received training in safe motherhood in Japan in 1997, overseas fellowship in Colposcopy by RCOG in Birmingham U.K 2000, international best practices workshop by WHO in Egypt in addition to her other academic activities.

**Mr. Rauf Kalsara** is a renowned journalist of Pakistan. He belongs to District Laiya (Punjab) and did his Master's in English from Bahud-din-Zakriya University, Multan, Punjab and also did master's in Political Communication from London University in 2007. He has a productive experience in Pakistani journalism. Currently he is associated with "The News" as a special correspondent. He also writes a weekly column in the Urdu Daily "Jang" besides hosting two live shows on National and International current affairs in Rohi, a Seraike Private TV channel in Pakistan. He is highly regarded for his courageous and empathetic reporting and analysis on issues perceived and believed as socio-politically sensitive.

**Fayaz Baqir** works for UN Resident Coordinator's Office. He is Senior Advisor on Civil Society. He has more than 15 years of working experience in UN agencies.

## Annex - II

### List of the Participants of the Dialogue

S.No.	NAME	Organization
1	Mr. Syed Shabhat Hassan	Plan Pakistan
2	Mr. Hammad Raees	Bahria University
3	Mr. Mushtaq Hussain	SACHET
4	Ms. Hamida Begum	SACHET
5	Ms. Bela Nawaz	SACHET
6	Mr. Imran Iqbal	SACHET
7	Mr. Zulqarnain	ROZAN
8	Ms. Shagufta Shah	CONCERN
9	Mr. Arshed Bhatti	Civil Junction
10	Mr. Touqeer Abbasi	SACHET
11	Mr. Yasir Niazi	Islamabad Medical & Dental College
12	Mr. Nasir Mehmood	SAHIL
13	Mr. Maroof Awan	SACHET
14	Dr. Asma Hayat	FPAP
15	Dr. Naseer Nizamani	FHI
16	Mr. Naeem	Aurat Foundation
17	Ms. Parveen Hayat	SUNGI
18	Ms. Ghazala Farid	SUNGI
19	Mr. Zahir Shah	SUNGI
20	Dr. Abrar Umar	FM-100, General Hospital
21	Dr. Kalsom	Save the Children
22	Mr. Faisal Shafiq	WHO
23	Ms. Jamila Achakzai	Daily Times
24	Ms. Rabia Pir	Voice of America
25	Dr. Syed Rizwan	PLAN Pakistan
26	Ms. SANA Gul	Daily Times
27	Mr. M. Abbas	PTCL
28	Ms. Anila Bashir	Daily Aaj Kal
29	Mr. M. Yousaf	Daily Ausaf
30	Mr. M. Faizan	Daily Ausaf
31	Mr. Pervaiz Mughal	Ausaf
32	Mr. Sibtain Raza	News 1, Waseb TV
33	Mr. Khurram Shahzad	News One TV
34	Mr. Rizwan Latif	SACHET

## Annex - III

### Programme & Agenda of the Dialogue



Dr. Rakhshinda Perveen, founder AGEHI Resource Centre  
Cordially invites you to attend a policy dialogue on 23<sup>rd</sup> Sep 2008

***"Alternative Perspectives on certain Traditional / customary practices influencing Health & Population"***

**Venue:**  
SACHET-Gallery  
Al-Babar Centre F-8 Markaz  
Islamabad

**Timing:**  
4:30 PM  
*Program overleaf*

**RSVP:**  
Ms. Zartash Moomi  
0300-8568903  
051-2256799

#### Program

Arrival & Registration	:	4:30 PM
Recitation	:	4:40 PM
Welcome & Context Setting By Dr. Rakhshinda Perveen	:	4:45 PM
Panel Discussion Mr. Fayaz Baqir, Senior Advisor (United Nations Resident Office) Dr. Batool Mazhar, Incharge MCH (Pakistan Institute of Medical Sciences) Representative from the Ministry of Population, Govt. of Pakistan	:	4:45 PM
Documentary Screening	:	5:45 PM
Key Note Address by the Chair, Ms. Kishwar Naheed	:	6:00 PM
Question & Answer session	:	6:25 PM
Recommendations by the Chair	:	6:45 PM
Vote of Thanks	:	7:00 PM
Iftar	:	7:20 PM

