

Policy Brief: Where Afghan Women are heading?

Summary

Afghan women have made historic contributions to enable environment for better living condition for other women as well as towards contributing in the development of the country. In the past 15 years Afghan women have worked hard and emphasized for their inclusive participation as well as their role as decision makers. Despite of the fact that there are several measurable progresses in the past

decades, these achievements look fragile. The changing political, security and economic situation in Afghanistan is equally effecting women's contribution as men. Focusing on goals, measurement and policy instruments this brief lays out the up to date achievements, key problems with current women's empowerment and provides practical recommendations.

Afghan Women's Network as one of the leading women's rights network focusing on policy advocacy with aim to empower and strengthen women across the country have conducted a thorough consultation process with over 200 women leaders in Eight regional zones covering all 34 provinces in the month of February 2016 to develop this policy brief. This policy brief will be officially launched in Kabul and provinces on the occasion of International Women's Day and will used in the United Nations annual event Commission on the Status of Women 60th Session in New York for policy advocacy.

Reaffirming Current Progresses

Afghanistan today is considered rich with national policies and international instruments commitments in supporting women's empowerment. Afghanistan Constitution is considered one of the modern ones in the region which guarantee equality of women and men before the law.¹ Similarly Afghan Constitution guarantees women's access to education, health and social presence. After 15 years, Afghanistan has key legislations, policies and national plans which further increases

government's obligation towards strengthening women's participation and equal rights with men. Afghanistan has ratified international laws and agreed to implement binding resolutions that add to strengthening women's role and presence.

¹ <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/women-war-and-peace/uncategorized/timeline-of-womens-rights-in-afghanistan/>

Afghanistan National development Strategy- 2005- Gender as cross-cutting theme

National Action Plan for Women of Afghanistan- 2008- 10 years plan for Ministry of Women's Affairs

Elimination of Violence against Women Law- 2009- First law that criminalize violence against women a social constraints and not a domestic issue

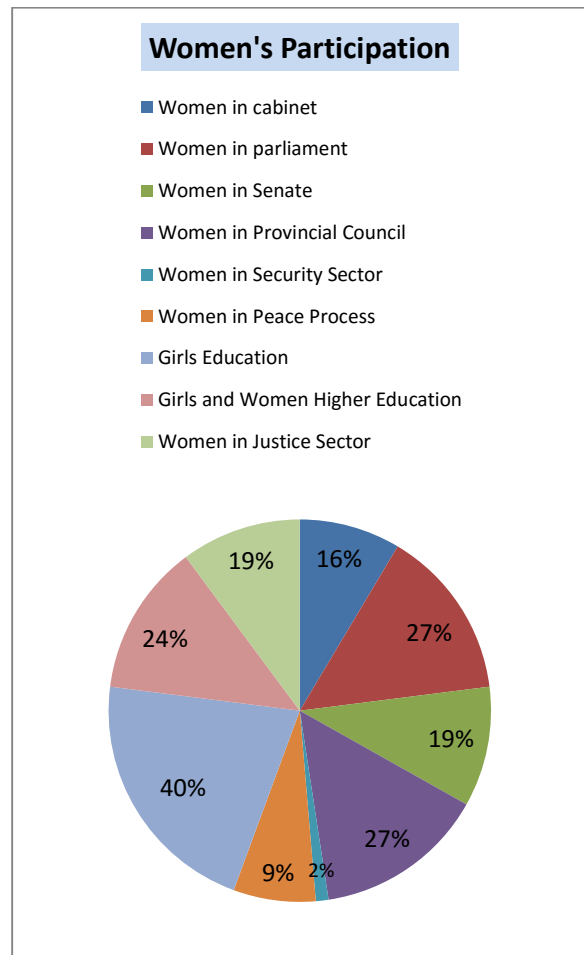
Afghanistan National Action plan on Implementation of United Nation Security Council Resolution 1325- 2015- Emphasizes on women, peace and security, women as decision makers and peace negotiators

International Convention on Eliminating All forms of Discrimination against Women- towards ending

Women's inclusion in some of decision making roles at the central and provincial level is notable. Women presence in the cabinet, ministries, parliament², senate³, provincial councils⁴, security sector and civil society is measurable today. Another notable success is improvements in girl's education⁵ as well as their access to education locally and internationally. Through access to higher education⁶, women have been able to find suitable jobs within government, civil society and private sector. These women are today economically empowered and even add more to the finances of their houses as compared to men family members. Women have a local presence through formal settings such as district development councils or informal settings such as women's councils where they bring women's prospective.

Women access to formal justice mechanisms is also notable. Women work in justice sector as judges, defense lawyers and attorneys.⁷ Women social presences have are notable in national and international venues. Women have participated actively in the past Presidential and

Parliamentary elections attended national gatherings (Jirga) about national discussions about Afghanistan and have represented women in international platforms.



