

## ARTICLES

**Article No.** #5201 , 12 December 2016

### IPCS DISCUSSION

# Women & Public Policy Journal [Vol. 2] Launch: 'Afghan Economy in the Decade of Transformation (2015-2024)'

Report

The Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies (IPCS) hosted Mariam Safi, Executive Director of the Kabul-based Organization for Policy Research and Development Studies (DROPS), for the launch of the second volume of DROPS' Women and Public Policy Journal (WPPJ). The interaction was held on Saturday, 26 November 2016. It was chaired by Lt Gen (Retd) Arvinder Singh Lamba, President, IPCS; Ex-Officio Member, IPCS Governing Council; and former Vice Chief of the Indian Army.

Published by DROPS and launched in 2015, the WPPJ is the first peer-reviewed public policy journal to be authored by Afghan women in Afghanistan. The 2016 edition of the WPPJ is titled, 'Afghan Economy in the Decade of Transformation (2015-2024) - Afghanistan's Journey to Economic Self-Reliance: Assessments & Recommendations'. This edition was first launched in Kabul on 21 November 2016, by the First Lady of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, Mrs Rula Ghani.

#### **Introductory Remarks by the Chair**

#### **Lt Gen (Retd) Arvinder Singh Lamba**

*President, IPCS; Ex-Officio Member, IPCS Governing Council; and former Vice Chief of the Indian Army*

The IPCS is privileged to host the launch of the second volume of the Women and Public Policy Journal, which in its second edition addresses issues expected to be salient in the decade of 2015-2024. The journal provides an array of perspectives on various issues centred around improving the role of women in relation to Afghanistan's economy and offers nuanced and insightful analyses of how steps can be taken to move forward from the present situation.

#### **Mariam Safi**

#### **Executive Director, DROPS, Afghanistan**

This is the second edition of the Women and Public Policy Journal. Established just over two years ago, DROPS was originally intended to address key gaps concerning policy research and policy-making in Afghanistan. First was an evident disconnect between policy-makers and policy-oriented research. Hence, it was important to create an organisation able to produce policy-oriented research to address a knowledge deficit facing the Afghan government. A lack of policies and strategies designed on the basis of evidence-based research has been a key problem in the country's development over the past fifteen years. So the intention was to create an institution that would develop research for the purpose of better informing policy-makers.

The second gap was the sparse presence of women researchers. In Afghanistan, women tend to be treated as objects of research rather than researchers. As such, policy-relevant analyses of all kinds have reflected a lack of input derived from the particular insights and life experiences of Afghan women. It was therefore important to create an institution which could empower Afghan women and enable them to undertake and leverage research to make their voices heard in policy-

making circles. Young women in Afghanistan should be made aware that one need not necessarily become a parliamentarian or a politician in order to become involved in policy-making.

This journal, the first ever focusing on women and public policy in Afghanistan's history, aims to address these gaps. The first volume centred on the topic of democratic governance; this year's is on economic development. All nine authors in the journal are Afghan women and the publication has two components: 1) researcher training and capacity-building and 2) provision of a platform in which to be published.

Authors were provided with twelve months of training on the intricacies of the writing process for a journal or a policy-based piece of research, at the end of which they encountered the processes of peer-review and copy editing. Many of the authors began as relatively inexperienced writers and so, through this process, the idea has been to encourage them to continue writing.

This year the topic was based on the issue of economic development. This was suggested to the DROPS team in a meeting last year with Dr Abdullah Abdullah, Afghanistan's Chief Executive Officer. Given that it is currently in the midst of an economic crisis, improving economic development is an important issue for Afghanistan.

A number of events held during the past year have solidified international commitments on development funding for Afghanistan. Yet in the hope that the Afghan government will be able to fill the budget gap, aid in Afghanistan still will decline with each passing year.

Accordingly, the Afghan government has pushed for several reforms, such as the creation of more flexible budget systems to ease restrictions on development spending. The amount spent on the military also needs to be reduced in order to increase spending on development. There is also an immense focus on developing the country's private sector, which is reflected in the high number of articles in the WPPJ focusing on issues related to the private sector and human capital in Afghanistan.

