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SAVE THE DATE

8TH ANNUAL LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE

Shaping the Equiverse *Pathways to Parity*

Equity at **Home** | Equity in **Education**
Equity at **Workplace** | Equity in **Society**



24th November, 2023
08:00 am to 06:00 pm IST
Holiday Inn, Aerocity, New Delhi





Success Story

Huma Fakhar

Chairperson & Founder of MAP Services Group

Huma Fakhar has been nominated
for the renowned
Global Woman Inspiration Award in the United Kingdom.

Huma Fakhar is a trained lawyer, who received her education from Cambridge University. Coming from a conservative business family, she was the first woman in her family to travel abroad for higher studies and worked hard to secure a scholarship and become financially independent. Soon she was hired by Clifford Chance, one of the world's pre-eminent law firms where she gained wide experience in her field. Later, she moved to Geneva where she set up MAP Services Group, a trade and advisory services boutique, in 1999.

MAP Capital raised investments for private sector firms and Government clients including Government of Bahrain and Sudan. During her trips back to Pakistan in the early 2000s, she felt that with the change in the political regime and the opening up of the media, the environment was becoming more conducive for women to work and the mindset of the people was changing.

This motivated her to move back to Pakistan and start an advisory firm for Small and Medium Enterprises to make entrepreneurs aware of the global trade scenarios. She set up her office in Pakistan in 2005 and moved back permanently in 2010. She decided to enter the rice export business (Basmati rice and various other varieties).

Today she exports under her own brand name Sultana Rice, which has its own environment friendly, sustainable, reusable, recyclable product packaging. When Huma started her rice export business, she faced many challenges. There were very few people willing to partner with her -not many were keen to even provide her with packaging services as she was a woman. At that time, people were not comfortable with the idea of a woman leading a business. When she went for trader and client meetings, she would not be recognized as the company leader or founder as doubts were cast on a woman's ability to run a business. Instead, her marketing manager, a male, was led into the meetings and she would often have to sit outside. The struggle for acceptance amongst such primitive thinking people was an uphill task.

It was then that Huma made the strategic decision of focusing only on institutional buyers and not on regular traders despite the lower profit margins in the case of the former as it was easier to penetrate that market segment.

Also, she chose not to focus on the domestic market and instead focus solely on exports as she found dealing with buyers in countries such as Spain, France, UK, Germany and Scandinavia to be more accepting and open to working with women business owners.

In fact, she notes that had she chosen to sell packaged rice domestically in Pakistan, her business would have not survived. In the export market, however, her business flourished. In the day-to-day operations of her business, Huma has faced several challenges being a woman.

She has faced difficulties adjusting with her employees as they would not take a female leader seriously. There were instances when computers, printers and other equipment were stolen from the office by her male staff, knowing that she would not be able to question them in a male-dominated society.

Given the vulnerable position of women business owners in such a society, she often found male colleagues stealing tenders and contracts from her. Knowing that she didn't have family backing and that it would be difficult for her to pursue legal action against them, she found herself to be at the receiving end many a times.

Although the work environment wasn't very conducive, she persisted and given her agility and dynamism found coping strategies to circumvent the various challenges that came her way.

Huma believes that had her business not flourished in the manner it did and had her export volumes remained modest, she would have not faced as many hinderances as she did. In a male-dominated society, when a woman becomes an equal and that too on her own merit by starting a business from scratch, it creates a feeling of insecurity among men.

She often felt that there were times when dealing with various business delegations, she was not allowed to speak or participate freely.

Despite being extremely successful, Huma believes that she has been able to realise only 15-20% of her potential on account of the gender bias prevalent in the society in Pakistan.

Adapting to the cultural and economic environment in Pakistan has been a challenge. The country has also not changed as much as its peers in the region have in the post-globalization era.

Adjusting to work in Pakistan after working abroad for decades has indeed been difficult but she has persevered. Having met with much success in the export market, she is in the process of setting up a Women Exporters Council and is developing a portal for women exporters who want to sell abroad.

This is a first of its kind initiative in Pakistan that Huma has undertaken as she wants to support small and large businesses run by women and provide a platform for them to participate in global markets and have a voice.

For Huma, each hurdle and every stumble only gave her a stronger sense of purpose, and success followed. Huma says, 'I feel if you are sincere to your purpose all difficulties shed away and success unfolds open-heartedly. It is definitely harder for us women in the workplace but once you jump into any business, you should not seek any concessions for being a woman. We can compete on all levels and our aim should be to give the best product or service to the market,'

Huma is optimistic about the future of women entrepreneurs in Pakistan today as she believes that though gender is still a constraining factor, it is now not as adverse as it was when she started her business.

Also due to rapid advances in technology, it has become easier for women to work from home and manage household responsibilities while working. With the start-up culture booming in the last couple of years and investments flowing in for incubators, several women entrepreneurs have now emerged in Pakistan.

While the IT ministry has shown tremendous support to women leaders, others are yet to show much progress. For any entrepreneur to be successful, she believes it is important to remain dynamic and keep innovating and re-inventing oneself and their business.

Read more-

https://www.india.talentnomics.org/files/ugd/121f4c_711db581a81d418994fcd995e1e0355c.pdf

“FATHERS”

Powerful Change Agents for shaping the ‘Equiverse’

In this month of June, let's celebrate fathers who are leading by example and creating an equal universe for future generations. In our quest to build a universe where gender equity is the norm, we cannot overlook the vital role father's play.

Researches consistently show that fathers can be powerful agents of change.

- 1. Father involvement and gender equity:** Research conducted by the **World Economic Forum** has found that countries with higher levels of involved fatherhood tend to have lower gender gaps in education, employment, and overall societal equity. Involved fathers contribute to a more balanced distribution of caregiving responsibilities, allowing women to pursue their careers and participate fully in society.
- 2. Impact on children's development:** Numerous studies have demonstrated the positive influence of involved fathers on their children's development. Children who have nurturing and supportive fathers tend to exhibit higher levels of self-esteem, better academic performance, and healthier social relationships. Fathers who actively challenge gender stereotypes and promote equity contribute to their children's understanding of gender as a social construct rather than a limitation.
- 3. Breaking down traditional roles:** Fathers who actively participate in household chores and childcare tasks help break down traditional gender roles and demonstrate to their children that responsibilities should be shared equally. This sends a powerful message that both men and women can excel in any domain, challenging gender stereotypes from an early age.
- 4. Paternity leave and workplace support:** Accessible paternity leave policies and workplace support for fathers are crucial in promoting gender equity. Research from the **United Nations International Labour Organization (ILO)** indicates that fathers who take paternity leave are more likely to be involved in their children's upbringing and continue sharing caregiving responsibilities even after returning to work. Encouraging workplaces to provide flexible working arrangements for fathers can facilitate their active involvement in both their careers and family life.

**Remember, together we can make a difference, and every action, no matter how small,
counts towards our vision of a more equitable world.**

Sources:

- World Economic Forum
- United Nations International Labour Organization (ILO):

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