**Seminar**

**INSPIRING EXCELLENCE, SUCCESSFUL WOMEN OF KPK**

**Organized by** : BSc Social Sciences Program

**Venue:** IMsciences

**Date :** 7th April,2015

**Day :** Tuesday

**Program starting time:** 10.30am

**Guest speakers:**

1) Shamama Arbab (C.E.O of Euro foods )

2) Suniya Sadullah khan (former engineer “Williams’s team 1”)

3) Jamilla Gillani (Ex-MNA, ANP)

4) Gulallay Ismail (Human rights activist, AWARE GIRLS ORG)

**Compiled by Anam Babur and Saddam Hussain (BSc. Social Sciences Program)**

**Shamama Arbab Kakakhel:**

There was a time when I was not allowed to drive. I was advisor to my husband at his business, I was not allowed to meet the employers, but slowly and gradually change occurred and then I was free to drive, and meet the employees. All that need is coexistence with the partner, without picking fight with the partners, accept them, one day the same partners will be your strength. Be confident, and don’t fight within yourself, and be at peace internally. When the responsibilities come on your shoulders, and then face up confidently.

All the women of the province have a lot of potential, but our cultural restrictions don’t allow them to participate freely. **We come from a culture (Pashtun) that is much stronger than our religion.** The participation of the women in the business is not about money rather it’s about self-achievement. We founded Women Chamber of Commerce KPK, to support the women and raise the voice of Women Entrepreneurs. Now we are struggling for the policy making. The culture against whom we are talking against, gives us a lot of respect especially to women. I am proud to be from KP.

Saniya Saadullah: Cherish your dreams; never give up your dreams.

Money doesn’t worth, your country worth a lot. I wouldn’t go back to the Formula One, I achieved what I wanted.

 **Suniya sadullah khan**

Stephen Hawking once said: ‘Remember to look up at the stars and not down at your feet. Be curious. And however difficult life may seem, there is always something you can do and succeed at. All that matters is that you don’t just give up.’

I was twelve when I watched my first ever motor race on tv and fell in love with Formula 1. For me, it wasn’t just the thrill of watching cars race each other at 250 km/h, I was fascinated by the constant technical and engineering skill involved in designing these race cars. It was then that I decided I wanted to work not just in motorsport, but for a specific team called Williams which competed in Formula 1.

The difference between having a dream and having a goal is that a goal has a deadline. I gave myself a deadline of working for Williams by the age of 25. Therefore, if my long term goal was to work for a Formula 1 team, I broke this goal down into smaller, short term goals.

As a 12 year old, this meant studying pre- engineering subjects in school and making sure I got good grades. After all, there was no point aiming to become an engineer in formula 1 if I didn’t have the correct foundation and grades!

I’m extremely grateful to my parents for always putting education first and making sure their children studied in the best schools. They took the brave step of allowing me to become one of the first girls in my family to study in a co-education school. When my relatives found out, my parents’ standard reply was that they trusted me and wanted to make sure my studies were not compromised in any way.

By the time I was in A levels, my next objective was to find the most direct route to motorsport. I had spent time researching on various engineers in Formula 1 and what subjects they studied to see how they achieved their goals. Almost all happened to be male, the majority were European and had grown up working part time at local motorsport events in their country. I then realised there wasn’t a specific route that a girl from Pakistan could follow! However, most had a mechanical or aerospace engineering background – my other passion has been aircraft, I decided I’d give motorsport my best shot, if it didn’t work out, my plan B was a career in aerospace.

At the time, the only established university for aerospace engineering in Pakistan was part of the airforce and only took in 8 male civilians every year! This meant applying to universities abroad which came with two issues. One was the financial cost of studying abroad and the second was convincing my parents to let me study abroad. For the first issue, I started researching different universities abroad, especially those who gave out scholarships, saving my eidi and pocket money to pay the application fees. I took on a part time job with my principal to earn extra money to pay for university applications and SAT fees.

