

A BRIEF REPORT

VICE CHANCELLORS' CONFERENCE

EQUITY AND INCLUSION OF MARGINALIZED COMMUNITIES IN HIGHER EDUCATION: OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

Prepared by: Noor Imran
Supervised by: Prof. Dr. Kanwal Ameen



HIGHER EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTES TO PROTECT MARGINALIZED COMMUNITIES

The Vice-Chancellor, University of Home Economics, Prof. Dr. Kanwal Ameen, joined hands with Executive Director Bargad Organization, Ms. Sabiha Shaheen to hold first of its kind *Vice Chancellors' Conference on Equity and Inclusion of Marginalized Communities in Higher Education* in the context of SDGs 4, 5, 10 & 16 which aim at Quality Education; Gender Equality; Reduced inequality; Peace, Justice & Strong Institutions. The Vice Chancellors from various types of public sector universities in the Punjab, young representatives from the marginalized communities, and the Minister for Human Rights and Minority Affairs, Punjab participated in the conference and discussed the challenges in availing the opportunities existing for the marginalized communities including minorities, transgenders and differently abled youth.

Conference Objectives:

- Bring together experiences and views of various stake holders
- Review the available opportunities and barriers in implementations of government policies in this regard
- Come up with an outcome document to build on a Plan of Action for a coordinated, comprehensive and practical approach to inclusion of the marginalized communities in higher education.

The Government of Pakistan has adopted Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) through the Ministry of Planning, Development & Special Initiatives in SDGs National Framework and embedded in Pakistan's Vision 2025. The Government is committed to implement the framework through laws, policies and institutional support to meet SDGs and a task force at federal level is there to monitor the progress.

Constitutional support:

Religious Minorities	Transgender Persons	Differently-Abled Persons
Article(s) 4, 20, 21, 22, 26, 27, 28, 36, 37, 51 and 106	Article 25A (Equality of citizens)	Article 25A (Equality of citizens)

Under this background, the Vice Chancellors applauded this unique kind of conference jointly organized by the University of Home Economics and Bargad organization and ensured working for an inclusive environment on campuses for the marginalized youth through compliance of quotas, orientation sessions with students and faculty, friendly infrastructure, representation in student societies, media usage and other measures on campuses. Both hosts expressed their gratitude to the vice chancellors, Minister for Human Rights and Minority Affairs, Punjab Mr. Ejaz Alam Augustine for their precious time and contribution despite strict COVID 19 situation. The Minister of Higher Education Mr. Raja Yasir Humayun Sarfraz and four Vice chancellors could not participate due to emergent unexpected situation. In the end, Conference Shields were presented to the chief guests and a group photo was sent to all vice chancellors.



Prof. Dr. Kanwal Ameen threw light on the importance of this conference and shared,



"There was a time when we did not have the laws and policies to address this subject, but now we do have. Nevertheless, the challenge is largely related to their awareness and implementation in HEIs. We need to play our role in identifying barriers of all kinds and I am very thankful to all the VCs for accepting the invitation. It is a testament to their commitment towards making higher education more inclusive and in line with SDGs 4, 5, 10 and 16."

Prof. Dr. Kanwal Ameen

Conference Host & Coordinator

VC, University of Home Economics, Lahore



Dr. Fazal Ahmad Khalid, Chairman, Punjab Higher Education Commission (PHEC) appreciated the organizers for addressing the issues and assured that the Commission would work through recommendations of the VC conference as we need the universities to develop quality human resource who are innovative and also sensitive to the social and community needs of tolerance among youth.

Punjab Minister for Human Rights & Minorities Affairs Mr. Ejaz Alam Augustine announced that the Government is introducing a bill to protect rights of transgender persons in Punjab. He said that the government's special quotas would result in inclusion of youth belonging to minorities, differently-abled and transgender persons in the higher education. He urged that we must follow ethical norms to strengthen and support our marginalized communities.



In the beginning, Ms. Maya Zaman, Ms. Tanzila Khan and student Ms. Amber Bajwa spoke on behalf of the marginalized communities to share their own experiences and give suggestions to the audience.



