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Glass Ceiling in Pakistan's Politics: Factors, Determinants and Strategies for Shattering

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ABSTRACT

The glass ceiling in Pakistan's politics represents a significant barrier hindering women's ascent to leadership positions and equal participation. This study examines the factors and determinants perpetuating the glass ceiling that impede women's progress in Pakistan's male-dominated political landscape. The study was done by using the qualitative content analysis technique and in-depth interviews of the female politicians and civil society representatives. The study concluded that Pakistan has notable women leaders like Benazir Bhutto and Fatima Jinnah and handsome number of reserved seats for females in legislatures and legal and policy framework for enhancing females' political participation in political representation and, yet challenges persist. Addressing the glass ceiling requires multifaceted efforts from government, civil society, and individuals to promote inclusivity and support women's leadership development, ultimately enriching Pakistan's political diversity and societal progress.

Keywords: Glass ceiling, Male-dominated, Political participation, Political representation, Inclusivity, Diversity

Introduction of the Study

The concept of "glass ceiling" referred to invisible barriers that prevented women from ascending to leadership positions and inclusion in politics. This metaphorical ceiling was

not tangible but represented the unspoken, often deeply ingrained obstacles that blocked advancement to top roles. In many societies including Pakistan, these barriers were complex and multifaceted, stemming from mix of cultural, social, economic, and institutional factors.

In Pakistan, despite having had notable female leaders like Benazir Bhutto (former Prime Minister), women remained underrepresented in political offices and decision-making bodies. Benazir Bhutto's political career was significant example indicating that women could achieve high leadership positions in country. However, her example contrasted with broader trend of limited female participation in Pakistan's politics, suggesting that various challenges persisted. The underrepresentation of women in political leadership roles pointed to presence of glass ceiling influencing their advancement in political sphere.

The situation indicated that there were some factors which hindered the female representation and also indicated its determinants and need to shatter these barriers. This study examines the complex interplay of factors that hinder women's advancement in political leadership through an in-depth exploration of key issues. It also shed light on barriers women face in entering and succeeding in politics, intersections of family politics, education, and quota-based systems, critical determinants shaping women's political trajectories and proposed strategies to shatter the glass ceiling and promote inclusive representation.

Defining the Glass Ceiling

The glass ceiling metaphor aptly described the invisible yet formidable barriers that hindered women's progression to senior positions. This phenomenon was pervasive, affecting women in small and large organizations alike, and preventing them from ascending to top management roles. At its core, the glass ceiling was perpetuated by bias from male-dominated leadership and administrative structures, which subtly yet systematically undermined women's potential (Zaccaro, Gulick, & Khare, 2008). In the realm of politics, women faced particular challenges. To establish credibility and make name for them, women seeking political office had to work diligently. However, their journey was fraught with cultural and political barriers that their male counterparts often

did not encounter. For instance, women typically had fewer financial resources to allocate to political endeavors, making it harder to compete with well-funded male opponents.

Furthermore, women faced unique complexities during election campaigns. Gender bias, stereotyping, and societal expectations affected how their messages were perceived and how they were evaluated as candidates. These obstacles required women in politics to navigate a more challenging landscape, where their credibility and competence were often scrutinized more intensely. As a result, women had to work harder to establish themselves and gain recognition in the political arena (Gidengil & Everitt, 2003). Ultimately, the persistence of these barriers underscored the need for systemic change to promote gender equality. By acknowledging and addressing these challenges, societies were able to work towards creating a more inclusive and equitable environment that enabled women to ascend to leadership positions and participate fully in the political process (Tarrar, 2023).

There were several barriers in the way of women's political participation which were natural as well as man-made (Tarrar, 2023). Mostly male politicians created hurdles in the way of women who wanted to join politics. From the male side, different tactics were used to pressure women politicians. For example, women who wanted to join politics were threatened in different ways, and women were easily subdued. Therefore, it was one of the big threats for women who wanted to join politics (Malik, 2023). Moreover, there were barriers from family, religion, and society for keeping women away from joining the political field. Women in many societies were not considered suitable to participate in politics. These societal and cultural norms often restricted women's engagement in public and political life, making it challenging for them to pursue political careers (Squire, 1988).