The News International,

TUESDAY, September 23

INTERACTIVE DIALOGUE, organised by Agehi with the theme 'Alternative Perspectives on Certain Traditional/Customary Practices Influencing Health and Population of a Society,' at SACHET Gallery, Al-Babar Centre, Park Road, F-8 Markaz, Islamabad, 4 p.m.

DAWN Islamabad, TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 23, 2008

METROPOLITAN 19

## Dialogue

THE AGEHI Resource Centre will organise its fourth interactive policy dialogue titled "Alternative perspectives on certain traditional/customary practices influencing health and population of a society" at SACHET-Gallery, Al Badar Centre, F-8 Markaz at 4pm.

14 CITY NEWS

The News International, Tuesday September 23, 2008

INTERACTIVE DIALOGUE, organised by Agehi with the theme 'Alternative Perspectives on Certain Traditional/Customary Practices Influencing Health and Population of a Society,' at SACHET Gallery, Al-Babar Centre, Park Road, F-8 Markaz, Islamabad, 4 p.m.

# Protection to vulnerable groups urged

Myra Imran  
Islamabad

Speakers at a policy dialogue on Tuesday called for initiating academic discourse over discriminatory traditional and customary practices to provide protection to vulnerable groups, especially women.

Presenting their point of view at the policy dialogue titled 'Alternative Perspective on Certain Traditional and Customary Practices Influencing Health and Population' organised by Advocates of Gender, Education and Health Information (Agehi), Sachet, they said that it was important to unveil injustices hidden in traditions or customs prevalent in every part of the country.

In traditional societies, they pointed out that customs were only applied to women and poor whereas the powerful were always above all laws and rules. They regretted that such practices were protected by those sitting in the

power corridors.

In addition to civil society activists and development practitioners, the dialogue was attended by United Nations representatives, medical practitioners and media persons. Also in attendance were Poyaz Baqir from UN, gynaecologist Batool Mazhar, renowned writer and poet Kishwar Naheed and journalist Rauf Klasra.

Giving a simple tip to tackle discriminatory traditions in society, Kishwar Naheed said that every person should start taking a stand against them in his or her capacity. "Only staying firm on views and approaches changes the attitudes to a great extent," she said adding that such practices had nothing to do with religion or society but were the end result of power politics.

Calling for reduction in marriage rituals, she said that a simple event of contrast between man and woman to start a new life was fast becoming more and more complicated and out of the reach

of poor class due to rituals in the name of tradition. "Traditions attached to marriages were also the reason for boys and girls opting for court marriages as their parents could not afford money for those useless ceremonies," she said.

She regretted that in a major part of the country police were just a showpiece and it were the sardars, feudal and influential that controlled the areas. "It is unfortunate that in the presence of a proper legal system and public infrastructure, 'jirgas' decide the fate of the people."

Rauf Klasra said that if tribal culture was above all laws, then why the tribal leaders sit in the parliament. "On one hand, these feudals and tribal leaders want to enjoy fruits of democracy and on the other they want to rule their area according to the same centuries old system," he said.

Turning the murder of Benazir Bhutto the biggest evidence of strong resistance faced by women

in society, Klasra said that her tragic death was a setback for all Pakistani women. "For long, no woman would dare to challenge the administration at this level," he added.

Blaming bad governance for all the ills, Poyaz Baqir said that people were fully aware of their rights but were helpless due to lack of facilities. "Government funds are never used properly and in the end everyone blames people for discriminatory murder."

Rakshinda Parveen, executive director of the Sachet, said that dowry was traditionally endorsed form of violence against women. "No one talks about this although it is very much preventable," she said, adding that there had been no improvement whatsoever for decades but rather things had taken a turn for the worse.

