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Volume I • 2014-2015

Edited by: Mariam Safi

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Contents

Preface	i
Editor’s Note	iv
A Decade of Democratic Governance in Afghanistan: Has it Been Responsive to the Afghan Citizens? By Rahela H. Sidiqi	1
Outbound Health Tourism and its Impact on Healthcare in Afghanistan By Freshta Karim	22
Women’s Roles and Perspectives in the Security Sector in Afghanistan By Fazila Rahimy	38
Afghanistan: The Looming Spectre of HIV? By Fatema Ahmadi	66
Policy Points for the Decade of Transformation: Afghanistan’s Political, Security and Economic Future By Mariam Safi	73
Supporting Civil Society in Afghanistan Post: 2014: How can SAARC Fill the Vacuum? By Freshta Zarabi	88
The Role of Youth in Combating Corruption in Afghanistan By Mariam Wardak	104

Security and Economic Concerns: Factors Impacting Migration Trends Amongst Afghanistan's Growing Young Adult population By Maha Khalili Sartip	113
Higher Education for Afghan Women: The Road to Transformation By Roya Ibrahimi	127
Book Review: The Wrong Enemy - America in Afghanistan 2001-2014 by Carlotta Gall By Lailuma Nasiri	137

PREFACE

THE PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE OF DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE IN AFGHANISTAN

On 08 September 2000, representatives of 189 countries attending the UN Millennium Summit signed the UN Millennium Declaration. This Declaration established the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) that are eight international development goals: to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger; to achieve universal primary education; to promote gender equality; to reduce child mortality; to improve maternal health; to combat HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases; to ensure environmental sustainability; and to develop a global partnership for development –to ensure a better world for every person.

It was an unprecedented commitment by world leaders to work together to ensure a more peaceful, prosperous and just world, with the primary deadline set for 2015. In Afghanistan’s case, in order to ensure a realistic chance of meeting the MDGs targets, the UN extended the deadline to 2020.

The progress of work on achieving the MDGs varies across different regions and individual countries depending on social and political structures, geography and local history. However, the impact of the conflict in Afghanistan cannot be underestimated given how we suffer from conflict simultaneously with performing poorly in meeting MDG targets.

Eleven years since the endorsement of the MDGs, hundreds of school are shut and burned by the Taliban; mortality rate is high;

governance is poor; the health system is dysfunctional; and inequality is on the rise. This journal, 'The Past, Present and Future of Democratic Governance in Afghanistan', the first peer reviewed journal in Afghanistan's research community history, highlights the challenges our country faces in its efforts towards actualising the MDG targets, and rightly suggests solutions to resolve them.

The analyses in this journal use various aspects of the MDGs as a lens to explore the limitations, challenges and progresses of the endeavours towards strengthening democratic governance in Afghanistan from 2011 to 2014.

From among the different MDG indicators, the authors of this issue of the journal have focused more on democracy – and its effects on the government's realisation of these Goals. This is a highly essential approach because human development is not just about ensuring a decent income and/or standard of living for everyone. It is also about ensuring that every individual has the capacity, rights, freedoms, and choices to be part of formulating and taking decisions that have a bearing on an individual's life, to choose the leaders who make those decisions, and to then to hold them to account.

I must highlight that in the process of examining their respective subjects, the authors of the analyses in this issue of the journal have also identified new (and/or hitherto under-addressed) areas of research that require further investigation, and have provided concrete recommendations for policy and practice.

I am thankful to all the authors, reviewers and Ms. Mariam Safi for conceptualising and undertaking a project of this nature, and then delivering on it.

I strongly urge other interested and curious researchers to follow the path set by this journal and to make recommendations towards bringing the MDG targets to fruition in Afghanistan. I also encourage my colleagues at the Afghan Parliament as well as policymakers in the executive branches to consider this journal's recommendations while designing policies.

Ms. Naheed Farid
Member, Wolesi Jirga (Lower House)
National Assembly of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan
October 2015

Editor's Note

It is often said that “the Afghanistan of today is not the Afghanistan of 2001,” inferring that the social, political, economic, infrastructural and most importantly demographic changes have been so significant that the possibility of being pulled back to the destitute conditions of 2001 is highly improbable. Since the fall of the Taliban regime, Afghanistan has witnessed three democratic elections; 8 million students enrolled in school, 39% of whom are girls; a life expectancy increased to 61.3 years of age in comparison to 47 years of age in 2001; great progress towards women's rights and public participation; and infrastructure development enabling the country to become a hub for trade, transit and foreign investment. With the widespread use of mobile phones and internet services, the country is also now more connected to the world than ever before.

