



CSC Evaluation and Monitoring Programme

## Women's Empowerment in Climate Change Action

*Durreshawar Mahmood*



Pakistan faces many environmental challenges, including frequent heavy flooding, which have had extensive and devastating effects on crop production. Agriculture is a significant source of employment and livelihoods for women and in Pakistan 67% of the sector's workforce are female.

Despite this, women are extremely underrepresented when it comes to the green sector in Pakistan. Innovative solutions are required to increase the engagement of women in climate change mitigation strategies, alongside promoting their socio-economic empowerment through this work. In addition, a deeper understanding of the various environmental changes is needed in order to effectively plan for disaster management and develop strategies to reduce the risk of depleting resources.

According to a 2019 World Bank report, more consistent and effective macroeconomic policies need to be implemented to reduce poverty and promote sustainable economic growth in Pakistan. Commonwealth Alumna Durreshawar Mahmood has played an instrumental role in tackling climate change and reducing poverty both as an expert and policy advisor on environmental and development issues in Pakistan. She has also led initiatives focused on empowering and advancing the role of Pakistani women in the green sector, with particular emphasis on green economy, renewable energy and entrepreneurship.



PAKW2E2 ICT skill building session with underserved women professionals on technology uptake for business development and communication in Azad Jammu and Kashmir (Bagh).



**Durreshawar Mahmood** was awarded a Commonwealth Scholarship in 2014 to study for an MSc in Global Environmental Change at University of Leicester. She is a co-founder of the Women in Renewable Energy Pakistan and founder of the Women Wireless Entrepreneurship and Empowerment initiatives. Through these initiatives, she has helped to advance the role of Pakistani women in the green sector as technical experts, policy makers, regulators, advisors, managers, and entrepreneurs. Durreshawar currently works for Ernst and Young as a policy advisor on an EU-funded initiative to develop and implement a poverty reduction strategy in Sindh (one of the major provinces of the country). She is also a team lead at WWF Pakistan working on Indus Delta Eco Region Landscape Initiative that engages the private sector in developing nature-based-bankable solutions funded by the Dutch Fund for climate change and development (DFCD). She has also consulted for the World Bank Pakistan, the European Union (EU) in Pakistan, UN Women, German Red Cross, USAID, in the areas of green enterprises, Climate Change, Women Empowerment, community driven local development and Entrepreneurship, Education, and Disaster Management. Durreshawar has delivered talks on climate action and entrepreneurship in 15 renowned universities in Pakistan and is a frequent volunteer and guest speaker in the areas that she is actively working on.

## Bridging the Gender Gap

When Durreshawar Mahmood took up the Commonwealth Scholarship to study for an MSc in Global Environmental Change at the University of Leicester, she had a clear sense of what she wanted to achieve, and how it would benefit her home country of Pakistan.

**'A lot of women in my country do not get opportunities to acquire a professional qualification... I will initiate a lot of environmental remediation projects where women can give their valuable input in saving the country's resources by creating awareness among its citizens and integrating community as an important stakeholder.'**

Following her scholarship, Durreshawar and another Commonwealth Alumnus co-founded Women in Renewable Energy (WIRE- Pakistan), a network that now includes 1,000 professionals in Pakistan. Established in 2018, WIRE Pakistan is a social enterprise that aims at ensuring diversity and inclusion in the renewable energy sector.

Bringing together women entrepreneurs, green entrepreneurs, energy professionals and climate specialists, WIRE provides women with training in Energy Management Systems, as well as opportunities for networking and collaboration. The network also empowers women to have a stronger and collective voice in the renewable energy sector, helping to bridge the significant gender gap that exists in the green sector in Pakistan.



Group photo of aspiring green sector women professionals who were trained on a 2-day bootcamp on climate action and green entrepreneurship through WIRE.

**'My UK scholarship has helped me in designing and executing some nation-wide women empowerment, women entrepreneurship and climate action programs.'**

Durreshawar has benefitted from the technical support provided by colleagues from the Commonwealth who studied for the same Masters programme at other UK universities, with whom she has also collaborated in creating project proposals, writing joint grant applications to multilateral organisations and donors, and in designing and implementing local projects in Pakistan.