Women were considered separate citizens in many societies. It could be judged from the examples of the developed states that they allowed women politicians to participate in politics and to vote after decades of political movements from women's side (Hain & Piereson, 1975). In developing countries like Pakistan, the inclusion of women in politics was much slower than that of men politicians and this was due to barriers which were made by men in society because this was patriarchal society and men were at the top of the stage (Afzal, 2023). There are number of women who tackled these obstacles and

made space for them in the political sphere of Pakistan, Benazir Bhutto was an example of this phenomenon (Malik, 2023). It became very difficult for women to participate in politics in the presence of male politicians. Men politicians did not want women to participate in politics and gain benefits over men politicians. These dynamics led to significant challenges for women seeking political roles, often limiting their opportunities and influence (Hain & Piereson, 1975).

Seventy years on saw that women continued to make sacrifices and were an integral part of the ever-evolving Pakistani society. A developing country, despite its many trials and tribulations over the years, had managed to secure a large female representation in parliament. Socio-cultural factors, reinforced by religion, made it difficult for Pakistani women to see themselves as suitable for higher positions, as they were not seen fit to be leaders. Traditionally, women in their culture and religion were treated as young adults unable to make important decisions independently. These perceptions influenced women's roles and participation in various spheres, including politics (Mumtaz, 2005).

When dealing with such factors, it was noteworthy that these factors not only pertained to Pakistan but could be widely seen all over the world. Though the cultural factors that instigated the glass ceiling in Pakistan were unique. Although there were no real laws prohibiting females from joining politics, it still weighed heavily on female advancement in politics (Djupe & Olson, 2013). There was need to battle against discrimination, to better lives of women by raising them to higher-level positions in politics (Bhatti, 2023). This bias was unconsciously perpetuated by women themselves, who had come to internalize these stereotypes. By educating women and changing their thinking, women became more confident in their abilities, resulting in more women breaking their socio-cultural barriers and ultimately improving their economic standing (Malik, 2023).

Women Equal Representation and Glass Ceiling

Women's equal representation in politics is an important issue for all the democracies of the world. Although more women have entered the political arena, women's scarcity at the top level positions remains a universal political phenomenon (Cooper, Schindler, & Sun, 2006). In present-day democracies, there is an unequal

distribution of power in politics. Currently, the average female representation in legislative assemblies around the world is 23.3 percent in both houses, while in Asia it is 19.3 percent. Overall worldwide 1237 ministerial portfolios are held by women in 186 countries. When it comes to Pakistan, the percentage is 20.6 percent (70/342) in the lower house (NAP, 2022), and 18.82 percent (16/85) in the upper house (Noreen, 2019). From the total 85 cabinet ministries, women hold just seven (less than one percent) (GOP, 2022).

Such a dearth of women on the highest political posts suggests that society is still keeping them outside of leadership positions and they are not involved in decision making (Murray, 2010). However, with more and more women entering into politics as compared to the past decade, this constant influx of women in politics might suggest that the glass ceiling is a thing of the past. But in the political sphere, it is still a reality. Women continue to be underrepresented in management positions, particularly in politics, their representation in decision-making structures lags far behind men. Although there is a growing number of women entering the political sphere, then parliament, and having political portfolios including ministries, upward mobility criteria of women's political careers are not defined yet (Jalalzai & Rincker, 2018).

Numerous scholars argued that women carry different perspective on public policy problems (Zamfirache, 2010). The presence of women in upper-level managerial and administrative positions may give different outlooks to the direction of policy outputs. Feminist political theorists argued that increased participation of women is key to address the gender disparities (Bari, 2010), and women's parity in politics can hide large gender inequality. Women's low participation in governments can result in severe costs for the political agenda, and for the legitimacy of democratic institutions (Norris & Inglehart, 2001).

The scarcity of women in important decision-making positions had made it difficult for women parliamentarians to point out the weaknesses and gaps in the existing policies and give meaningful input by representing the overlooked half of the population, that was, women. The presence of women at the top-level positions had been beneficial for effective and sustainable policymaking. Significant advantages had resulted from the

increased representation of women in the upper echelons of the political arena (Afzal, 2023).

Women had the competence to rise to higher positions, but they faced many obstacles on the way to getting ahead straightforwardly as men often did, which was linked to the glass ceiling phenomenon. The concept of the glass ceiling symbolized a distinctive form of career hindrances that explained the lack of women and minorities in decision-making positions (Djupe & Olson, 2013). Glass ceiling came across in an organization at the top of the hierarchy and prevented women from achieving the same positions as men. Some argued that the glass ceiling had already been shattered, while others argued otherwise. Maybe instead of a glass ceiling, women were now facing a glass labyrinth (Hain & Piereson, 1975).

However, the term glass ceiling was misleading as it erroneously assumed a glass ceiling was an absolute barrier at a specific level, generally near the top, implying that women and minorities had equal entry at the lower levels. This perspective overlooked the complexities and nuances of the challenges women encountered throughout their careers (Tarrar, 2023). The barriers women faced were multifaceted and could vary across different contexts and organizational structures. The idea of a glass labyrinth suggested a more intricate and winding path for women's career advancement, reflecting the various obstacles and detours they might encounter (Bari, 2010). Discussions around the glass ceiling highlighted the ongoing challenges to achieving gender equality in professional and leadership spheres. Understanding these dynamics was crucial for addressing the disparities and fostering more inclusive environments (Bhatti, 2023).

Factors Contributing to Glass Ceiling

The factors that contributed to this glass ceiling in Pakistan's political landscape were likely varied. Socio-cultural norms and traditional gender roles restricted women's engagement in public and political life. Pakistan's societal structures, often patriarchal in nature, influenced women's access to political opportunities and leadership positions. Additionally, factors like limited access to financial resources, education, and political

networking hindered women's political careers. Security concerns and personal safety issues also deterred women from active political participation in certain contexts.

Determinants of Women to Enter in Politics

Many factors had determined women's entrance into politics, such as political stability and instability, law and order conditions in a state, and the type of political and party system in a country. If a system was overshadowed by political instability, then there were higher chances that women would participate in politics (Jalalzai & Rincker, 2018). This had enhanced the opportunity for women to gain access to higher executive political posts, often in replacement of their family members, as a result of military coups or political assassinations. Consequently, the factor of political turmoil had been one of the prominent determinants influencing the role of women in politics (Malik, 2023). Political instability had sometimes created unforeseen pathways for women's political involvement, often linked to familial connections or extraordinary circumstances (Bhatti, 2023). Such contexts had shaped women's entry into political arenas in various countries. The interplay of political dynamics and societal structures had impacted women's participation in politics, leading to varied outcomes. In some instances, extraordinary events had propelled women into prominent political roles. The circumstances surrounding women's political engagement had been complex and multifaceted, reflecting broader political and socio-cultural landscapes (Tarrar, 2023).

In countries like Pakistan, women were regarded as a political minority with inadequate representation in power positions. They shared their roles and responsibilities with male executives (Afzal, 2023). Some of the notable factors influencing the prominence of women leaders in Asian countries included patriarchy, martyrdom, social class, familial ties, independence movements, prison experiences, and electoral arrangements, which were explored as key facilitators through which women had attained powerful leadership positions (Noreen, 2019).

Women were working as pilots, doctors, political candidates, leaders of political parties, and most importantly as heads of state (Malik, 2023). The question that arose was how women came to power in societies where numerous taboos restricted their social

participation in various fields. In such societies, the rise of women as political leaders of a party or as heads of state was not a common occurrence. For such participation, high-level political ambitions were necessary, and it required a long and arduous struggle to reach the point of success. Women who were heads of state had to work harder than their male counterparts because, on one hand, they had to confront societal taboos, and on the other, they had to combat opposition within the political arena (Tarrar, 2023).

Family Politics and Women Role

Family politics and the role of women were very important in the field of politics. Some families were so deeply involved in politics that many of their members, both male and female, were actively participating in practical political activities. Therefore, in such an environment, it was relatively easy for women from these families to become involved in politics and pursue it as a political career (Malik, 2023). Women in such cases did not have to exert as much effort to break into politics; they often carried on the legacy of their family. In this way, many women had earned a notable place in the political history of the world. This phenomenon was observed in both developing and developed countries (Chaudhary, 2023).