The institutionalisation of democratic governance in Afghanistan was central to achieving these successes. However, while these gains are noteworthy, the post-2014 environment shows that these advances are largely symbolic as the government struggles with: providing basic public services, curbing widespread corruption and impunity, providing justice and addressing rising insecurity conditions with the insurgency growing in strength and new actors such as the Islamic State (IS) entering the theater of conflict.

Moreover, the precarious presidential elections of 2014 and subsequent failures of the National Unity Government (NUG) to unite the nation and bring much needed reforms have only served to widened the gap between the state and citizens. As a result, more Afghans have become disconnected and alienated from the

state, now than at any other time since the international intervention commenced in 2001.

The social, political, economic and security conditions that unraveled in 2015 proved to Afghans that despite a decade of state-building, democratisation was still a long road ahead of them. Thus, for development in these areas to be genuinely sustainable, it should have been owned and led by those whose development was at stake. Weighty developments such as democracy can only be driven from within and below. For this to have happened in Afghanistan, there was a need for open, inclusive, and accountable structures for participation and growth in society, which both the past and current national government along with its international partners failed to institute.

Thus, using Afghanistan's Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) as thematic areas, against which the democratisation process can be measured, the first issue of the Women and Public Policy Journal explores the limitations and challenges faced in strengthening democratic governance in Afghanistan. The MDGs provide an important lens in this journal as it is regarded as critical to the process of goal setting that is central to the progressive realisation of state-building as well as the democratisation processes. This peer-reviewed framework provides 10 essays that analyse the challenges posed to strengthening democratic governance, while providing recommendations for policymakers as well as identifying new areas of research.

In the first article, Rahela Sidiqi assesses the extent to which democratic governance in Afghanistan has been responsive to the needs and demands of its citizens. Drawing on her experience as a Senior Advisor to the Afghanistan Civil Service Reform Commissions, Sidiqi identifies problematic issues in governance

structures and makes recommendations geared towards the national government to address these issues.

In the second article, Freshta Karim explores the shortcomings in developing the health sector in Afghanistan and how the inadequacies in the health care system are pushing Afghans and resources to neighboring countries for medical treatment. Karim identifies the issues that hindered the establishment of an effective healthcare system, specialised facilities, and health care professionals, and based on that, draws the impact of this phenomenon on the local healthcare economy.

In the third article, Fazila Rahimy looks at the role of women in the security sector and evaluates the importance of women's perspectives in shaping the security framework and combating the insurgency. Rahimy identifies the challenges women face in participating in the Afghan National Security Forces and the impact this has on developing a comprehensive approach to ending the conflict in the country.

In the fourth article, Fatema Ahmadi assesses the link between drug abuse and the rising cases of HIV/AIDS in Afghanistan via a public health lens. Ahmadi explores the status of drug use amongst men and women and illustrates how the approaches currently deployed by the Afghan government lack an understanding of this important link, which averts them from developing holistic approaches towards curbing HIV/AIDS in Afghanistan.

In the fifth article, Mariam Safi offers recommendations for policymakers, on the peace process, the security situation, and the Afghan economy, reflecting perspectives gathered via in-depth interviews conducted with key stakeholders. Safi provides policymakers with recommendations grounded in local perspectives

that will help assist in developing well-informed strategies for Afghanistan's peace, economic and security policies in the immediate future.

In the sixth article, Freshta Zarabi explores the importance of developing a regional partnership for development through the existing framework of the South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation (SAARC). Zarabi identifies different sectors via which the SAARC and the local Afghan civil society organisations can cooperate to fill the vacuum created by the withdrawal of the international community and the anticipated reduction in foreign aid in the post-2014 period.

In the seventh article, Mariam Wardak discusses the role youth can play in tackling corruption in Afghanistan. Wardak assesses how corruption has destroyed public trust, undermined the rule of law, skewed competition, and distorted resources. She explains that with 68% of the population being under the age of 25, the youth represent the largest and most educated group that can be mobilised through civic education, progressive religious teachings, and their participation in the justice sector to tackle the sources of corruption.

In the eighth article, Maha Khalili Sartip explores the push and pull actors influencing current migration patterns amongst Afghans. Khalili Sartip sheds light on the economic and security factors impacting migration trends amongst the growing young adult population and how it jeopardises the future stability of the country.

In the ninth article, Roya Ibrahimi evaluates the progress women have made in the education sector since 2001 and simultaneously discusses the various barriers that remain in promoting gender

equity in the education sector and its impact on the democratisation process in Afghanistan.

In her book review of Carlotta Gall's 'The Wrong Enemy – America in Afghanistan, 2001-2014', Lailuma Nasiri provides a comprehensive review of Gall's captivating book on the role the ISI played in masterminding the insurgency in Afghanistan and how the U.S. never faced up to the fact that its most powerful ally in the region was also its most powerful enemy in the war on terrorism.