Later, a documentary on dowry was shown highlighting different violent practices against the oppressed, most of the time women.



روزنامہ اوصاف، 24 ستمبر 2008ء

## سٹی نیوز

2

خواتین کو صحت و تعلیم کی سہولیات فراہمی موجودہ دور کی ضرورت ہے  
مناسب طبی امداد نہ ملنے سے سینکڑوں خواتین دورانِ زچگی جاں بحق ہو جاتی ہیں

فیملی پلاننگ کے حوالے سے خواتین کو باشعور بنانا ہوگا، سائے کے زیرِ اہتمام سیمینار سے مقررین کا خطاب  
اسلام آباد (نامہ نگار) خواتین ملک کی آدھی آبادی کا حصہ ہیں مگر انہیں مسلسل نظر انداز کر دینا اور ان کے حقوق کا خیال نہ رکھنا ان کے ساتھ زیادتی ہے خواتین کو تعلیم اور صحت کی بنیادی سہولتیں فراہم کرنا موجودہ دور کی اہم ضرورت ہے زچگی کے دوران بہت سی خواتین صرف مناسب طبی امداد نہ ملنے کی وجہ سے وفات پا جاتی ہیں اور ایضاً ان کی تعداد بہت زیادہ ہے مقررین نے حکومت پر زور دیا کہ خواتین کو باشعور بنایا جائے اور اس سلسلے میں انہیں تعلیمی، طبی اور قانونی سہولیات بھی فراہم کی جائیں تاکہ وہ اپنی زندگی بہتر انداز میں گزار سکیں ان خیالات کا اظہار



سائے کے زیرِ اہتمام "خواتین کے مسائل" سیمینار میں ڈاکٹر باقر، کشور ناہید اور ڈاکٹر رشیدہ بیگم نے حصہ لیا (فونوگراف)

Daily Times

Wednesday, September 24, 2008

## Reproductive health in syllabus stressed

Staff Report

**ISLAMABAD:** Speakers at a seminar on Tuesday called for inclusion of subjects like reproductive health, dowry and violence against women in school syllabus.

They recommended that politicians be made part of a nationwide initiative to create public awareness of such issues.

AGEHI organised the seminar titled 'Alternative Perspectives on Certain Tradition /Customary Practices Influencing Health and Population'. Fayyaz Baqir from UN and Prof Dr Batool Mazher from PIMS and Kishwer Naheed spoke on the event.

Naheed called for training school and college teachers on the reproductive health. She said trained teachers should tell students about impacts of population explosion on economy, public health, food, environment and housing.

Fayyaz Baqir said dowry should be discouraged at community level.

Dr Rakhshanda Parveen, SACHET executive vice president, said the main objective of this seminar was to understand importance of reproductive health.

She said the people working at grass roots would benefit from this discussion.

## Part II

### Demystifying Gender Issues in Pakistani Context

## AGEHI

### Editorial

#### Gender, Population & Pakistan

The International Conference on Population & Development (ICPD) held in Cairo and the chain of events leading up to it can be confidently labeled as a major shift in the agenda on Population policy from reduction in growth rate to realizing the Reproductive Health needs of men, women & adolescents. Family Planning services are an essential part of RH care. Following the global biased approach, men were effectively excluded from the FP Program in Pakistan that is now recognized as the 7th most populous country on this planet. In spite of being a signatory to the ICPD' 94, the commitment to the Cairo Ideals is yet to be reflected in its 40-year old program. Women (and that too only married and in reproductive age) in Pakistan were and still are "targeted" in FP Programs. The male role in the perspective of ICPD' 94 is barely visible in the FP Program. In a workshop conducted by an International Donor Agency in Pakistan, working groups were asked to create a definition of an ideal male partner. The ideal male partner created was that of a man who loves his family, is sharing, caring, honest and faithful and is able to make informed decisions with his partner's inputs. Searching this "Superman" would be a futile exercise in a patriarchal society where traditional gender roles and rules can jeopardize communication between spouses on family planning. The demand of the changing times is to accept and acknowledge the contemporary realities and design strategies accordingly. A point of caution for all government agencies and NGOs is not to become obsessed by the Target Syndrome but to adopt a Need-Oriented approach with a human face in all the actions aimed to control population growth rate in Pakistan.

