

WOMEN IN THE INDUSTRY

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WHY DID YOU CHOOSE TO WORK IN THE FERTILIZER INDUSTRY?

Hailing from Pakistan, agriculture is central to the business landscape. It is no overestimation to say that the sector serves as the driving force for the country's economy with an almost 20% share of GDP and an engagement of up to 40% of our national workforce. During my time in the UK pursuing a master's degree in Business Administration I saw the way agriculture is practiced in developed agri-economies like the UK compared to developing states like Pakistan. This served as the driving force for my choice of a career in the fertilizer sector due to its pivotal role in agriculture overall.

HOW DID YOU START YOUR CAREER IN THE INDUSTRY?

I wanted to undertake a challenging role where I could serve my company, the industry and moreover the primary stakeholder, the farmers themselves. I was fortunate enough to become part of Pakistan's leading fertilizer brand in 2010. Even more importantly, in a short time I was able to lead the corporate social responsibility, which helped to support the company by reaching out to our primary stakeholder, the farmers, and addressing the shortcomings faced by agriculture in Pakistan.

WHAT DO YOU FIND THE MOST REWARDING ABOUT YOUR JOB?

We all strive for a role and a job which ultimately translates into a larger cause, benefitting the present and the future. I consider myself highly fortunate that, as Head of Food Security for FFC, I have the opportunity to be a driving force for real change both nationally and globally. Being the largest food security initiative in Pakistan, FFC's Food Security and Agriculture Center of Excellence enables us to spearhead work towards Sustainable Development Goal 2, "No Hunger", and make a significant contribution to farmers' lives and agricultural practices which are central to achieving food security both nationally and internationally for a sustainable world by 2030.

WHAT CHALLENGES HAVE YOU HAD TO OVERCOME?

Pakistan has a very overwhelmingly male dominated social order. During the initial stage of my professional life I had to face this issue almost every day. I started my career in the textile industry where being a women working in Human Resource Management was a novel idea. At every step I was made to realize that this industry was hostile to progressive females. I had many tough days but I tenaciously kept moving forward.

I was, however, lucky to then join FFC where merit is the criteria and not gender. FFC has a core strategy of gender inclusion and equal opportunity. This policy helped me to undertake various roles which under normal circumstances would not be considered reasonable for female employees. This added responsibility made me undertake such tasks in an exemplary manner so that my female colleagues have been able to follow in my footsteps and undertake challenging and diverse roles. I have learned a lot here and have always been encouraged.

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WHAT ACHIEVEMENT ARE YOU MOST PROUD OF?

I have always had a passion to give back to society and work for the greater good. At my former company I was proud to have created a nonprofit organization called the Nightingale Foundation to perform the company's corporate social responsibilities. However, my latest role has been the most challenging and close to my heart. The mammoth task ahead, with almost 820 million people globally suffering from hunger and nearly 40% in Pakistan, requires the unified and concentrated effort of all stakeholders. As part of FFC, we have been able to successfully initiate the most extensive food security program in Pakistan which has been hailed locally and internationally as a role model for developing agri-economies struggling with food security. Establishing FACE as a not-for-profit initiative and deploying it on the ground for the advantage of farmers with small landholdings is an achievement that I will always cherish.

WHAT IS THE MOST IMPORTANT LESSON YOU'VE LEARNED IN YOUR CAREER TO DATE?

Learning is a never ending process of life. From the cradle to the grave, every new day adds to our knowledge. However the most important thing that I have learned, stuck to and made a trait of my character is to never quit trying. Generally every decision has a cost and resistance to overcome but when it's worth it you shouldn't give up. Even when external factors make it difficult to achieve your goals you should always maintain tenacity and perseverance. Things don't happen, you have to make them happen.

DO YOU THINK YOUR JOB AND THE INDUSTRY WILL CHANGE IN THE FUTURE?

The fertilizer sector has been exemplary in leading the charge in reducing nitrogen-footprints and food insecurity. What we are doing today is definitely a step in the right direction for our future generations. We are working with farmers to enhance their capacity to produce more while using less resources, grow quality crops and earn more to support their families and dependents.

However, there is a need to invest more in order to make production even more efficient and minimize the negative environmental footprint. That this has been realized across the industry is commendable. The fertilizer industry has recognized the need for "sustainable" rather than "rapid" progress and is pursuing this. The challenge faced by the agri-sector as a whole has never been as overwhelming and serious as it is today, with so many people globally suffering from hunger and food insecurity. More

efforts in the shape of collective resources, expertise, technology and R&D focused on food security are required to meet the shared vision of 2030 (the SDGs).

WHICH FEMALE LEADERS DO YOU ADMIRE AND WHY?

In Pakistan, I see Fatima Jinnah as the role model for female empowerment and inclusion. She was able to become a doctor in the 1930s, one amongst a million, and later rallied the public in a popular movement aimed at independence. Due to her endless service to the nation and being a role model of female progression and empowerment, I would definitely consider her as a shining example to be followed and I am a humble admirer of her achievements.

WHERE DO YOU SEE THE BIGGEST CHANGES AS A RESULT OF THE COVID-19 CRISIS?

COVID and its implications have been unprecedented, something larger and graver than the great depression. The entire world, from organizations to individuals, has been caught off guard and it has reaffirmed the significance of setting our priorities in the right direction. Progress is only partial if it is not translated into healthcare, food, prosperity and peace for all.

Private-public partnerships are key to attaining the SDGs and 2030 vision of a sustainable tomorrow. Post-COVID, the world has recognized that, after neglecting the food supply and production chain for ages, it's vital for our survival. Providing investment and resources to make agriculture more efficient, productive, higher quality and more profitable for farmers, is the way forward for maintaining the balance between life and progress in the world.

HOW DO YOU SEE AGRICULTURE AND FOOD SYSTEMS CHANGING IN THE FUTURE?

While food security and stability have been regarded as the most strategic concerns worldwide, it is worth pointing out that the sector as a whole did exceptionally well to maintain the overall food supply and demand balance intact during this crisis. While all other industries have suffered, fertilizer and the food sector cannot afford to do so considering the importance of food security.

However, we as an industry and individually need to devise contingency measures in case of a crisis like COVID. The world cannot afford to run away from our shared responsibility. To ensure food security, using the latest technology and practices, R&D and Best Universal Farming Practices will be very important to face challenges including growing populations, the impact of climate change, depleting soil productivity, water scarcity and catastrophes like locust attacks, drought etc.