²<https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/system/files/document/files/Afghanistan-%20Women,%20Peace%20and%20Security%20-%20Summary%20of%20Key%20Documents%202010-13,%20TLO,%202013.pdf>

³ Ibid 1

⁴ Ibid

⁵ <http://www.unicef.org/afghanistan/education.html>

⁶ <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0023/002327/232702e.pdf>

⁷ <http://www.scoop.co.nz/stories/WO1403/S00272/women-in-afghanistans-justice-sector.htm>

Ongoing Challenges:

The consultations conducted by AWN in Eight zones in Afghanistan once again reaffirms that despite of the gains highlighted above, women still suffer from major insecurity, discriminations, harmful traditional and cultural practices and violence. It is also noted that despite of the fact that there are national laws and policies in place, women are present in government and civil society, addressing girls and women's overall challenges is not been enough. Some of the most serious challenges identified by women from across the country are as below:

1. Despite of women's presence in the government, their participation as compared to men is fairly low. Women also have lower decision making role which shows ad hoc political of the government mostly linked to their Presidential Campaigned promises. Mostly women with higher education and years of experiences are not appointed in important government posts which results in introduction of those with limited knowledge and experience about their responsibilities. Women's presence in security sector is fairly low. Due to low presence, women are not part of decisions and important national strategies linked to peace and security.
2. Increase insecurity across the country is affecting women differently as compared to women. Due to change environment, women in most parts of the country prefer to keep low profile or relocate for their family and self safety.
3. While there is formal justice mechanism, Afghan government have

specific obligations towards the law to support women empowerment and equality, there is weak rule of law, women's access to justice and law implementation. Almost a year ago Farkhunda's⁸ an Afghan citizen was brutally murdered in the center of the city. Despite of available and enough evidence, justice is not brought.

4. According to AIHRC⁹, year 2015 has been the deadliest year for women in Afghanistan. Unfortunately crimes such as killing, stoning, lashing, cutting body parts of women and rape has happened to women and girls across the country. While ERAW law criminalizes all the mentioned crimes, there is no mechanism to find out perpetrators, proceed with judgment and provide all kind of support to women and girls victims of violence.
5. Afghan government has focused massively to bring peace in Afghanistan. Despite of physical presence of women in high peace council and provincial peace councils, they have not meaningfully engaged in discussions relevant to peace. Unfortunately in the recent produced "roadmap to peace" document women were neither consulted nor asked for recommendations. There is no guarantee that in the possible upcoming formal peace talk, women will also be involved. Absence of women in the peace process means lack of transparency and inclusiveness and sidelining half of the population.

⁸<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/may/06/farkhunda-afghan-judge-sentences-four-to-death-over-mob-killing>

⁹ سال-۲۰۱۵ خونین ترین برای -/af/latest-news-fa/ariananews.af http://ariananews.af/latest-news-fa/ زنانه-افغان-حقو
<http://ariananews.af/latest-news-fa/?lang=fa>

Taking Actions- Looking Forward Solutions

While reaffirming the progress made and notifying once again the existing challenges that slow down women's progress and empowerment in Afghanistan, for sustainable development initiatives and increasing women's political and social roles, AWN have collected below key forward looking solutions:

Women in Government

1. Women in governance must be politically supported. The political support should include respect, authority and effective role in influencing national decisions, participating in national programs implementation and presenting new ideas and initiatives.
2. Increase number of qualified, experienced and strong women in government across the country. Women must be assigned as per their expertise in government positions so that their contribution is measured and impactful.

Women in Sustainable Development

3. Girl's education must still remain a priority. Girl's schools across the country must be protected from any kind of insecurity and attack. Families should be encouraged to allow their daughters to continue study after certain age through national awareness raising sessions and programs.
4. At least 30 percent of the scholarships within the country and abroad should be allocated for girls and women higher education to increase more girls and women with degrees in specific fields.
5. Women and girls economic empowerment must continue. This should be done with ending discriminatory and harassment within working institutions and introducing women friendly job opportunities.

Women, Peace and Security

6. it's time for commitments to be actualized. Women would like to discourage the culture of tokenism, nepotism, or elitism. We call on NUG to select female participants in the upcoming peace negotiations on the basis of their knowledge of the issues, their speaking skills, and their decision-making, negotiation, mediation, and consensus building skills. At least 25 percent of the peace negotiators should be women.
7. Women in policing is one of the necessities for Afghan culture. Current women in police must be encouraged to lead important policing jobs. These women must speak to communities and families; use all kinds of media to invite more girls and women joining the police.
8. Afghanistan National Action on implementation of UNSCR 1325 must be closely monitored. The successful indicator for effectiveness of this plan would be it is implementation by concerned government ministries and local governments across the country.

Women Access to Justice

9. Any kind of discrimination and violence against girls and women stamps Afghanistan with a darker scar of horror. Afghan government must ensure that incidents of violence against girls and women are considered top priority by the rule of law institutions. Perpetrators are found, arrested and judgment is done in accordance with national laws such as EVAW law.