**'It was my colleague, who was a Commonwealth Scholar, who teamed up with me and we co-founded Women in Renewable Energy.'**

Durreshawar and colleagues also run nation-wide climate action and advocacy efforts through social media, networking events, residential boot camps, dialogues, and training sessions to advance the role of women in the green sector in Pakistan. Participants from around the globe have also benefitted from this network by exchanging knowledge on best practices in renewable energy management and climate change, which they have been able to adapt to their local contexts.

**'Under [Women in Renewable Energy] I try to give back to the community, using the knowledge from my education in the UK, which has been in environment and climate change.'**

For example, in 2018 WIRE organised a three-day residential boot camp at the Mera Maan Residential Training Centre, on the topic of 'Energizing Pakistan: Developing Tomorrow's Leadership with Greater Climate Action Pledge'. The aim was to provide mentoring and advance the role of women in the male-dominated green sector, particularly in renewable energy.

The WIRE Boot Camp brought together **30 companies, 26 Trainees, 26 Mentees, 8 Mentors, 15 Speakers, 100 members from the community (students, community members, observers), and over 500 Social Media Followers (400 Facebook and 123 Twitter).**

Durreshawar has also dedicated time to visit local universities where she runs seminars to share knowledge on climate change issues with students. She also delivers talks in the private sector and to government agencies to promote awareness and discourse.

## Harnessing the Power of Networks to Promote Development

Durreshawar is also the founder and CEO of the Pakistan Wireless Women Entrepreneurship and Empowerment (PAKW2E2) initiative. This network promotes internet-based social micro-enterprises aimed at gender inclusion and socio-economic empowerment of women, while giving them an opportunity to become agents of change in their communities. PAKW2E2 provides rural women with access to information and communication technology (ICT) infrastructure, such as hardware, software, digital tools, and wireless internet connectivity, as well as capacity-building workshops, equipping them with the information and ICT skills needed to set up and enhance the performance of their businesses.



As a result of the PAKW2E2 initiative, **300** women have been trained in ICT (approx. **50** each from cities including Peshawar, Ghizer, Bagh, Quetta, Rawalpindi, Lahore). Over half (**200**) of these trainees have gone on to use ICT to scale up their businesses especially using various social media outlets for business development, communication and marketing, mobile cash applications for digital banking and logistics applications to reach out to customers. Twenty of the beneficiaries have also made use of their newfound skills to conduct workshops on digital literacy, which have been attended by over **6,000** girls and women.

PAKW2E2 has also connected with policy makers and other influential stakeholders in Pakistan through its advocacy activities.

**'Most importantly, the project created long lasting working relationships with over 50 different public and private organisations working in technology and entrepreneurship space. This is the most important outcome to ensure the sustainability of PAKW2E2.'**

Networking forums conducted by PAKW2E2 have also accelerated the creation of business partnerships between established women entrepreneurs from urban centres and rural women entrepreneurs, as well as creating opportunities for women entrepreneurs to partner with their local organisations for business opportunities and information exchange.

Over 50 policy makers, CEOs and managers have been mobilised to support the PAKW2E2 programme through the provision of technology spaces and opportunities for rural women entrepreneurs in Pakistan. A total of **275** students (**120** in Ghizer-Gilgit Baltistan, **110** in Fatima Jinnah women university Rawalpindi, and **45** in Bahria university Islamabad) have also been reached and supported.

In addition to applying the skills and knowledge acquired from her Commonwealth Scholarship in her development work in Pakistan, Durreshawar's career progression has also been influenced and supported by the Commonwealth-based networks and relationships that she developed during the scholarship.

**'The influence of Commonwealth Networks is the best part about the Commonwealth Scholarship. The alumni network has been very active. In fact, my second job was recommended by my colleague who was also a Commonwealth Scholar.'**

Durreshawar highlighted the residential workshop weekend held at Cumberland Lodge (which formed part of the Commonwealth Scholarship Commission's Development Training Programme) as one of the most memorable networking events that she attended while in the UK, giving her an opportunity to establish long-lasting relations and networks with other Commonwealth Scholars.