A variety of topics have been addressed in this year's journal, which engages with areas of priority to the Afghan government. For instance, one of the authors, Tanya Arya, examines how effective public policies play a key role in shaping and supporting private sector investment and bridging gaps in the labour market. Zohal Atif discusses the interconnectedness between Afghanistan's economic stability and its national security. Author Naheed Sarabi links private sector growth to limited involvement of women entrepreneurs. Mariam Wardak evaluates the impacts of insurgency on the Afghan economy and illustrates how the Taliban have contributed to weakening the economy through the production and trafficking of narcotics, illegal mining, and the escalation of conflict. Atif Asafi assesses the various interventions the Afghan government has undertaken towards increasing women's involvement in the economy. Sona Mahmody focuses on implementation of the rule of law in Afghanistan and how this could help improve the economy. Dilawaiz Hashimi delves into the challenges Afghanistan has encountered in developing its human capital. Rahela H Sidiqi presents a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and possible outcomes of facilitating greater participation of women in economic markets.

The journal also features a policy paper that is produced in-house by DROPS staff and offers in-depth analysis of the importance of regional cooperation in optimising Afghanistan's economic potential towards becoming a hub for trade and transit. The team looks specifically at the status of economic cooperation between Afghanistan and its central Asian neighbours. It argues that this engagement remains limited and proposes measures to strengthen bilateral and multilateral cooperation between Afghanistan and central Asian countries. The journal also includes a book review by Ayesha Al-Hashimi, who provides a detailed review of Christina Lamb's book *Farewell Kabul: From Afghanistan to a More Dangerous World*, in which she remarks on the author's first-hand experiences and direct observations, with a particular focus on former Afghan president Hamid Karzai.

## **Discussion**

### **Mariam Safi**

*On whether there exists mechanisms to assess if research has been absorbed into the policy-making process:*

There is no mechanism in place to evaluate the extent to which research is being used. Led by DROPS, a network was created in Afghanistan called the 'Afghanistan Network of Women Thinkers and Researchers'. It tries to bring together a community of women analysts in the country and promotes policy-relevant findings and recommendations coming from the journal. They have held meetings with government officials to discuss various research. This year, the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs requested several copies of the journal for circulation at the Heart of Asia conference in Amritsar. These are signs of progress but it will take more time for this kind of work to become more embedded in policy-making processes.

*On the vision for the WPPJ and the challenges faced during the process of its establishment and growth:*

The intent is to develop an Afghan women-owned and -led academic-level journal which offers nuanced and valuable perspectives. This journal intends to advance authors' knowledge on content production and methodology through the training process mentioned previously. It is also important to bring the focus back to the issue of gender and women's empowerment in Afghanistan. Additionally, it is important for the authors to write on issues related to current and pressing issues such as the role of the private sector or counter-narcotics initiatives in Afghanistan's economy. The journal intends to combat marginalisation and break stereotypes associated with women writers, and encourage more young women to start writing on such topics.

**Haroon Sherzad**  
**Former Deputy Minister for Counter-Narcotics, Afghanistan**

In past years, the process of research and policy development was under the domain of international institutions and in the process many unhelpful assumptions were made, and research was politicised. Finally, an independent and neutral process has emerged and will help the government of Afghanistan. Not only will it avoid flawed observations and assumptions, but it will also cultivate perspectives from native Afghans who will lead the process of identifying problems, undertaking research, and proposing policy recommendations.

*On the security situation in Afghanistan and its impact on the economy and related research processes:*

The security situation has affected economic development. It has had negative repercussions for tourism. Foreign investments in agriculture and infrastructure are hard to come by. With every passing year the security situation is getting worse and this makes it challenging for researchers to travel to various provinces. Mobility has become difficult and access to women who reside in those provinces is restricted. The members of the DROPS network were able to conduct interviews in different provinces through relying on their personal networks.

*Rapporteured by Niharika Tagotra, Research Intern, IPCS*

B 7/3 Lower Ground Floor, Safdarjung Enclave, New Delhi 110029, INDIA.

**Tel:** 91-11-4100 1900, 4165 2556, 4165 2557, 4165 2558, 4165 2559 **Tel/Fax:** (91-11) 4165 2560

**Email:** [officemail@ipcs.org](mailto:officemail@ipcs.org)

© Copyright 1997-2017, Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies.