



## **Press Release**

### **International Women's Day: Women Leaders Highlighted Importance of Maternal Nutrition**

Islamabad March 06, 2017: The International Women's Day (IWD) is celebrated every year on March 08 to highlight the social, economic, cultural and political achievements of women. The day also marks a call to action for accelerating gender parity. This year IWD slogan is #BeBoldForChange.

In connection with, IWD the Importance of maternal malnutrition was discussed during a seminar organized by Scaling Up Nutrition Civil Society Alliance Pakistan (SUNCSA,Pak) with support of Micronutrient Initiative (MI) in Islamabad.

Delivering the inaugural remarks Ms. Ayesha Gulali Member National Assembly appreciated MI and SUN Society Alliance for highlighting the crucial issue faced by most of the Pakistani population. She said, Women play key role in development, only a healthy mother can produce healthy baby. Ms. Gulalai made commitment to raise the issue of maternal malnutrition on the floor of National Assembly. She said that she will ensure that KP government enact necessary legislations and allocate adequate resources to address malnutrition.

Opening the ceremony, Mr. Aslam Shaheen, SUN Focal Person/ Chief Nutrition Planning Commission appreciated MI for organizing the seminar to highlight issue of maternal malnutrition and marking the achievements of women leaders from all walks of life. He said, government of Pakistan along with partners is striving hard to scale up nutrition programs at provincial and national level. Mr. Shaheen said, all provinces have developed their multi-sectoral nutrition strategies while Pakistan Multi-sectoral Nutrition strategy is being developed by Ministry of Planning Development and Reform at federal level. Province are also in process of implementing PC-1s aiming to address maternal and child malnutrition, said Mr. Aslam.

Dr. Shershah Syed, a well-known gynecologist and President of Pakistan National Forum on Women's Health shared the overall situation of maternal malnutrition in Pakistan and recommended remedial actions. He said that Women in developing countries are 36 times are more likely to die of pregnancy related complications than in developed nations, Pakistan is among five countries where malnutrition in all its form either directly or indirectly is worst. He said,

Sharing the situation of maternal anemia and its implications, Dr. Asma Badar, Country Manager White Ribbon Alliance Pakistan said that Anemia is widely prevalent, mostly known but fails to seek the kind of public health attention it merits. She said, around 1.62 billion people globally are affected by Anemia. In Pakistan, the situation has been worsened over the years, said Dr. Asma. The moderate anemia has increased from 27% (2001) to 49% in 2011 for non-pregnant women and 36.9% to 49.3 % for pregnant women in the similar time bracket. Meanwhile, it rose to 56% in 2011 against 47.3% in 2001 for children under 5 as well. The obvious gaps (demand & supply) in terms of availability of iron folic acid for pregnant lactating women (PLWs) at community and facility level, poor compliance, inadequate counselling and follow up by healthcare providers, poor dietary diversity and eating habits and lack of focus on adolescent girls to break the inter-generational cycle of anemia is contributing to poor maternal health outcomes, she added.

Dr Shabina Raza DG Health Khyber Pakhtunkhwa shared that we should focus on implementation of SDGs, if we implement SDG2 only we will be able to achieve all SDGs. He said, KP government had developed multi-sectoral nutrition strategy and enacted law to protect and promote breastfeeding in the province.

Dr Sahib Jan Badar, Director Program MNCH Sindh said that we should adopt multi-sectoral approach to address malnutrition. She said, Sindh province is most affected province from malnutrition. Dr. Sahib Jan briefed the audience that Sindh government has taken a number of steps to address malnutrition including implementation of 63 Billion PC-1 which will be extended to whole Sindh.

Mr. Sami Ibrahim, renowned Journalist / anchor person said unfortunately media is not focusing on social issues. We should highlight impacts malnutrition on daily basis as its serious issues which is affecting Pakistan's economy.

Mr. Aoun Sahi said media has crucial role in awareness raising and accountability. He said bad governance is major factor behind poor nutrition and health indicators. Mr. Aoun Said, media should highlight social issues rather focusing only on political debates and crimes.

Dr Naseer Nizamani Country Director, Micronutrient Initiative highlighted the role of civil society in scaling up nutrition programs at grass roots level. He said MI is hosting secretariat of SUN Civil Society Alliance which is coalition over 118 CSOs from all over Pakistan. He said, we should capacitate civil society so that they could work with communities to improve behavioral practices.

Dr. Nafisa Khattak Member National Assembly emphasized on implementation of multi-sectoral nutrition strategies in all provinces. She said that parliamentarians should work together beyond party affiliations as malnutrition is our national problem. She said, if we focus on improving maternal nutrition we would be able to save our generation

Concluding the ceremony Dr Abdul Baseer Achakzai Director Nutrition Ministry of National Health Services, Regulation and coordination said that the direct outcome of high rates of malnutrition in women is seen in the form of long lasting adverse effects reflected by high maternal mortality and morbidity and its perpetuating effects on infant and child growth and development. Pakistan is facing a malnutrition crisis that is amongst the worst in the world and has not improved for decades. This needs to be urgently addressed in order to safeguard the country's future development and prosperity. It's a simple fact that nearly half of all children in Pakistan are malnourished, and this undermines their mental and physical growth, as well as the country's prospects. Pakistan's leaders must urgently recognize and respond to this emergency. He added that if we don't focus on addressing malnutrition, Pakistan may face a demographic nightmare which means growing unskilled, economically unproductive population, rather than the 'demographic dividend' which has powered its neighbors' growing prosperity. Investing in ending malnutrition is one of the most cost-effective steps governments can take: every \$1 invested in proven nutrition programs offers benefits worth \$16, he added.

\*\*\*\*\*