Ms. Maya Zaman
(Transgender Activist)

"It took me 7 years to complete my degree and HEC has not approved my degree yet. The university is now asking me to sign a declaration that if HEC does not approve my degree, I cannot claim it. If this does not go my way, my Master's degree will also be null and void. In these cases can there not be a special case? Children discover their identity around 13-14 and they are discriminated, humiliated in schools and they leave or drop out. For the transgender community it is very difficult to reach the merit subscribed by universities. I believe that there needs to be some level of flexibility for special cases."



Ms. Amber Bajwa (Representing minorities)

"The main challenges facing the minority population are:

- Lack of awareness
- Added burden of economic and social isolation
- Discriminatory material especially in text books
- The lack of freedom/choice when it comes to subjects' selection
- Quotas and laws for the protection of minorities not being implemented.
- The process of socializing and sensitizing individuals should be seen as integral."



Ms. Tanzila Khan (Differently abled activist)

"There is lack of empathy, support and acceptance when it comes to people with different abilities. There are language barriers along with attitudinal barriers. Each institution must have its own inclusion policy which should be displayed on their websites and in their pamphlets to make differently abled students feel welcome. Each institute must also undergo an institutional and structural audit to ensure representation on their campuses."

After the presentations by the representatives from the three marginalized communities (minorities, differently abled and transgender persons), all vice-chancellors were invited to express their views on the theme of the conference.

VCS' COMMITMENT TOWARD INCLUSION



Prof. Dr. Asghar Zaidi

Government College University, Lahore

"Two pledges of SDGs that stem from the 2030 agenda are relevant to our discussion today: 1) leaving no one behind: We cannot leave any group behind and development must be inclusive.

2) Reaching the furthest behind first: For me the furthest behind group in our country is the transgender group and without including them, our development cannot be inclusive and it cannot be meaningful. "



Prof. Dr. Bushra Mirza

Lahore College for Women University

"We are currently trying to get approval for transgender women's' admissions. We are also trying to include ramps and increase accessibility but it is a large infrastructure. In our new campus in Kala Shah Kaku, we are taking care of this. I really appreciate the suggestion of a student led inclusion policy by Tanzila Khan and I will ensure this practice. We have a scholarship for blind students but I think a similar scholarship for transgender population can also be set. "



VCS' COMMITMENT TOWARDS INCLUSION



Prof. Dr. Javed Akram
University of Health Sciences, Lahore

"There are a lot of policies, laws and research as well which is evidence based. We need the implementation. I assisted the Supreme Court with transgender laws. In all my major clinics I have special clinics for transgender population because they have special needs. Also 45-50 of disabilities are preventable so we should go for prevention rather than dealing with it later."



Prof. Dr. Rukhsana Kausar
Government College Women University,
Sialkot

"We cannot restrict our approach when we think about disability of differently abled people. There is however a mindset about quota implementation as well. We celebrated Christmas in our university and some people even from the faculty refused to participate. I was also told to not share the pictures in the media. This year we celebrated it at an even larger scale. This time in our forms we changed the term sex to gender and also removed mention of male and female categories. Students are allowed to identify as whoever they want to. There must be an attitude shift."



Prof. Dr. Talat Naseer Pasha (S.I)
University of Education, Lahore

"We have two campuses with special education students with foreign qualified faculty. I asked them to show me their labs when I joined, and I was told they are too expensive and were not there so I got them done. We developed a PKR 350 million project to train teachers and develop model labs for students who are differently abled. Due to COVID it has been delayed but it will be done this year. In our new buildings we are especially conscious of making it accessible to people with disabilities. We also gave 2% quota for Masters' for our minority students and advertised it. It was filled completely."

VCS' COMMITMENT TOWARDS INCLUSION



Prof. Dr. Nasim Ahmad

University of Veterinary Sciences, Lahore

"We have reserved seats for differently abled students. We do not discriminate against transgender population. They are welcome on open merit. In our faculty, we have minority representation. For 19 years, we have never missed Christmas celebration on campus. In new buildings we are conscious of allocating ramps; we also made modifications to our rest houses. We also have students from Nepal, Sri Lanka, Gambia and Ghana. Most of them are non-Muslims and they are taken care of. Physically challenged and minorities are not an issue in universities. However, transgender population is and I believe that it is because of lack of awareness."