Now, at the time, very few of my male cousins had studied abroad and none of my female cousins. It just wasn’t done. Now, I am extremely close to my father but, in fact, when he found out, he told me to cancel my applications and forbade me from applying abroad for 3 reasons. One, as he said he couldn’t afford it financially, second, he didn’t think I could handle living abroad on my own and third, he felt medicine and becoming a doctor was a better career choice. Even my mother, who had supported my goals throughout, told me that she was siding with my father on this matter. I was told to forget aerospace and either study engineering from a local university or start studying Biology as an extra subject and give the medical entrance exams!

Fortunately, my older brother who had supported me throughout, told me not to give up. Together, we went to different banks in Islamabad to see if I could get a student loan, but as a teenager with no assets in my name, we kept getting refused. I knew it was a long shot, but, at least I knew I had had tried.

In the end, I managed to achieve the grades to get into Sheffield and also received their Pakistan scholarship. However it was now August, university started in September, and I needed to show some finances to apply for my visa and eventually pay my fees. Another family member stepped in to help me with a loan and I managed to get my visa. Now came the hard part – telling my parents. I was honest, and told them that although I had chosen an unconventional career route for a girl from KPK, I wasn’t doing anything morally wrong. I told them I had continued with my applications, had got the grades and even a scholarship. I had even arranged a loan which I would pay back myself once I started earning so it wouldn’t be a burden on them and I was going to England, I would like to go with their blessing but nevertheless I was going. My father let me go, but I knew he was still not convinced.

I left 2 days later, extremely grateful I had made it this far. Now at 19, my next objective was to maintain my GPA for my scholarship, adjust to a new country and culture and most importantly, get a part time job. I worked part time for 3 out of 4 years I studied in England – whether it was handing out leaflets and fliers to people on the street, or washing dishes in the student cafeteria or as waitress, I did it. My father had agreed to help me financially as much as he could but he didn’t have the money at the time and I had promised myself I wouldn’t ask for money no matter how badly I needed it. So, at one time, I used to wake up at 4am, catch 2 buses and worked as a cleaner, cleaning the floor of a cinema for 3 hours every day from 5-8 am and then go attend my lectures. I was determined not to waste this opportunity, no matter how tired or homesick I was. This was 2003 – phone calls abroad were expensive and Skype was just a startup! I used to chat with my parents on msn messenger in the university computer centre.

I applied for and was awarded another scholarship which gave me more financial security. This helped me towards my next objective – gaining motorsport experience to add to my CV. Now, the one way to make sure people give you work when you have no previous experience, is to say you’ll work for free. So, for one year, during my masters, I studied and worked as a waitress during the week and worked for free as a mechanic on weekends. Needless to say, my mother was horrified - that her daughter was choosing to work as a ‘mistri‘ but, she still respected my decision!

By this point, I was now 2 years away from my deadline of working in Formula 1 when events turned completely beyond my control. This was 2007, the start of the global financial crisis. It impacted the motorsport industry as well, with fewer jobs being available. It was extremely frustrating to get to the final round of the interview and then be asked questions about work visas instead of any technical questions. That’s when the job rejections started arriving – with the economy in depression, no one was willing to take on a fresh inexperienced graduate who also needed a work visa to remain in the UK. I couldn’t believe I was so close to my goal but yet so far. After graduating, I started a parttime job to support myself in order to continue working as a volunteer for any small motorsport team that would take me. The new plan was to make sure they’d hire me permanently and I could work my way up to Formula 1.

One year before my deadline, I had come home on holiday when my mother fell ill and had to be hospitalised. I immediately decided to move back to Pakistan to take care of her. My mother’s health and her recovery were more important than any other goal in my life. Moving back at the age of 24 meant I was also under a lot of pressure to settle down and get married. I had started working for a telecom company, enjoyed my job and being with my family, but I knew I wasn’t ready for marriage just yet. I also met many people who told me I had wasted my time and money on getting two degrees which had no scope in Pakistan! I was now 25, the age when I should have reached my Formula 1 goal but I was 4000 miles away! I began to wonder if my motorsport dream was completely dead or just on hold.