We greatly appreciate the support made available to us by our international editorial board and to the authors who contributed to this issue of the journal. We are grateful to the peer reviewers, whose proficiency and hard work has clearly paid off, culminating in the accomplishment of this issue. We are also thankful to the National Endowment for Democracy for their guidance and support in making this publication, the first peer reviewed women's public policy journal in Afghanistan, a possibility.

Mariam Safi (Director of DROPS)
Editor

A Decade of Democratic Governance in Afghanistan: Has it Been Responsive to the Afghan Citizens?

By Rahela H. Sidiqi ¹

Governance is the tradition and institution by which authority in a country is exercised. Democratic governance is when development is sustainable, human rights are respected, and the citizens of the country feel confident and secure; the government works inclusively with communities at the national and local level as partners in development for effective service delivery, to reinforce the rule of law for the protection of all, and to keep institutional performance accountable and transparent. It is where the leaders lead the country through mutual learning with a clear understanding of each other's roles and responsibilities and their legal boundaries. More importantly, it is where people are not made overtly aware of the government's presence, but benefit from the effective service of the government, instead of being controlled by government.

After over a decade, the seeds of democratic governance are still in their embryonic stages in Afghanistan. Although some progress has been made with over two million girls registered in school, the establishment of several private universities, and the construction of a number of schools in urban areas to promote education, literacy levels remain stubbornly low with a 28.1% rate overall and female literacy at a measly 12.6%. The public's access to health

¹ Rahela Sidiqi is Founder and Strategic Advisor, Rasa Advocacy and Skill Building Agency (RASA), Afghanistan. She is also Chair, London Refugee Forum, and the Asian Middle East Women & Youth Society

facilities has improved, contributing to greater life expectancy and a decrease in infant and child mortality by 53% and 62% respectively. The civil society's role in the development sector has improved, most notably with village level Community Development Councils (CDCs) engaged in the development.

With the deadline of the 2015 Millennium Development Goals (MDG) agenda this year and the launch of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 2016-2030), especially its first goal, 'End poverty in all its forms everywhere', the next 15 years will be extremely challenging for Afghanistan. The Afghan government does not have the adequate capacity and/or the resources to achieve the sustainable development goal effectively. The central government's capacity to design sound policies, and the capacity of the central and provincial government institutions to implement government policies, is weak; and this has resulted in weak human capacity within the governance institution, especially the government institutions. Consequently, the government has been unsuccessful in the implementation of MDG goals. Therefore, Afghanistan still has a long way to go before it meets the MDG and SDG goals of good and democratic governance. According to the former Minister of Public Health Dr. Suraya Dalil, an overwhelming number of people lack access to basic infrastructure such as housing, electricity, clean water, and health facilities, particularly in remote areas where 74% of the country's population lives. Although there has been improved capacity in the central government, the capacities of provincial governments remain weak due to a number of factors, including corruption and the centralised structure of the government system.

More money was made available to support counter-terrorism activities in comparison to what was available for investment towards capacity building in democratic institutions and general

economic development. As a result, Afghans suffered from both greater insecurity caused by the increased military activities and, inheriting a government that lacks the human capacity and commitment to work towards providing the aforementioned basic human services. The aid community failed to commit themselves to understanding the real needs of the Afghan population, and to invest with a focus on sustainable development. The current need of the Afghan government is to build constitutional governance institutions including the civil society organisations and private sector, and government could play a facilitating role. This article assesses the performance of some of these institutions with regard to service delivery and responsiveness, transparency and accountability, and implementation of the Rule of Law.

Service Delivery and Responsiveness of the Afghanistan Government

The Afghan government has difficulty responding to its citizen's needs due to a number of factors, such as minimal guidance and leadership from the top, weak delegation of authority within the service delivery sector, unclear roles and responsibilities, and institutional incapacity, insecurity, human rights abuse, shrinking financial resources and economic instability.

Minimal Guidance and Leadership from the Top

Afghans desire their leaders to lead the country based on national interests, and not the latter's personal interests. The Afghan leaders' lack of a clear vision, poor capacity to effectively apply the governance system, and the absence of service delivery standards, has resulted in a situation where citizens have lost trust in government institutions towards solving their problems. An example of the government's inadequate service delivery includes the most recent elections, which were shrouded in doubt and suspicion. There were numerous accusations of electoral fraud

during the presidential and provincial council election processes in 2009 and 2014. The perceived influence of the government in the election commission's decisions led many to conclude that the election commission's "independence" were merely in name.

Weak Delegation of Authority within the Service Delivery Sectors

Likewise, the main impediment to effective service delivery is the centralisation of the government system. Centralisation undermines the role of the provincial counterparts by limiting their integration into the overall service delivery process by not delegating power and authority to provincial heads which would have allowed them to participate in the sub-planning and decision-making processes. Some examples of this issue are: the ministry's recruitment and performance evaluations of provincial level senior civil servants conducted without involving provincial representatives; and the centralised execution of province-based service contracts.