Prof. Dr. Robina Farooq

Government College Women University,
Faisalabad

We talk about the 17 SDGs but I appreciate the selection of the 4 SDGs this conference is focusing on. Along with the topics discussed here, I would like to bring the role of women in this discussion. Women face a lot of inequalities in terms of decision making or higher-ranking roles. Even at the VC level, women are given only women universities to lead. I think not just Christmas, but we should also celebrate and participate in other religious events."

VCS' COMMITMENT TOWARDS INCLUSION



Prof. Dr. Muhammad Afzal

Baba Guru Nanak University

"The name of my university indicates that we are cognizant of the minority issues. We don't have any issues when it comes to minority students or differently abled. However, in my 30 years of experience I have never come across an application from a transgender student. I think the issue starts earlier and it needs to be addressed at a primary, secondary level. Higher education for the transgender population comes much later. My university is very new and this conference has given me a lot material to implement."



Prof. Dr. Muhammad Zakria Zakar

University of Okara



Prof. Dr. Sarfraz Khurshid

Information Technology University, Lahore

"I would like to comment that the inclusion policy is a great idea, but I would advise that we can share our efforts instead of drafting our own policies. We can also issue a statement that is collective.

On inclusion, we can maybe hold an inclusion day or dedicate one day in a year to bring forward the underrepresented groups and bring them to the forefront. Maybe the funding agencies can also aid in the inclusion process to create a broader impact in the world."

"There is a substantive theoretical aspect to all this as our society has not progressed at all. The patriarchal mindset does not allow for this development. I also have additional charge of University of Sahiwal where all the lead positions in the faculty were for men while there were more than 30 qualified women faculty members who could lead various aspects. I gave charge to females. We have reduced the society to a very utilitarian aspect and keep women away from real institutional power. Until we change our binary social and cultural systems, this issue cannot be dealt with. We need to change regimes and notions of normalcy; otherwise we cannot achieve these goals. I advocate quotas etc. but we need to go deeper than this."

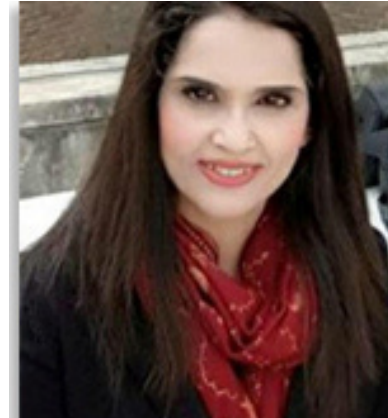
VCS' COMMITMENT TOWARDS INCLUSION



Prof. Dr. Saiqa Imtiaz Asif

Sadiq College Women University,
Bahawalpur

"When I was a student, I studied in the convent, so other religious groups were a norm for us. However, my children went to so called elite schools but had no such exposure. During my Master's there was a 2% quota and every batch would have 70-80 students graduating. The day I became VC I said that this will be revived because I believe visibility improves a lot of things. I believe that education for transgender population should be free across the board. As far as differently abled persons are concerned, we are taking care of all of this in new building from our recent grant from HEC. I believe that state universities have this responsibility that they facilitate underrepresented and minority students."



Prof. Dr. Rubeena Zakar

Director, Institute of Social and Cultural
Studies, Representing University of the
Punjab, Lahore

"We have also started a mentoring service among students who will facilitate students with special needs (language, anything). When we develop curriculums, we need to involve students in the process as well so we can know their needs. Our education is not community based. It has to be according to the needs of the community. If people are unaware of the opportunities, we must then have community outreach programs to connect them to the programs. We just started a social entrepreneurship program on campus which encourages students to build community based projects."



BARGAD REPRESENTATIVES

"We are gathered here today to right the wrongs and bring the marginalized back to the mainstream. Focus is on inclusivity especially in higher education. The greatest challenge today is not alleviating poverty but gender disparity. We are mindful of affirmative action but also consider reverse discrimination contrary to justice."



Dr. Ghazala Irfan

Forman Christian College
Member, Board of Directors
Bargad

"We must stress the need to inclusive development in higher education. This is also aligned with Pakistan's commitments made under the sustainable development goals 4, 5, 10 & 16 which aim at Quality Education; Gender Equality; Reduced Inequality; Peace, Justice & Strong Institutions in Promoting the Inclusive and Equitable Educational Institutions"



Sabiha Shaheen

Executive Director,
Bargad

RECOMMENDATIONS

Prof. Dr. Kanwal Ameen then concluded the Business Session and presented the following recommendations based on all discussions:

- There is a need of greater promotion and awareness campaigns about the opportunities available for the marginalized communities.
- Orientation sessions on diversity, inclusion and mutual respect for all new students must be incorporated.
- Celebration of religious festivals of minority religions can help promote diversity on campus.
- Maximum neutral learning and teaching contents should be part of the curriculum.
- Accessibility for differently abled students to all facilities both on campus and on websites must be ensured.
- Representation of marginalized groups in student societies is a must for inclusion and diversity.
- Faculty sensitization on gender, religion, culture and so forth must be addressed in all universities,
- Encouragement and sharing of best equity practices among universities, and
- Role of media for awareness about equity and inclusion of marginalized communities among society.

She emphasized that in order to meet Pakistan's vision for 2025 and the SDGs the universities have to play their role aggressively.





AGENDA

Vice-Chancellors' Conference on Equity and Inclusion of Marginalized Communities in Higher Education: Opportunities and Challenges

Date: March 17, 2021 (Wednesday)

Time: 09:45AM– 02:00PM

Venue: Shalimar Hall, Faletti's Hotel, Lahore

Organizers: University of Home Economics, Lahore & Bargad Organization for Youth Development

Session	Duration
Tilawat: Mr. Muhammad Shahbaz, Bargad	10:00AM-10:05AM
Welcome Note by Dr. Ghazala Irfan, Chairperson and Professor, Forman Christian College (A Chartered University) & Member, Bargad Board of Directors	10:05AM-10:10AM
Introduction by Prof. Dr. Kanwal Ameen, Vice- Chancellor, University of the Home Economics, Lahore	10:10AM-10:20AM
Opening Remarks by Honorable Mr. Raja Yasir Humayun Sarfraz, Provincial Minister of Higher Education, Punjab	10:20AM-10:35AM
Group Photo	10:35AM-10:50AM
Presentations I. Religious Minorities: Amber Bajwa, Student, Forman Christian College (A Chartered University), Lahore II. Differently-Abled Persons: Ms. Tanzila Khan, Program Officer, Open Mind, Telenor III. Transgender Persons: Ms. Maya Zaman, Monitoring & Evaluation Associate, Forum for Dignity Initiatives & Ms. Ribka Awais	10:50AM-11:05AM
Vice- Chancellors' Round Table On Gaps for Equity and Inclusion of Marginalized Communities in Higher Education & Plan of Action to Ensure Achieving of SDGs 4, 5, 10 & 16 Moderator: Prof. Dr. Kanwal Ameen Vice Chancellor, University of Home Economics, Lahore	11:05AM-01:00PM
Closing by Ms. Sabiha Shaheen, Executive Director, Bargad Organization	01:00PM-01:05PM
Remarks by Honorable Mr. Ejaz Alam Augustine, Provincial Minister Human Rights & Minorities Affairs, Punjab	01:05PM-01:20PM
Lunch	01:20PM

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PAKISTAN

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Press Release

MARCH 17, 2021



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INTERNATIONAL
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Govt believes in dignity and fair treatment: Augustine

By Our Staff Reporter

LAHORE: Provincial Minister MA&HR Ijaz Alam Augustine has said that the Punjab Government is committed to take all necessary measures for elimination of all forms of discrimination and protection of the rights of vulnerable citizens. He said the government believes in the dignity and fair treatment of

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FRIDAY
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UHE holds moot on marginalized communities

STAFF REPORTER

University of Home Economics (UHE) in collaboration with Bargad organized a vice-chancellors conference on equity and inclusion of marginalized communities in higher education: opportunities and challenges.

The conference was attended by Provincial Minister of Human Rights and Minorities Affairs Department, Ejaz Alam Augustine; 12 universities' vice-chancellors along with experts and representatives from marginalized communities including minorities, differently-abled persons and transgender persons.

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The organizers would like to extend their gratitude to all of the honourable Vice Chancellors who participated in the conference and made it a success.