**Dr. Rakhshinda Perveen**

### Guest Editorial

*Source: Quarterly AGEHI Newsletter  
Autumn, 2001 Issue 2*

## editorial

### Hudood Ordinance, Gender and Pakistan

**Zafran Bibi's Case:** Taking into consideration the deep ignorance of the biological and rational dimensions of sensitive issues like rape, adultery etc, one can only suggest that the Judiciary needs to be genderized to ensure Gender Justice.

In spite of the fact that the Holy Quran is particularly solicitous about women's well-being and development, women have been the targets of the most serious human rights violation in some Muslim societies. Not Islam but the contrariety that exists between Quranic ideals and practice of a number of women related issues contribute largely to the present status of women. Discriminatory laws and their gender-blind, irrational interpretation has added to the plight of a vast majority of Pakistani women.

Pakistani society is governed by patriarchy, inequity, injustice and selective men-friendly applications of the dominant religion Islam. Amidst the extraordinary, dishonorable and distressing social milieu characterized by power structures and lack of common sense, one is compelled to arrive at the conclusion that activism without addressing substance is not going to bring any change in the lives of those who are even unaware of any thing called "Rights".

Symptomatic treatment would have only cosmetic value. It is the time to go beyond rhetoric and take concrete and pragmatic measures as a remedy. We hope that the President of Pakistan would demonstrate his gender sensitivity by bringing gender justice to female victims and take immediate steps for putting an end to all anti-women laws ensuring the development of a gender-aware policy in all spheres of national development including the judiciary.

**By Dr. Rakhshinda Perveen**

**Source: Quarterly AGEHI Newsletter  
Spring- Summer 2002 Issue 4**

## Editorial

Despite relatively uninformed and unprepared acceptance of globalization as a consumer good, it appears rather strange that marriage market is still intact in Pakistan. Marriage is an important event in the life of a Pakistani woman. Getting married early is being lucky. Obligatory **Jahez** takes a heavy toll on the family of **dulhan** - the bride. Dowry is a multi-faceted, deep-rooted gender issue with social, economic and health consequences. In spite of a consensus on disliking the practice, a few have the courage to disown it.

Dowry popularly referred as a Hindu custom has visibly migrated, escalated and embraced in all the areas of the present day Pakistan. It has become an active tradition, norm and religious practice for those who believe that there is an absence of such custom and tradition in their faith. The implication of this convenient forgetfulness is inattentiveness to dowry-related violence.

Ironically, in spite of a very high frequency of domestic violence and cases of stove deaths, dowry-related violence is neither perceived and recognized as accepted form of violence nor documented in social sciences. Therefore, unfortunately it is not a popular theme or priority agenda item for organizations working on women's issues.

There could be three possible reasons for this convenient forgetfulness. One is the spiral of silence and *sharam*, which implies that woman, related issues must not be taken out of the premises of home for the sake of honor. Second is the ironical fact that attention to the role of dowry in our marriage system has not gained deserved attention of international donors. Therefore, the hype stirred by comparable social problems like child labor or environment, overshadowed a traditional area like dowry and related issues. Thirdly, the Ministry of women development in Pakistan has yet to acknowledge dowry and dowry-violence as gender issues.

Recently, the Law and Justice Commission of Pakistan organized a two-day workshop in collaboration with the AGEHI Resource Center, SACHET to discuss the proposed amendments in the existing laws regarding marriage expenses and dowry restriction. That was not only a very positive step but a historical event in many ways. We hope that the spirit behind this effort would be kept alive and a law reflecting stakeholders' participation would be soon finalized. The need of the time is to analyze our problems with our own eyes rather than relying on the visions created elsewhere.