It was indicated that out of fifty-four women executives, fifteen were either daughters or wives of politicians and had succeeded their male family members to executive posts, a pattern notable in regions like South Asia (Noreen, 2019). The connection between family background and women's political participation was evident, highlighting the role of familial ties in shaping political careers for women (Tarrar, 2023). In many instances, women's entry into politics was facilitated by their family's political heritage, illustrating the interplay between family dynamics and political engagement (Bhatti, 2023).

The majority of examples indicated that women had assumed executive political positions and had initially worked according to principles and structures established by men, often having associations with strong male political figures. Notable female political leaders in South Asia included Indira Gandhi, Sirimavo Bandaranaike, Khalida Zia, and Benazir Bhutto. In Burma, the daughter of the nationalist leader Aung San, who was assassinated, had been driven to pursue executive office amidst extraordinary political and economic

challenges and repression. Aung San Suu Kyi's path to leadership was significantly influenced by her father's legacy and the country's tumultuous political landscape. South Asia stood out for having the highest percentage of women in executive political posts, albeit often due to their connections with influential male political figures. In contrast, no other region had more than ten percent of women serving as parliamentarians, highlighting the unique, albeit complex, position of women in South Asian politics (Reynolds, 1999). The situation was same in Pakistan and huge number of female politicians entered in the political arena due to family affiliation and accidental problem as well as other engagements of male-counterpart of the family. Benazir Bhutto, Kalsoom Nawaz Sharif, Maryam Nawaz, Saira Afzal Tarar, Tehmina Daultana, Rahila Baloch, Najma Afzal, Aneeqa Mehdi, Nabila Sana, Abida Hussain, Ghulam Bibi Bharwana, Shezra Mansab, Saima Bharwana, Aisha Jutt, Samina Khalid Ghurki are example for this phenomenon.

Education and Awareness

Education had been one of the most significant factors determining women's inclusion in politics. Based on their education, women had been progressing in various fields, and politics was one of them. Therefore, it had been crucial to encourage and provide facilities to women for better educational opportunities so that they could participate in politics and contribute to the country's development. Some women had held high political positions despite not being well-educated, often due to factors such as family connections or other circumstances discussed earlier. However, such examples were rare, as women were often treated differently and faced prejudice. The society had been male-dominated, with men predominantly managing worldly affairs. In such an environment, it had been challenging for women to succeed in politics without education. Education had equipped them with the necessary tools to navigate and compete in the political arena, providing a foundation for a better future in politics. Women's access to education had played a pivotal role in shaping their political participation and empowerment. The lack of education had often posed significant barriers to their involvement in political processes. Efforts to promote women's education had been vital for enhancing their roles in politics and broader societal engagement (Hain & Piereson, 1975).

Women in Politics on Quota Base

In modern times, there had been a quota system for women in the political field in both developing and developed countries. This had been a significant opportunity for women to enter the practical realm of politics. It was considered one of the favorable measures extended by male politicians to encourage women's participation in political activities (Noreen, 2019). Based on quotas, women had been included in politics and had been encouraged to participate in open systems where distinctions between men and women were absent. Two types of tracks had been adopted by states; some countries had opted for the incremental track model for women's inclusion in politics, while most developing countries had chosen the fast-track option, utilizing reserved quotas and party quotas to bring more women into politics (Noreen, 2019). Pakistan adopted fast-track model for women's inclusion in politics, utilizing reserved quotas and party quotas to increase representation. This approach had paved the way for women's easier entry into the political sphere and Pakistani females are proving them good politicians by having chance to reach in the legislatures and local bodies on quota-base representation (Malik, 2023).

Legal and Policy Frameworks

Setting the legal and policy framework to enhance females' representation in politics has been considered best practice in the world but it was considered difficult and challenging strategy. Pakistan has established various legal and policy frameworks to promote women's representation and empowerment. Let's break down some key aspects

Reserved Seats: Women are allocated reserved seats in the National Assembly (60 seats), reserved seats in Senate (8 seats) and provincial assemblies (168 seats across Balochistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Punjab, and Sindh) as well as same in the local bodies, aiming to enhance their political representation. The seats were reserved for females in legislature since 2002 and still continued.