As a former Senior Advisor, Independent Administrative Reform and Civil Service Commission, I have seen that under such constraints, provincial heads have very little knowledge or discretionary control over their staff and budgets to improve their service delivery performance or to stimulate their local economy and rural unemployment, particularly those of females – which has grave social repercussions.

Additionally, there is no clear division of tasks between the Governor's Office and the ministries. Legal frameworks are developed without the engagement of relevant provincial authorities. The central government, to a large extent, has been limiting the autonomy of the provincial government. For example, recruitment and performance evaluations of senior civil servants assigned at the province level are carried out at the ministerial level

and without inputs from representatives of the provincial governments. Likewise, the delegation of tasks for senior staff is top down. Therefore, clarity on the percentage of the provincial revenue to be ideally re-invested directly to the provinces for service delivery purposes is inadequate. Service contracts are signed at the Centre.

Unclear Roles and Responsibilities and Weak Institutional Capacity

Largely, the Afghan public has limited awareness about their legal rights and responsibilities. There is no joint planning conducted with communities as a partner for development. There are no district level councils or community-level legal representatives. The capacities of the provincial councils are not developed enough to enable them to represent their people with advanced knowledge and skills for better advocacy and planning. Furthermore, village level CDCs are not effectively engaged as an active participant in the development processes.

Therefore, in most cases, the government and civil society influence the role of the public. As observed in the 2014 Human Development Report, the multidimensional poverty level is high in Afghanistan. While 36% of the population lives below the national poverty line, there are provinces that have higher levels of poverty. For example, 73% of the population lives below the poverty line in Paktia province.

Although the capacities of provincial governments are weak, there have been improvements in the capacity of the central government. However, there still are duplications of tasks within and among the ministries. For example, duplication is witnessed between the Ministry of Economy and the Ministry of Finance; the Ministry of Economy and the Ministry of Commerce; and the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Water and Electricity. Also, at the

heart of government, duplication takes place between the president, vice president and the office of the chief of staff. Furthermore, there is duplication of tasks between the ministers and deputy ministers due to the lack of clarity regarding the division of tasks. In some cases, those confidants closest to the ministers take on more responsibility and therefore gain much authority. This leads to duplication of tasks and confusion for government employees and beneficiaries. Moreover, positions are often created to employ an individual as opposed to based on the requirement of the position. In some cases, required positions are eliminated due to ministerial opposition to a particular individual. These events occur with collusion amongst high-level personnel within the organisations. Furthermore, bureaucratic processes coupled with increased levels of corruption have hampered the efficient delivery of services.

Besides, administrative reform is affected by political influence, corruption, a culture of impunity and favoritism. Monitoring and supervision processes and building the capacities of employees is another issue that impacts service delivery. There is no linkage between capacity building and performance evaluation, so as to enhance employees' capacities based on their need. This is the case particularly at the provincial level. This also affects employees on gradual bases, which may result in their departure. There is also a problem of developing the employees' belief in a system for results-based performance and where there is no effective system to award those who perform better. Additionally, the action of unfair punishment of employees by senior leaders affects the motivations of employees and limits their creativity. Another important issue is that of the low participation of women in the government structures. Women occupy approximately 2% of grade one positions within the civil service machinery. Currently, women's presence in other positions of the civil service is at 19% compared

to 24% in 2004. Although 25% of the Afghan Members of Parliament are female, with regard to executive political positions, women occupy only 2% of positions in 42 ministries and agencies.

Insecurity and Human Rights Abuse

Over the past few months of 2015, Afghans have been living in insecurity with an increased number of civilian casualties. The security situation across the country has dramatically deteriorated over the past two years with a 22% increase in civilian casualties in 2014 and an additional 4% increase in civilian casualties in 2015. The recently signed security agreement between the Afghan government and the U.S. with the help of Pakistan, to initiate peace negotiations with the Taliban, has failed to reassure the public of the government's ability to reverse the situation and put the country back on the path to stability. The government's failure to include the public as a partner in the peace process has been a major failure. The involvement of provincial and district councils have been circumvented in the peace process, and considering the number of civilian lives that have been lost or destroyed in the fighting, the government has squandered another opportunity to win the people's trust and use these powerful representatives of public opinion to gain a foothold towards peace. Civilian casualties increased by 22% in 2014, and there has been an increase in deaths and injuries 1% and 4% respectively, in 2015. There is a perception that the National Unity Government (NUG) does not work in harmony and that they have not recruited professional and qualified people.