Dr. Rakhshinda Perveen

**Source: Quarterly AGEHI Newsletter  
Summer 2003 Issue 6**

## EDITORIAL

### *Sexual and reproductive health- a question of priorities*

The signpost International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) 1994 and the chain of events leading to it were a visible shift from Population towards Reproductive Health (RH). In this connection another newness brought to old issues through ICPD was the language change suggesting replacement or at least emphasis on the introduction of new jargons. Earlier obsession of policy makers with reduction in fertility and population growth steered population programs towards chasing demographic targets, which overlooked socio-cultural values in the developing world. Health, including Sexual and Reproductive health (SRH), has different cultural perceptions and various determinants. Some crucial determinants of SRH include information, education, lifestyle, religion, region, law, gender roles, economy and political will. These factors are not only separately related to SRH but mutually influence each other. The vital new issues underscored by ICPD encompassed Gender Equity, Violence against Women, Trafficking of Women, Female Genital Mutilation, Child Marriage, Male Roles and Responsibilities, Unsafe Abortion, Infertility, STDs/HIV/AIDS, Safe(r) Motherhood and Antenatal Care.

Taking into consideration the fact that in this world, men are the first to be heard and women are the first to be harmed, it is suggested that men, specially the young men, should be the primary audience and women, especially young women, regardless of their marital status, should be the direct beneficiaries of SRH interventions.

It is time to go beyond rhetoric and take concrete yet pragmatic decisions and actions on the most debatable, disputed and tabooed issues in our society. For instance, the issue of Abortion. The Quran does not clearly address this issue. However, there is a general feeling that Islam permits Abortion only for the most serious reasons. It is time to develop a consensus on this, include rape, marital rape, incest, and war victims in the list of most serious reasons for safe abortion.

The biggest challenge is; are those who are in the corridors of power and politics ready to take immediate steps to change not only the condition but position of oppressed men, women and children in their respective societies.

Dr.Rakhshinda Perveen

*Source: Quarterly AGEHI Newsletter  
Autumn 2003 Issue 7*

## Editorial

### **Violence Against Women**

Violence against women is one of the most urgent agenda item and concern of our times. Women are castigated for being women in all ways and at all places; be it a household or a battlefield. They are abused by the uninstructed as well as by the well taught with the same vehemence but in different manners. The Islamic Republic of Pakistan is no exception. It would be too naive to reject any violent practices against human beings of lesser fortune in general and women in particular in our homeland. It would be equally unrealistic to claim that such practices would be eradicated by any half-cooked governmental policy or a donor-funded NGO project. However, remaining a silent spectator on this human or gender issue is not less equivalent to committing a crime like violence. On the International Day of Women, I request the **Chief Executive of Pakistan** to vow for breaking the silence against violence. On the practical side, the one little measure (with great social impact) that he could do is to use all media to publicize the scientific fact that sex of an offspring is determined from the father's share of chromosome. Women by no means are "sinful" or "culprits" in this vital determination. It may happen that our next generation may not be composed of wild, ruthless and angry fathers who kill or abuse their wives and girl children as a mark of rejection of their gender which in fact is none else but Almighty's decision.

Dr.Rakhshinda Perveen

*Source: Quarterly AGEHI Newsletter  
Spring- Summer 2001 Issue 1*





**SACHET - Pakistan** is a not-for-profit voluntary organization committed to promote Human Development in Pakistan with Gender perspectives. **AGEHI (Advocates of Gender Education & Health Information)** Resource Centre of **SACHET - Pakistan** launched **FAD** project (2000-2006) that did pioneering work on issues of dowry violence through diverse activities. **FADAN (Fight Against Dowry Advocacy Network)** is an outcome of **FAD** efforts that is contributing towards raising awareness on violence associated with the custom and institution of dowry through change makers across Pakistan. Silver Ribbon, the logo of **FADAN** symbolizes hope for rejecting this socially endorsed and conveniently forgotten form of gender violence and promoting austerity in marriage ceremonies.

Stove Death