

### **Experts call for urgent action for population control**

A public health system must be central to all health policy management and operations and should cement and integrate sociopolitical issues and their connectedness with health issues, said parliamentarian Nafisa Shah on Saturday.

She was speaking at the plenary session of the Public Health Conference organised by the Jinnah Sindh Medical University's APPNA Institute of Public Health.

She stressed that there was a dire need for a legal framework to emphasise the central position of the public health system in society. "An additional system of alerting, monitoring and surveillance is also the need of the hour."

Shah observed that at present Pakistan does not have a coherent, interconnected, coordinated, conscious health system, and this situation needs to change.

Public health experts from all over Sindh participated in this first multi-disciplinary conference held at the Sindh Medical College campus. The majority of experts pointed out the population explosion as the issue needing urgent attention owing to its drastic impact on resource management and on the overall health and nutrition status of families.

Renowned economist Dr Kaiser Bengali declared health-related problems of the masses as manifestations of massive state failure. He quoted from his work on household surveys revealing distressing stories of food insecurity. "Some people cite the rush outside posh restaurants in Zamzama as the evidence of growing economy. I tell them to visit the same restaurants at two in the morning when there are even bigger queues outside the same restaurants of women and children awaiting the leftovers from the day."

He stressed that these women do not just belong to the poor class. "You would see that some of the women are sitting while some are standing a little apart with their faces covered in niqabs. These women belong to the lower middle class, driven to secure food for their households alongside the poor of the city," he said.

Prominent physicist and social commentator Pervez Hoodbhoy talked about setting national priorities and stressed that we must figure out what was more important for our survival. He asked how a bulging population could be served in social amenities within the limited resources of the country.

He also emphasised governing public health institutions as central to the delivery of healthcare goals to the masses.

Vice Chancellor Jinnah Sindh Medical University Professor SM Tariq Rafi recommended a university-based framework to identify indigenous issues, and find and implement solutions on their level with budget and authority.

He gave the example of JSMU teams visiting Diplo and Nagarparkar under the Sindh government's initiative where they are working on a long-term sustainable solution, and said: "Our teams do not go there to distribute milk and food packs. We have carried out long-term needs assessments and are working on providing training to the local human resource in dealing with the health of the population there."

Pro-Vice Chancellor Dr Lubna Ansari Baig pointed out that the conference aimed to contribute to the public health discourse around the world from the perspective of Sindh. She emphasised the need for the involvement of all the stakeholders in the province in unified and focused efforts to improve public health to achieve the goal of universal healthcare.

The theme of the daylong conference was "Universal Health Coverage: Everyone Everywhere." A total of 75 papers were presented at the conference covering areas like universal health coverage, maternal and child health, role of universities and civil society organisations in strengthening health system, communicable and non-communicable diseases, environmental and occupational health, and medical education.

This conference contributed towards building linkages between multidisciplinary experts working within the health system. This event is part of the JSMU's commitment to its vision of improving the communities it serves.

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