Elections Act 2017: This act enshrines women's right to political participation and grants reserved seats for women, marking a significant step towards gender inclusivity. This act bound the political parties to nominate five percent female candidates on general seats

and empower the Election Commission of Pakistan for strict action against the political parties who would not nominate five percent females on general seats.

Strategies for shattering Glass Ceiling

Strategies to shatter this glass ceiling included promoting gender-sensitive policies that supported women's political participation. Enhancing women's political education and training empowered them with necessary skills and knowledge for leadership roles. Support for female political candidates, including financial and campaign assistance, helped boost their electoral success. Encouraging political parties to adopt inclusive structures, like quotas or affirmative action for women, was another potential approach. Addressing socio-cultural norms through awareness and advocacy campaigns might have helped in changing perceptions and fostering a more inclusive political environment (Tarrar, 2023). Here are proposed strategies for shattering the glass ceiling:

Individual Strategies:

Leadership Development

Investing in leadership development is crucial for shattering the glass ceiling. Women should seek training, mentorship, and coaching to enhance their leadership skills. This can include identifying leadership development programs, seeking mentorship from experienced leaders, and attending conferences and workshops. By developing leadership skills, women can build confidence, expand their networks, and prepare for senior roles.

Networking

Building relationships with influential people and joining professional organizations is vital for career advancement. Women should attend industry events, join professional associations, and connect with leaders on LinkedIn. Networking helps women access valuable information, gain visibility, and secure recommendations.

Self-Promotion

Confidently showcasing achievements and capabilities is essential for career growth. Women should develop a personal brand, create a portfolio, and share accomplishments on social media. Self-promotion helps women demonstrate their value, build credibility, and attract opportunities.

Resilience

Developing coping mechanisms is crucial for handling challenges and setbacks. Women should practice self-care, build a support network, and reframe failures as learning opportunities. Resilience enables women to navigate obstacles, maintain motivation, and stay focused on their goals.

Goal Setting

Setting clear, achievable goals is vital for career progression. Women should set SMART goals, break goals into smaller tasks, and regularly review progress. Goal setting helps women stay focused, prioritize efforts, and celebrate achievements.

Organizational Strategies

Diversity and Inclusion Policies

Implementing diversity and inclusion policies promotes equal opportunities. Organizations should develop diversity and inclusion policies, provide training on unconscious bias, and establish diversity and inclusion committees. These policies foster inclusive cultures, address biases, and ensure fairness.

Mentorship Programs

Mentorship programs pair women with experienced mentors, providing guidance and support. Organizations should develop formal mentorship programs, match mentors and mentees, and monitor progress. Mentorship helps women gain valuable insights, build confidence, and access networks.

Training and Development

Offering training and development opportunities enhances women's skills and knowledge. Organizations should provide training on leadership skills, communication skills, and bias awareness. Training empowers women to take on new challenges, build confidence, and advance in their careers.

Flexible Work Arrangements

Providing flexible work arrangements supports work-life balance. Organizations should offer flexible scheduling, provide remote work options, and encourage work-life balance. Flexible work arrangements help women manage responsibilities, reduce stress, and increase productivity.

Performance-Based Promotions

Ensuring fair, merit-based promotions is critical for career advancement. Organizations should develop clear promotion criteria, use blind hiring practices, and regularly review promotion decisions. Performance-based promotions ensure fairness, address biases, and recognize achievements.

Systemic Strategies

Legislative Reforms

Advocating for policies supporting women's empowerment is crucial. Governments should support equal pay legislation, advocate for parental leave policies, and encourage policy reforms. Legislative reforms address systemic inequalities, promote gender equality, and create supportive environments.

Quota Systems

Implementing temporary quotas increases women's representation. Governments should establish quotas for leadership positions, implement quotas for board membership, and

monitor quota effectiveness. Quotas address underrepresentation, promote diversity, and ensure fairness.

Education and Awareness

Promoting gender sensitivity and challenging stereotypes is essential. Governments should provide education on gender equality, conduct awareness campaigns, and challenge gender stereotypes. Education and awareness foster inclusive cultures, address biases, and promote understanding.