The other issue is the increase of human rights abuses, and the abuses of women's rights linked to growing insecurity, in particular. Women's rights activists claim that exclusion from peace talks undermines their role as partners in development. Research has shown that the problem of human rights abuses is mainly due to

insecurity. Over 70% of women experience early marriage and 78% face at least one type of violence. The exercise of *baad* – where girls are given to resolve honour killing –, burning, assault, sexual abuse and harassment occurs in remote and insecure areas.

Economical Instability and Financial Shrinking

There are now enhanced policies and efforts being made to support production and the value chain – which is in essence trying to create niche markets that are able to compete with imported products. Afghanistan is in the process becoming a signatory to the World Trade Organisation (WTO). Once complete, this should help create a more conducive and enabling environment for niche market development and to support the value chain more effectively, whereby raw materials and products are Afghan owned and developed. However, in the last decade, economic development processes in Afghanistan have been *ad hoc* because of ineffective investment by the international community. Employment opportunities were also poor and were not sustained over the long term. There has been no effective legal framework to support the sustained and gradual advancement of local production. The practice of open markets with no government control made local producers vulnerable. Therefore, Afghan citizens continue to purchase poor quality goods from neighbouring countries, while also losing most of their small scales business. Import substitution entering Afghanistan as a result of cheaper raw material and produce from Pakistan and India has led to small-scale agricultural production. The government's economic development efforts have been ineffective in sustaining any kind of continued growth and investment in the business sector. While there have been short term gains in employment, and support to small business initiatives, expertise and finances invested in building the capacities of local business and associated infrastructure to sustain the economic development process have been insufficient.

Also, the processes of economic development and loan provision services are mostly not in line with moral building, community support, and literacy and business management capacities. The decline in the country's economic growth and the decrease in job opportunities have resulted in a 'brain drain' from Afghanistan. Development practitioners believe that democratic institutions are the key elements for establishing democratic governance to build unity for inclusive and participatory socio-economic development, one that is owned by the Afghan people.

Aid community contribution and financial resources should be invested based on the realistic needs of the Afghan community by building foundation infrastructures. This has to be carried out in order to create more job opportunities via the mobilisation of internal resources, introduction of new technologies, and the establishment of small, medium and large factories.

The following section deals with the rise in the number of civil society organisations providing the public with audio and print media, many of which, at the risk of their own safety, have been critical of the government's poor performance in matters of transparency and accountability.

'If information and knowledge are central to democracy, they are conditions for development'.

The Degree of Transparency and Accountability

One way of increasing transparency and accountability is by implementing and enforcing the Access to Information Law (Law) that was passed on 09 December 2014. The passing of the Law guaranteed the Afghan citizens' constitutional right to government information, and was a positive step towards government reforms to tackle corruption and to promote transparency and accountability. Article 32, Chapter Six is consistent with the best

international practices and specifically mentions in Article Two the rights of citizens to access to information held by the government and to ensure transparency and accountability in the performance of government.

Improved access and coordinated implementation of the Law by civil society organisations tasked with research and advocacy responsibilities could improve government accountability. The government's profile would improve considerably in the eyes of the public by respecting the voters and exposing the election fraud – that was alleged during the 2009 and 2014 presidential elections. The Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) and the Equality for Peace and Democracy (EPD) monitored the government's performance under their purview and concluded in their report that they have seen improvement. However, the independence of the AIHRC and the EPD has raised skepticism among activists and human rights organisations, because all the AIHRC and the EPD staff are appointed by a presidential decree as opposed to an open and merit-based recruitment.

Real reform needs to lead top down if there has to be any improvement in the government's contract and bidding process. When compromised, this is one area where private-public partnerships expose the government to considerable criticism, as has been seen and reported frequently by the media and civil society.

Civil society organisations' audio and other media activities, in particular, have been effective in highlighting a lack of transparency and accountability within the government. However, in terms of capacity and coverage, the performances of civil society institutions at the provincial level are inadequate to monitor the performance of the provincial governments. There is a duplication of tasks

among and within these organisations in some areas. For instance, there is no effective sector-wise consortium and division of tasks within the sector to monitor the performance of government sectors with better knowledge and skills. As a result, effective cooperation is not common practice. Likewise, the cooperation between the private sector and the NGOs seems inadequate.

The Capacity to Implement the Rule of Law

The creation of a sound legal framework and the implementation of the rule of law is central to the success of any democratic state. In 2004, Afghanistan's Loya Jirga approved the most recent version of the Afghan constitution and began the process of developing a legal framework, signaling a move towards economic and social progress. However, a recent survey conducted by the World Justice Program (WJP) on how the rule of law is experienced by citizens ranked Afghanistan at 101st of the 102 surveyed countries vis-à-vis the levels of justice, corruption, and governance. Afghanistan's problem does not appear to lie in the incapacity of institutions but instead in the commitment of the leadership to lead its citizens to take charge of change. The WJP survey states that "all elements of society are stakeholders that strengthen the rule of law and that change only comes from within." It will take at least a generation before the people gain the capacity and begin believing that they have the power that builds strong and sustainable democratic governance that protects the rule of law for its citizens.

