P@SHA

Pakistan IT Industry Association

Bridging the
Gender Gap in
Entrepreneurship

Pakistan faces a severe gender gap that is holding back its economic potential and leaving a large segment of the population disenfranchised. The country ranks[1] a dismal **142nd** out of 146 countries in the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report 2023, with only a 57.5% gender parity.

Studies show that economies with greater female participation experience a significant boost[2] to GDP. Closing the gender gap in Pakistan could lead to a one-time **30%** increase in GDP. However, the country's female labour force participation rate remains low at just **24%**, compared to 32% for South Asia and 69% for low-income countries.

In this purview, **P@SHA** arranged a Policy roundtable on **"Bridging the Gender Gap in Entrepreneurship"** at ITCN Asia Lahore, 2024. The roundtable was attended by exceptional women leaders in Pakistan's tech sector.

Women make up only **13%** of the workforce in pakistan's it sector

The roundtable was centred upon five main themes, delivering the following Policy Recommendations:

Empowering Women in Tech

The panellists discussed the emergence of technology as a powerful tool for women entrepreneurs in Pakistan to overcome barriers and access new markets. Social media entrepreneurship is becoming a significant trend, enabling women to monetize their skills and create successful businesses without traditional business education or access to male-dominated professional networks. Platforms like Instagram, Facebook, and local e-commerce sites have been game-changers, allowing women to engage with customers and build loyal communities.

Perspectives on Women in Tech in Pakistan

Women in Pakistan play a vital role in promoting diversity and sustainability in the tech industry, enhancing creativity, innovation, and decision-making.

Initiatives include women-focused tech organisations, scholarships, and mentorship programs designed to empower women in tech and promote diversity and sustainability in the industry. Programs like[3] CaterpillHers and CodeGirlsPakistan spearhead the inclusion of women in tech, empowering women with technical skill sets for career development and financial independence.

Despite facing challenges like gender bias, limited access to education, and cultural barriers, Pakistani women are actively involved in initiatives and programs supporting their involvement in tech.

[1] https://www.dawn.com/news/1760949
[2] https://www.elibrary.imf.org/downloadpdf/book/9781513516103/ch016.pdf
[3] https://anankemag.com/2023/10/10/bridging-the-gender-gap-women-in-pakistans-evolving-tech-sector/

Creating Inclusive Workplaces

One of the key agendas of the roundtable was to discuss how to create inclusive workplaces in Pakistan's tech sector. It is crucial for empowering women, fostering diversity, and driving innovation. Some of the key interventions included:

- Ensure women are well-represented in leadership positions to serve as role models and advocates for female advancement.

- Offer mentorship and sponsorship opportunities vital for the professional development of women in tech.

- Implement dedicated mentorship and networking events to enhance the learning and working environment for women.

- Implement flexible work cultures, including remote and hybrid models, to better accommodate women in the workforce.

- Provide support for work-life balance, such as child care assistance and flexible schedules, to retain women in the industry.

- Partner with organisations like P@SHA, and leading IT companies to introduce policies supporting women in the workforce.

- Collaborate with international organisations and initiatives to learn best practices and drive change.

- Advocate for gender inclusivity across all tech-related policies and programs.

Addressing the Digital Divide

The digital divide remains a critical issue. The gender gap in mobile ownership is about **33%**, and the gap in mobile internet usage is even [higher](#)[4] at **38%**. This divide is more pronounced among women from [lower](#)[5] socioeconomic backgrounds and those in rural areas. In regions like Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, only **8%** and **12%** of women are employed, with financial inclusion at **13%** and **17%**, respectively. These figures highlight the urgent need for targeted efforts to bridge this digital gap.

The Digital Divide
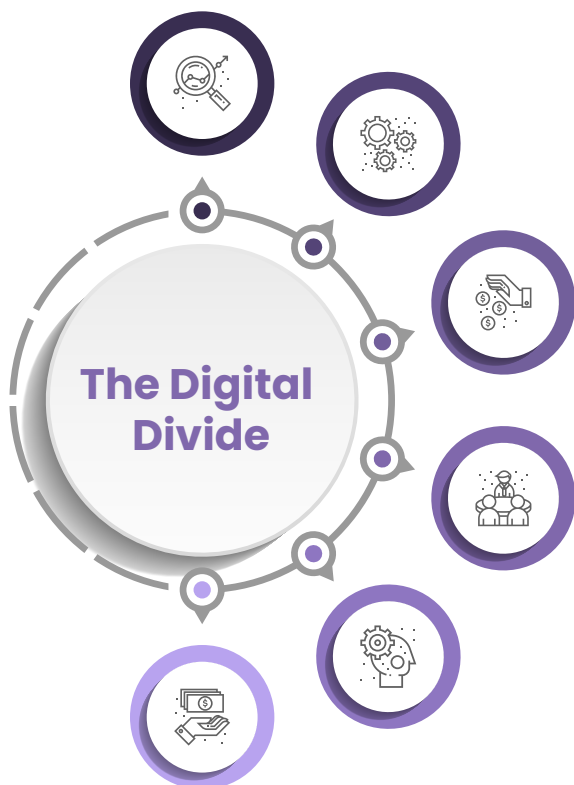
33%
Gender Gap in Mobile Ownership

38%
Gender Gap in Mobile Internet Usage

8%
Women are employed in Balochistan

13%
Women have financial inclusion in Balochistan

12%
Women are employed in KPK

17%
Women have financial inclusion in KPK

[4] https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PA00ZW85.pdf
[5] https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PA00ZW85.pdf

Challenges for Women Entrepreneurs in Rural Areas

Women entrepreneurs in rural Pakistan face an uphill battle. From limited access[6] to capital, manifested in complex loan procedures and inadequate government support[7], to societal pressures that prioritise traditional gender roles, these women navigate a landscape lacking resources and understanding. Furthermore, inadequate[8] education, training, and information networks leave them struggling not only to manage finances but also to find markets and customers. The burden of household duties and a lack of flexible work arrangements further complicate their efforts, while limited government assistance and bureaucratic hurdles add yet another layer of difficulty.

Financial Constraints
Lack of access to capital and credit, with complex loan procedures and inadequate financial support from the government.

Social & Cultural Barriers
Entrenched social norms, including a patriarchal society, limited family support, and pressure to conform to traditional gender roles, create a challenging environment for these women entrepreneurs.

Limited Education & Skills
Deficient knowledge in business, entrepreneurship, and technical skills, coupled with poor access to market information, product trends, and government support programs, hinders their ability to thrive.

Lack of Govt Support
Ineffective government support, entangled in bureaucratic red tape, stifles business growth

Pakistan's low female labour force participation rate and dismal ranking in gender equality stifle economic growth. The **P@SHA** roundtable on "Bridging the Gender Gap in Entrepreneurship" offered solutions through technology, inclusive workplaces, and addressing the digital divide. Empowering women in tech, creating supportive work environments, and ensuring internet access are crucial steps to unlock Pakistan's full economic potential

[6] https://www.academia.edu/11727845/Women_Entrepreneurship_Problems_Faced_by_Rural_Women_Entrepreneurs_in_Sindh_Province_of_Pakistan
[7] https://www.webology.org/data-cms/articles/20220328073505pmwebology%2018%20%286%29%20-%2087%20pdf.pdf
[8] https://fbj.springeropen.com/Articles/10.1186/s43093-023-00251-y

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