Media Representation

Encouraging positive portrayals of women leaders challenges negative stereotypes. Media outlets should promote women leaders, encourage diverse representation, and challenge negative stereotypes. Positive representation inspires women, challenges biases, and promotes role models.

Research and Data Analysis

Tracking progress and identifying areas for improvement informs policy decisions. Governments should conduct research on gender equality, analyze data on women's representation, and identify areas for improvement. Research and data analysis ensure evidence-based policies, address gaps, and promote progress.

Policy and Legislative Strategies for Women's Empowerment

Implementing Electoral Reforms

Electoral reforms, such as proportional representation, can increase women's representation in politics. This system allows for a more diverse range of candidates to be elected, giving women a fairer chance of being represented ¹. By implementing proportional representation, countries can move away from traditional majoritarian systems that often favor male candidates.

Enacting Legislation to Address Violence Against Women

Legislation addressing violence against women in politics is crucial for creating a safe and inclusive environment. This includes laws that criminalize harassment, intimidation, and violence against female politicians and activists ². Such legislation can help prevent women from being discouraged or forced out of politics due to violence or threats.

Providing Public Financing for Campaigns

Public financing for campaigns reduces financial barriers for women seeking political office. This levels the playing field, allowing women to compete with men who may have more resources ¹. By providing public financing, governments can promote diversity and inclusivity in politics.

Establishing Family-Friendly Policies

Family-friendly policies, such as parental leave and childcare support, enable women to balance family responsibilities with political careers. These policies help women overcome structural barriers that often force them to choose between family and politics ². By establishing family-friendly policies, governments can promote women's participation in politics.

Strengthening Anti-Discrimination Laws

Strengthening anti-discrimination laws and enforcement is vital for protecting women's rights in politics. This includes laws that prohibit discrimination based on gender, race, or ethnicity ³. Effective enforcement mechanisms, such as independent commissions or tribunals, can ensure that these laws are upheld.

Cultural Strategies

Challenging Stereotypes

Addressing unconscious biases and gendered expectations is crucial. Societies should challenge negative stereotypes, promote positive role models, and encourage diverse

perspectives. Challenging stereotypes fosters inclusive cultures, promotes understanding, and addresses biases.

Role Modeling

Highlighting successful women leaders inspires and motivates. Societies should share stories of women leaders, celebrate women's achievements, and provide mentorship. Role modeling encourages women to pursue leadership roles, builds confidence, and promotes aspiration.

Community Engagement

Fostering supportive networks and communities empowers women. Societies should establish women's networks, encourage community involvement, and provide resources. Community engagement provides support, fosters connections, and promotes collective growth.

Male Allyship

Encouraging men to advocate for women's empowerment promotes gender equality. Engaging men in gender equality, providing allyship training, and encouraging men to advocate challenges patriarchal norms and fosters inclusive cultures. Male allies amplify women's voices, challenge biases, and promote policy changes.

Celebrating Successes

Recognizing and celebrating women's achievements promotes visibility and inspiration. Celebrating women's accomplishments, recognizing women leaders, and sharing success stories challenges negative stereotypes and fosters role models. Celebrations can include awards, public recognition, and media coverage.

Technological Strategies

Digital Literacy

Enhancing women's digital skills and online presence is crucial in today's digital age. This involves providing training programs that focus on developing skills such as coding, digital marketing, and online safety. By doing so, women can confidently navigate the digital landscape and access opportunities that can improve their economic and social well-being ¹. For instance, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) aims to help 1 million more women access and control digital assets.

Online Platforms

Creating online spaces for women's networking and empowerment can foster global connections and knowledge-sharing. This can be achieved through online forums, social media groups, and dedicated websites that provide resources and support for women. These platforms can also serve as safe spaces for women to share their experiences and challenges.

Social Media Campaigns

Utilizing social media to challenge stereotypes and promote women leaders is an effective way to amplify women's voices. Social media campaigns can leverage hashtags, storytelling, and visuals to raise awareness and promote gender equality. For example, sharing stories of successful women leaders can inspire and motivate others to pursue leadership roles.

Virtual Mentorship

Providing remote mentorship and support can empower women to access guidance and expertise globally. Virtual mentorship programs can connect women with mentors from diverse backgrounds and industries, providing valuable insights and advice. This can be particularly beneficial for women in remote or underserved communities.