Recommendations

1. Service Delivery and Responsiveness

The senior leadership of the government should shift the practice of unity from rhetoric to reality. The individuals in the organisation's structure, and not the leader's speeches alone, can deliver unity if the hearts and minds of leaders are not focused on building national unity and are not committed to the national interest.

Therefore, the focus of each member of the government, civil society, private sector organisations, and community leaders, should be on a commitment towards meeting national interests, over their own personal interests. It is the responsibility of every Afghan citizen to ensure their leaders' focus on national interests.

2. Adequate Guidance and Leadership from the Top

The government's vision should be comprehensively developed and integrated. The strategic vision of ministries should be developed via a 'bottom up' approach, drawing on consultations and with the engagement of lower grade employees and, where applicable, communities, as partners in development.

The professional skills and potential of the Afghan citizens should be used for the benefit of the Afghan public. The level of cooperation for merit and gender-based political appointments by the president and Chief Executive Officers should be top priority. The creation of more positions in the organisational structures will not help productivity if qualified and technical people are not placed in leading positions at all levels. Political leaders should increase their trust in the country's qualified cadres, and not to their parties' membership alone. Political leaders have an obligation to put their promises into practice, in the coming decades. They should not compromise on keeping or injecting unqualified people into the government machinery and all other institutions that contribute to Afghanistan's development.

Ministers need to recruit qualified people in the structure of their respective ministries. They should build trust and faith amongst employees to enhance effective services. The government should also engage communities in the process of development to deliver an effective and sustainable development approach. In Afghanistan, the National Solidarity Program (NSP) is the best model for

community engagement. The presence of CDCs, including women and men, should be extended and their capacities should be built. Greater ownership should be given to the CDCs. Female members of the CDCs should be more empowered via capacity building and by increasing their engagement in the decision-making process.

3. Institutional Capacity, Roles and Responsibilities

The international community should consider the enhancement of the Afghans' capacities seriously to ensure that the latter are able to take control of the development processes in their country. The need for building women's capacities is significant. Service delivery to women in rural areas should also be a priority. For example, if health and education services are delivered by male teachers and doctors, they become inaccessible to women in rural areas. A majority of girls do not attend secondary school. The ratio of girls to boys attending school is 1:4, and in rural areas 80% of girls do not attend secondary school. Moreover, there are multiple reasons such as early marriage, absence of female teachers, distance, and insecurity that function as stumbling blocks. Therefore, the enhancement of the capacities of Afghan women and the development of an enabling environment should be a top priority of the international community and the Afghan government. Additionally, it is a global responsibility to support the world's population in the areas of basic human rights. Therefore, attention should be paid to the 36% of the total Afghan population that currently lives below the poverty line. Assistance should also be considered for people who live in insecure areas. Experienced practitioners at the field level suggest considering a risk management approach. Research and observation shows that the contribution of the Afghan NGOs in this regard will increase if they are fully engaged and adequate financial resources are made available. This, particularly with increased capacities of female-run NGOs will improve and enhance delivery of services. Likewise,

transparency in the service delivery systems should be a precondition for securing financial support from the international community.

The engagement of women and youth in the process of development, and the establishment of democratic institutions, is a must. Employees aged 55 years and above should be retired and given retirement benefits by the government. Existing employees should be offered periodic trainings in all areas relevant to their performance and productivity. State and private universities should consider matching education to employer needs, under the guidance of the government.

Merit should be the basis for government employment as opposed to political affiliation. The growing epidemic of 'brain drain' should be tackled. The salary scale of the present government is not based on international standards, as there are no additional health benefits, land or housing insurance, or potential salary increases. Therefore, there is a need for the international community and the Afghan government to find mid and long-term solutions to enable and ensure qualified government employees remain in the government. The Civil Service Commission needs to develop a more comprehensive and transparent recruitment process in accordance to labour laws and civil service laws.

4. Delegation of Authority and Autonomy of Independent Organisations

Independent organisations such as independent commissions should work with increased autonomy and should be able to hold the government accountable. Their independence should not be influenced or undermined by ruling dispensations. Therefore, the appointments of commissioners should be independent of government control. Their recruitment should be merit-based and

carried out under the observation of the civil society and the international community. The Independent Election Commission in particular requires total independence. They should be able to work independently and without the fear of losing their jobs.

The other area is increasing transparency in the competitive contractual bidding process. The government should consider penalties for any official who shows favoritism, to avoid the misuse of national resources.