**'The lasting memory was definitely the team building activities, the groupwork that took place in the Cumberland Lodge [workshop].'**

Durreshawar has tapped into the networks that she built with other Commonwealth Scholars during this event to identify guest speakers for her advocacy work and activities around environmental management and women's empowerment.

## Driving development in Pakistan

In addition to leading initiatives to advocate for gender inclusion in the green sector and the socio-economic empowerment of women, Durreshawar has also worked as a consultant on various multidimensional development projects and legislative portfolios in Pakistan. This work has included strengthening resilience and response to natural disasters as well as promoting climate action, women's empowerment, poverty reduction, and community development. As a consultant she has contributed to impact evaluation and research studies for multilateral organisations such as the World Bank, the European Union (EU), the United Nations (UN) Women, and the German Red Cross, across the same thematic areas.

**'I would say it is my scholarship that has gotten me here, the confidence and other skills.'**

Currently, Durreshawar is working as a policy advisor for Ernst and Young Pakistan and is part of the advisory body and technical assistance component of the SUCCESS project, an EU funded initiative aimed at reducing poverty, promoting women's empowerment and supporting their involvement with the local government across eight districts in Sindh, Pakistan. The initiative has supported the Government of Sindh in developing a Poverty Reduction Strategy integrating Community Driven Local Development, Urban Economic Cluster and Rural Growth Centres approach.

As part of the technical team, Durreshawar led the development of a results-based performance management system to support the implementation of the Poverty Reduction Strategy. Now in the wrap up phase, this was the first such strategic framework for poverty reduction developed in the Sindh province of Pakistan. Based on her extensive experience with the green sector and enterprise development, she has also undertaken a fresh role as team leader for the Indus Delta Ecoregion Landscape Initiative funded by the Dutch Fund for Climate Change and Development to develop bankable projects with the private sector, with conservational and social outcomes and high economic returns.

**‘[The Poverty Reduction Strategy] is a one of a kind. It’s happened for the first time in Pakistan, and I’m very much honoured to be in the pool of youngest consultants.... to be part of the team at my age.’**

As part of this work, she regularly draws from the knowledge and skills enhanced during her studies in the UK. She leads the training of government officials on the implementation of the strategy, and contributes to writing different publications, manuals, and guidelines to inform the implementation of the strategy. Her publications include work on the rural enterprise landscape in Sindh, community driven local development options and comparative analysis between Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa and Sindh provinces.

**‘The Scholarship polished my interpersonal skills, which is very important. Because as long as you are able to communicate and write, you can always make a difference. This gave me confidence in multitudes, and I utilised these skills to deliver impactful training.’**

The training workshops conducted by Durreshawar have improved the knowledge and skills on developmental issues for public officials at her assignment at Ernst and Young and for participants in her ventures at PAKW2E2, WIRE, and other assignments with intrapreneurs, university students or community members.

**‘The great news is that these people [government officials] are very much determined to uptake the knowledge and to adapt it.’**



Durreshawar delivering session on Monitoring and Evaluation Framework for Sindh under Sindh's poverty reduction strategy implementation efforts undertaken for the government of Sindh with Ernst and Young Pakistan.

The Poverty Reduction strategy has since been adopted by the government and other implementing agencies.

**‘In the light of that Poverty Reduction Strategy that we created, all the programme implementing agencies are now streamlining their intervention in the light of the provincial Poverty Reduction Strategy.’**

The tool that she has helped to develop has been used to track poverty reduction interventions, improving accountability, reporting and milestones, justification for

investment, and value for money for the public investment in these initiatives. In line with the Poverty Reduction Strategy, the Sindh local government and NGOs working with grassroots communities have offered entrepreneurial training targeting vulnerable communities, among them women who are within the lowest income band and supporting them to progress.

Durreshawar is also consulting for the World Bank in Pakistan, offering technical advice to their social safeguards team on the social risk assessment related to resettlement, existing labour laws and practices, and inclusivity and disability. This has informed the review of the Environmental and Social Management Framework (ESMF), for Pakistan’s aquaculture for economic growth and nutritional security programme and digital literacy programme as part of their Covid-19 response. This has resulted in better management of environmental and social risks associated with projects and improved developmental outcomes.