Data-Driven Decision Making

Leveraging data analytics to inform gender equality initiatives is critical for effective decision-making. This involves collecting and analyzing data on gender disparities and using the insights to develop targeted interventions. By doing so, organizations can track progress, identify areas for improvement, and make informed decisions that promote gender equality.

Collaborative Strategies

Multi-Stakeholder Partnerships

Fostering collaborations between organizations, governments, and communities is essential for promoting gender equality. Multi-stakeholder partnerships can bring together diverse perspectives and expertise, leading to more effective solutions. For instance, the UNDP partners with governments, civil society, and the private sector to advance gender equality.

Cross-Sectoral Cooperation

Encouraging cooperation between private, public, and non-profit sectors can promote knowledge-sharing and resource mobilization. Cross-sectoral cooperation can also facilitate the development of innovative solutions that address complex gender equality challenges.

Global Networking

Connecting women leaders worldwide can foster global solidarity and knowledge-sharing. Global networking initiatives can provide opportunities for women to share experiences, best practices, and lessons learned.

Best Practice Sharing

Exchanging effective strategies and lessons learned is critical for promoting gender equality. Best practice sharing can facilitate the replication of successful initiatives and avoid duplication of efforts.

Collective Advocacy

Amplifying voices and advocating for policy changes is essential for promoting gender equality. Collective advocacy can mobilize public support, influence policy decisions, and hold leaders accountable for promoting gender equality ¹.

Educational and Research Strategies

Conducting Research for Women's Political Participation

Conducting research on women's political participation and barriers is crucial for understanding the complexities of women's underrepresentation in politics. This research can identify systemic obstacles, social attitudes, and institutional biases that hinder women's political advancement. By analyzing data and trends, researchers can develop evidence-based solutions to address these challenges. For instance, studies can investigate the impact of gender quotas, voting behaviors, and media representation on women's political participation.

Developing Curriculum and Educational Programs on Women's Leadership

Developing curriculum and educational programs on women's leadership empowers women with the knowledge, skills, and confidence to pursue leadership roles. These programs can focus on leadership development, campaign management, and policy analysis. By integrating women's leadership into educational curricula, institutions can cultivate a pipeline of future women leaders. Effective programs incorporate experiential learning, mentorship, and networking opportunities.

Establishing Academic Centers Focusing Women and Politics

Establishing academic centers or institutes focused on women and politics provides a hub for research, education, and advocacy. These centers can convene experts, host conferences, and publish research papers. By centralizing resources and expertise, academic centers can advance knowledge and inform policy decisions. For example, the Center for Women in Politics at Rutgers University conducts research and provides training for women in politics.

Providing Fellowships for Women Studying Politics

Providing fellowships and scholarships for women studying politics addresses financial barriers and supports academic advancement. These opportunities enable women to pursue research, internships, and leadership development programs. Fellowships and scholarships can also foster a community of women scholars and leaders. Organizations like the National Women's Studies Association offer scholarships for women pursuing degrees in politics and related fields.

Disseminating Best Practices and Successful Strategies

Disseminating best practices and successful strategies globally facilitates knowledge-sharing and collaboration. This can be achieved through publications, conferences, and online platforms. By sharing effective initiatives and lessons learned, organizations can replicate successes and avoid duplicating efforts. Global dissemination also fosters cross-cultural understanding and adaptation of strategies to diverse contexts. For instance, the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance publishes reports on women's political participation and best practices.

Conclusion

The glass ceiling in Pakistan's politics represents a formidable barrier hindering women's ascent to leadership positions and equal participation. Despite trailblazing efforts by iconic figures like Benazir Bhutto, Fatima Jinnah, and Khalida Zia, women continue to grapple with patriarchal norms, socio-cultural biases, and institutional hurdles.

Pakistan has to strengthen the Legal and Policy Frameworks to enhance females' representation in politics, particularly five percent females' nomination for public vote on general seats in every election. The Election Commission of Pakistan has to perform its role in this regard and take strict action against the parties who would not nominate females. The Strategies for shattering Glass Ceiling should also be adopted all the stakeholders have to perform for better results.

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