I ended up spending my 26th birthday in hospital – my leg had been injured and I had almost bled to death. It was a slow and painful recovery, especially since I couldn’t walk properly for 4 months. I had come back to take care of my parents, but they ended up taking care of me! Surviving that experience increased my self-confidence and I realised I wasn’t ready to settle down until I had one last shot at motorsport. I went back to work and slowly started to save money in the hope that I may be able to give motorsport one last shot.

I saved up enough money to live in the UK for 6 months. This was it – my last opportunity. At the age of 27, I quit my comfortable, well paying job, left my parents and moved back to the UK with one suitcase. I had maintained contact with motorsport teams I had worked with during my masters and was given temporary jobs – I ended up moving 6 times in 4 months! The job rejections started again- this time I had the right visa but not enough recent motorsport experience. I was also older than the fresh graduates they were looking for.

After five months, I had an interview with my dream team, Williams. This is what I had dreamed of my entire life! A week after the interview, I was rejected. Not enough experience for that position. That was the lowest point I had reached. I thought of quitting and coming back home when I got another email from Williams- the interviewer was impressed by my enthusiasm and thought I should apply or another role they had available. The only problem, it was in admin, whereas I had dreamt of becoming a race engineer.

I took the job and decided to prove I could do more. Within 6 months, I was doing extra work with the race team. A year later, I was formally part of their race operations team as an engineer. I finally got there!

At the same time, the news from Pakistan seemed to get worse with floods and constant suicide attacks. I was donating money but felt there should be something more I could do. I had achieved one of my goals in life but in the process was contributing to the brain drain in Pakistan. It became harder to live my cosy life abroad, knowing what was happening in my country.

Having achieved my dream for formula 1, I have now aimed higher. I am now pursuing a PhD in Aerospace and I hope to bring back to Pakistan all that it has given me.

I will leave you with one thought: Cherish your dreams. You are the only one who has the power to make your dream a reality. Do not give up on your dreams. Thank you.

**Jamlila Gillani:**

I started my early career in politics as a student of the Progressive Students Union Mardan College during the Zia’s regime. I was the President of Mardan College of that student’s activism when Zia banned it.

Politics is all about guidance yourself and paving the ways for yourself. Politics is a factor of our society. I continued my political activism after getting married. I have been supported by the family. Bacha Khan has an inspirational personality for Pashtun women, whom sent his daughter to Delhi for higher studies.

MMA government was a threat to women. It was the time for me to face up and speak up for women rights. I joined the Awami National Party, as it was fighting for the cause of women. ANP was too much supportive in policy making for women. It was my dream to see Pashtun women empowered, and today we see it practically. Development of Humanism and Human friendly is the need of time, be a preacher of this ideology.

**Domestic Violence is not a private matter of the partners. It’s the responsibility of the state to provide proper security to women**.

**Gulalaie Ismail:**

When I was 12, I and my cousin of my age were studying in a school. Her ambition of life was to be a pilot, but unlikely she was married to a 15 years old guy forcibly and quit the studies.

Then I researched, and I found that only 50 out of 100 girls ever went to school in Pakistan. These figures were alarming in our own KPK, where only 30 out of 100 girls went to school. I was unlucky to save my cousin, but devoted myself to the cause to save other girls from early and forced marriages. Change may occur or not, I have to the responsibility.

For this purpose, I founded Aware-Girls Organization, to be the voice of girls. Most of the people of our society, particularly women are submissive- obeying males is mandatory. **Discrimination is not a privilege rather a human rights violation.**

Honor Killing was not a crime before; we struggled for it to make it a law. Our organization is working in Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh. We want girls’ involvement in Politics. For this purpose we arrange meetings of politicians and girls regarding policy making for girls.

**I keep balance between my family life and work life, likewise Obama, Imran Khan and Nawaz Sharif do. We need to know one thing that’s the thing we have control over, is our own self. Woman is not born only to be, she can also be a Pilot.**

**FAQ session**

**Thank you**