5. Economical Development and Financial investment

The international community should further invest in Afghanistan's development, and long-term financial support over the coming 25 years should be considered. Long-term planning and investment plans should be published and be made accessible for the public to build hope and confidence among the citizens regarding the future development of their country. The donor community should also be held accountable for their performance so that their mistakes can be avoided in the future. Afghanistan's sustainable development needs the international community to continue supporting economic infrastructure development. Investment should be based on the needs of Afghan citizens. They must revisit their investments of the past decade, identify gaps in their ways of assistance, and avoid past mistakes. With industrial and agricultural giants such as China, India and Pakistan for neighbours, Afghanistan's agricultural sector and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) need an extended period of professional mentoring and infrastructural support if they are to find their niche and compete regionally.

Some have called for a legal framework that would protect local producers from the many foreign products that flood the country's markets. Cash-for-work programs of donor agencies have been effective and appreciated by the public. However, their short-term nature and rapid mobilisation fail to provide appropriate skills

and/or long-term stability to workers who, once project activities are complete, are forced to return to subsistent farming, taking up weapons, or to migrate in search of better employment opportunities.

A more systematic, long-term approach coordinated by all stakeholders towards a sustainable, appropriate, and market-driven model that contributes to the economic and social growth, is required.

6. Insecurity and Civilian Rights

According to Articles 24, 54 and Number 3 of Article 75 of the Afghanistan constitution, the government is responsible for the safety and security of their citizens.

It is the responsibility of the government security departments to inform the citizens about high-degree security threats (i.e Jalalabad and Kunduz) in time and help them make their decisions for their lives. For example, the security departments should have informed the residents of Jalalabad and Kunduz of the imminent threat of the Islamic State and the Taliban to their homes and families. The government's counter offensives against the insurgents should ensure that the lives of the Afghans are not affected. The citizens should be informed of the government's emergency management plan and of the resources for relocating the former during extremely deteriorated situations. Insurgents and the Afghan people should make their decision. The government should inform the Afghans of the possible support they can or cannot provide. They should also consider their negotiations with international aid organisations to ensure timely emergency support time. The casualties and damages incurred by different organisations and the households based in Jalalabad and Kunduz, as well as human rights abuses – especially those of women – would not have taken place if

the government would have informed the people in advance. At least people casualty and sudden killing could have been reduced.

7. Increase Transparency and Accountability

All elements of the society are stakeholders in the rule of law and should therefore support the full implementation of the ATI Law as fundamental to keeping Afghanistan's governance system transparent and accountable. As recommended by the South Asia Transparency Advisory Group and the Integrity Watch report, the Afghan parliament should amend the ATI Law to enable a more effective implementation of the law. Under the Afghan Constitution and the ATI Law, the public has a right to be aware of the government's actions and the government has the duty to keep the public informed of its activities. A national campaign sensitive to the national literacy rates, and appropriate to local contexts, should be launched to raise awareness of the ATI Law.

All employees currently employed by the government should be made sufficiently literate to read and understand the government's code of conduct. All new government employees should meet minimal education requirements and all literate staff should be held accountable to the code of conduct in order to eradicate corruption from the system.

8. Enforcement of Rule of Law: Enforcement of the Rule of Law

The first step towards building democratic governance is for those tasked with leading it to value its principles and understand and practice its disciplines. Afghan citizens desire that the focus of all actors and contributors should turn towards sustainable development.

One sign of democratic governance at work is the community's ownership of their own development issues, such as security, socio-cultural and economic affairs. Partnering with communities by building their capacities and leveraging the 'People Power' to assist communities with self-governance will lead to safer and more productive citizens.

This approach could:

- a. Facilitate rapid mobilisation
- b. Apply appropriate solutions identified via continued consultation and the decision-making processes of the partnering communities
- c. Reach and mobilise the otherwise marginalised groups such as women and youth
- d. Leverage community ownership and contribution, as communities are ready to provide land, and contribute resources.

The capacities of the civil society and social media institutions need to be developed and enhanced to increase and expand their coverage in and to remote areas. Their proactive approach towards demand information and evidence from the government should be increased at all levels.

The Diaspora's role in the development process is an underutilised resource and needs to be increased. The capacities of the youth and women need to be built so that they can take up leadership and technical positions in government, civil society, and private sectors.

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Outbound Health Tourism and its Impact on Healthcare in Afghanistan

By Freshta Karim²

In the 14 years since the fall of the Taliban, despite the healthcare system's achievements and billions in foreign aid spent in the healthcare sector, many Afghans (mostly from major cities) opt to seek medical treatment abroad. With a large number of patients traveling abroad for treatment, the money that should have been spent inside the country too is traveling out of the country, thus affecting national economy as well as individual savings.