**‘It’s because of the Commonwealth Scholarship and my experience that I’m now consulting for [the World Bank].’**

As a programme specialist for the Climate Advocacy and Coordination for Resilient Action (CACRA) project, administered by the German Red Cross in Islamabad, she had the opportunity to train over 800 volunteers on climate integrated responses, disaster management, and recovery operations in four provinces of Pakistan. Durreshawar also led the development of a climate awareness capacity building programme for vulnerable communities in four provinces of Pakistan and contributed to the upgrading of Disaster Management policy.

She has also promoted entrepreneurship capacity for Pakistani women through her work with the Shaor Foundation and leading the implementation of the Women Can Do project. This project focused on training university girls and local women on entrepreneurial skills while integrating existing information and communication technology (ICT) to enhance their ability to network and create and run businesses within the comfort of their homes. This work was particularly important for women as a lack of mobility was one of the barriers contributing to their exclusion from entrepreneurial projects.

**‘Women cannot step out of their houses to work as entrepreneurs. So why not design something where they can sit at home and create a project.’**

As part of the PAKW2E2 project, it was key to bridge the gap between industry leaders, policy makers and rural women entrepreneurs and their welfare organisations through constant advocacy, mobilization and networking forums. In line with this, she ran activities on advocacy and mobilisation of women at universities, business associations, and women’s chambers in Pakistan with policy makers, media personnel, and leaders across 11 districts and four provinces.

Durreshawar dedicated a great deal of time to the project, travelling across the country and reaching out to over **3,700** women entrepreneurs in **11** districts of Pakistan. She also advocated for the need for a women entrepreneurship policy to **200** policy makers in Pakistan in 2015.

## Adapting to Promote Change

While Durreshawar has been successful in implementing a range of development programmes in Pakistan, she has encountered stumbling blocks along the way. For the PAKW2E2 project, she and her colleagues had to deal with dropouts from the training sessions due to clashing commitments with trainees' daily tasks and activities. Others lacked basic English language skills, causing disruption to the programme, which ultimately had to be extended from three to six months to allow for the provision of a basic English course for trainees. In some cases, continuous training and support had to be provided, and a community mentorship programme was developed for some trainees who lacked confidence to start business initiatives.

Apart from programme-specific challenges, there were also challenges related to introducing formalised approaches to an informal environment. While in the UK, Durreshawar had learned about using a systematic, professionalised approach to delivering activities. However, upon returning to Pakistan she has at times struggled to replicate these formalised working modalities in spaces that are still very informal.

**'What you learn [in the] UK, everything is very systematic there, whatever we study in the UK. But when you come back to your home country and you start working in different sectors, in whatever capacity, things are very much informal.'**

Through her consultancy work in Pakistan, Durreshawar has had opportunities to work with multiple international organisations and has worked to adapt formal structures and policies to the local context. One aspect of her work that has attracted locally based international organisations, while also supporting development in her country, is promoting and streamlining gender equality.

**'My passion to work for women's empowerment is definitely coming from my personal experience with gender inequalities and that encountering by my colleagues and the wider community.'**

It is this passion for women's empowerment that motivated her to take up consultancy projects that promote gender equality and development, and to take the further step of starting her own initiatives, WIRE- Pakistan and PAKW2E2, through which she has helped to empower thousands of other Pakistani women. Durreshawar's work has helped to ensure women's voices are heard in environment and climate-oriented projects, thereby bridging the gender gap in the green sector, and enabled women to engage in entrepreneurship and contribute to economic development in Pakistan.

Looking ahead, Durreshawar hopes to study for a PhD in development studies, which will feed into her poverty reduction and green enterprise development work - an area where there is still a gap in expertise in Pakistan. In this way, she hopes to further contribute to reshaping livelihoods by bringing green growth and climate action to the heart of development work and continuing to unite environmental work, socio-economic stability and poverty reduction in Pakistan.

### More about Durreshawar Mahmood's work

<https://success.org.pk/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Women-Empowerment-Final.pdf>

<https://tribune.com.pk/story/1173805/women-can-project-ends-high-hope>

<https://success.org.pk/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Policy-and-advocacy-dialogue-report-Final.pdf>

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