**Seminar Brief**

**Seminar on Women’s Role in Rural Development of Pakistan 28thDecember, 2017**

Centre for Rural Economy (CRE) organized seminar on***Women’s Role in Rural Development of Pakistan*** on Thursday 28th December 2017 at “P” Block Auditorium, Pak Secretariat Planning Commission in Islamabad. Deputy Chairman of the Planning Commission, Mr. Sartaj Aziz was Chief Guest of thisevent. He stated thatthose women inhabitants of rural Pakistan are particularly disadvantaged in terms of access to basic social services and livelihood opportunities. He highlighted that the vision 2025 provides vision to minimize the discrimination against females, provide enabling environment and socio-economic opportunities to articulate with the rural transformation. He further mentioned that the developing non-form rural enterprises, branding of products, marketing policies, off-farm jobs creation, livestock and poultry industries, development of SMART cities etc. shall enhance women empowerment by increasing family income, nutrition and women &childhealthcare, which are integral part of socio-economic sustainable growth. Mr. Sartaj Aziz argued that there are examples of rural growth and SMART citiesin China, Laos, the Philippines, Indonesia and Cambodia. He also highlighted that for the forthcoming 12th five years plan of Planning Commission enforcing key components that are related to gender empowerment will be rural transformation, agriculture development, law enforcement, financial inclusion, gender gap & mortality, non-recognition of women workforce and nutritionby given equal opportunities, women could contribute much more in rural development of Pakistan. He emphasized the development sector and government stakeholders to develop Human Development Index (HDI) and Gender Development Index for Pakistan and the CRE will bridge the gap between the Planning Commission and stakeholders. He also said that indeed rural women are key agents for sustainable development in the country. They play a catalytic role towards achievement of transformational economic, environmental and social changes required for sustainable development. However, the societal discrimination, set cultural norms, health care and education facilities are among the many challenges they are facing. Empowering them is essential, not only for the well-being of individuals, families and rural communities, but also for overall economic productivity, given women large presence in the agricultural workforce worldwide.

Mr. ShoaibAmhadSiddiqui,Secretary, Ministry of Planning, Development and Reforms, welcome the participants of the seminar and appreciate the Centre for Rural Economy (CRE) to highlight the different aspects of women’s in rural development of Pakistan by involving eminent Guest Speakers. He also appreciated the paramount project “CRE” launched by the Prof. AhsanIqbal (Minister of PD&R) and emphasized the Donors, INGO s and NGOs shall collaborate with the CRE for further strengthening the Centre for devising the rural policy mandate. Chief Executive Officer of CRE, Dr. AamerIrshad introduced that the Centre was formally inaugurated on 23rd November 2017, having key mandates of evidence based policy research on different aspects of rural economy in the country. He said that the rationale of establishing a Centre in the Planning Commission was thereis the neglected rural economy pouring 20% economic contribution to national GDP through farm and non-farm economic activities that should be formalized through CRE. He said that the structure of the CREis proposed to be a registered under Company Act after two years and shall comprise equal board representation from private and public sector. The sustainability of the Centre depends on the endowment fund that will be created with coordination of Economic Affair Division (EAD) and Donors. He mentioned that CRE has already signedMOUs and also had a joint collaboration with ACAIR (Australia) for conducting transnational rural transformation study in South Asia (China, Bangladesh, Indonesia and Pakistan), to analyze the policies and model along with international advisory. The Centre has also started research activities with international organization by CRE Core Team, Syed AmjadHussain, Dr. Faisal Anwar Malik, Dr. QaiserRafique Yasser (Group Heads) and SohailAjmalParacha and Mushtaq Ur Rehman (Senior Research Fellows).

Four distinguished guest speakershave shared their valuable experiences in this seminar, on different dimensions of women roles in rural development of Pakistan. Ms. ShandanaHumayun Khan, CEO, National Rural Support Program Network (NRSPN) highlighted the key issues of rural women and shared the practical issues of women in rural development. She also pointed out that the RSPN role in rural development and willing to provide technical support to CRE by signinga MoU. She recommended government to provide seed funds for development of women in rural economy.Dr. Saba GulKhattak (President, Open Society Foundations) highlighted the issue of women land rights in Pakistan, Ms. KhawarMumtaz, Chairperson, National Commission on the Status of Women (NCSW) addressed polices required for women economic empowerment, raise women voice for decision making and violence against women. She highlighted that the NCSW is publishing an annual report on the Status of Women in rural development 2017 in March 2018, which was funded by the Canadian Government. She stated that some facts & figures about the report the agriculture sector employees 21% of the labour forces out of which half are women, moreover, women labour force contributes 75% in the off farm activities. The report covers the facts about labour force activities, off-farm activities, family size, health, nutrition, skilled labour, taxing wealth, food security, rural literacy, and women rights. She recommend that the Centre may also focus on gender discrimination in labour force, gender production & reproduction work, gender physical & mental health, legal status of women labour in sector like fisheries, agriculture and nonfarm activities. Ms. RazinaAlam Khan, Chairperson, National Commission for Human Development (NCHD), stated that the NCHD sole responsibilityis to be provided formal and non-formal education to rural inhabitants and NCHD provide literacy to 3.8 million people and established 6000 literacy centers in the rural areas. She further mentioned that NCHD facilitated literacy programs for prisoners, established feeder schools, micro-credit initiatives around the country.In her presentationsheconferred that the role of women in inclusive rural transformation demarcated as a process in which rising agricultural productivity, increasing marketable surpluses, expanded off-farm employment opportunities, better access to services and infrastructure, capacity to influence policy all lead to improved rural livelihoods and inclusive growthin Pakistan.

Mr. Shoaib Sultan Khan and Rashid Bajwa also highlighted the key activities of the RSPN. Program Manager of Australian Center for International Agriculture Research (ACIAR),Dr. EjazQureshi mentioned their collaboration with CRE on the rural transformation project and said that the Australian government is planning to launch a women related program in Pakistan. Ms. MarviMemon,Chairperson of Benazir Income Support Program (BISP)discussed their initiated multiple micro-investment plans, credit facilities for women, community investment project. She concludedthe session by mentioning that the BISP has focused policies in the role of women in rural transformation may lead to numerous positive developments in the lives of people and their nations, such as improvement in life expectancy, improvements in education, health, water and sanitation, increased rural and urban employment opportunities, and empowerment of women the disadvantaged group. She emphasizedthat activities focusing on mal-nutrition/stunting and wasting programmes, e-commerce education among rural women and social mobilization programs which may had multiplier effect on the rural transformation. She appreciated Center for Rural Economy (CRE) to this conduct seminar on this important topic to create awareness about women role in sustainable development for policy makers and relevant stakeholders.