

## Women in Frontline Roles: Breaking Barriers and Leading Change in Pakistan

In Pakistan, women have historically been underrepresented in frontline roles - whether in manufacturing, logistics, distribution, agriculture, or field operations. However, as societal norms shift and industries evolve, more women are stepping into these positions, reshaping the workforce and redefining what leadership looks like in sectors traditionally dominated by men. This change is not just about gender equality; it is about unlocking the untapped potential of Pakistan's economy by embracing the skills, resilience, and leadership qualities that women bring to these critical roles.

Despite progress, deep-rooted barriers remain. Cultural stereotypes, limited access to training, and structural challenges continue to hinder the full participation of women in frontline roles. Yet, success stories of women rising to the challenge - working on factory floors, leading field operations, and even in distribution centres - highlight their resilience and ability to drive meaningful change.

The private sector has a crucial role to play in accelerating this shift. Many companies in Pakistan are already prioritising Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DE&I) initiatives to break down barriers and create opportunities for women in unconventional roles. By investing in training programmes, mentorship opportunities, and creating a supportive work environment, these organisations are paving the way for women to take on leadership positions in frontline industries. In doing so, they are not only creating a more inclusive workforce but also bringing diverse perspectives and driving innovation.

This plenary will focus on the following key issues:

- **Challenging Cultural Norms:** How are women in Pakistan confronting and overcoming societal expectations that have historically sidelined them from frontline roles? What can be learnt from women who have defied these norms, and how can pathways be created for others to follow?
- **Role of the Private Sector:** What initiatives are being undertaken by businesses to foster DE&I in frontline roles? How are companies creating environments that support the advancement of women, and what impact has this had on their operational success and innovation?
- **Success Stories and Impact:** Highlighting real examples of women in Pakistan who have thrived in frontline roles, how have their contributions reshaped the industries they work in? What lessons can be drawn from their experiences to inspire broader change?
- **Overcoming Structural Barriers:** What frameworks are needed—both within companies and across sectors—to dismantle the obstacles that keep women out of these roles? From addressing workplace harassment to ensuring equal access to training and career growth, how can the private and public sectors collaborate to build an inclusive workforce?
- **Building a Sustainable Future through DE&I:** How do inclusive practices in frontline roles contribute to a broader vision of sustainable development? What opportunities exist for partnerships between the private sector, government, and civil society to ensure that gender diversity becomes a cornerstone of future workforce strategies?

### Plenary Organisers

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