This outbound movement for healthcare purposes takes place primarily because the Afghan healthcare system is not well equipped to treat serious diseases. This is because, since 2001, more emphasis was laid on providing basic healthcare services and less on building the capacity of the healthcare sector to cure serious illnesses. Incumbent Afghan President Ashraf Ghani's election manifesto too had addressed this issue. "In recent years, some national-level programs have been implemented and have seen progress, but the huge number of Afghans traveling abroad for medical treatment shows that a lot more has to be done," it noted. Most Afghans go to India and Pakistan to avail medical treatment. Travelling to Pakistan is cheaper than travelling to India or any other country and is therefore preferred by individuals from lower-income groups – particularly from the eastern Afghan provinces.

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Turkey and Iran also host some Afghan patients for medical treatment but the numbers they host are far lower compared to those of India and Pakistan. A 2010 study by the Afghan Ministry of Public Health shows that only 11.4 percent of those traveling the aforementioned countries who were interviewed for the survey were patients. While there has been no subsequent official study to analyse whether the numbers of patients traveling abroad for treatment have increased, decreased or remained static, data available on the website of the Indian embassy in Kabul indicates a steady rise in the numbers of Afghans seeking medical visas to visit India. The Indian embassy in Kabul issued 5,224 medical visas in 2008 — compared to 4,658 in 2007, and 3,844 in 2006. Moreover, a number of patients visiting the country on ‘tourist’ visas have also often accessed regular medical checkups. From 2011 to 2014, over 100,000 medical visas have been issued by the Indian embassy alone.

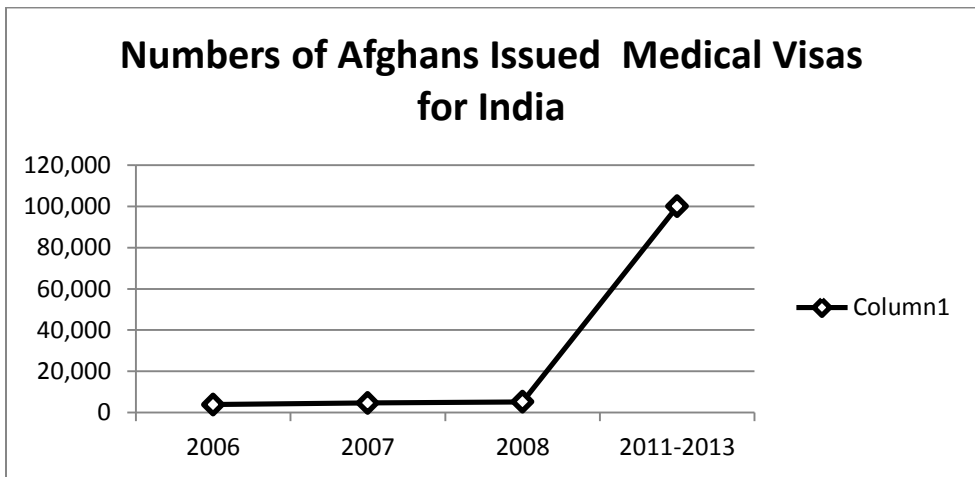


Image 1

This paper explores why many Afghans choose to go to other countries for medical treatment, and how this decision impacts the Afghan economy and healthcare system. To that end, this author

has undertaken qualitative research and has based her assessments on the several in-depth interviews, data, and other research on the subject. Individuals consulted for this purpose are: Mr. Lais Mustafa, Director of Research, Afghan National Public Health Institute, speaking on behalf of Ministry of Public Health (MoPH); Dr. Najibullah Safi, Team Leader, World Health Organization's (WHO) Kabul Office, speaking on behalf of the WHO; Dr. Mohammad Rafhie, Technical Deputy, Afghan Swiss Hospital; Dr. Aqa Meir Hufyane, Chief Physician, Arya City Hospital. Three patients – Shafiqa (name changed upon request), Hosai Wardak, and Sher Mohamad Mangal (from Kabul) – who visited India and Pakistan for treatment too were consulted.

I. Afghanistan's Health Care System: A Primer

In 2001, Afghanistan's healthcare system was in a deep crisis. With few trained medical professionals left in the country following decades of conflict, fewer hospitals remained functional, and with limited means. At the time, the infant and maternal mortality rates in Afghanistan were among the worst in the world. Inadequacies in these areas were especially problematic: numbers of medical personnel – female doctors in particular; access to and availability of medical infrastructure and space; and the scope for managerial coordination thereof. The responsibility of addressing these challenges (and further problems of significant national concern) lay with the new post-Taliban government in Afghanistan.

Although no clear statistics are available on the amount of money spent in the Afghan health care sector over the past 14 years, since 2001, large sums of money from different sources especially international community have been spent in this sector. In 2002, the mortality rate (of children under five years of age) was 257 per 1,000 live births; but by 2012, it had dropped to 97. Maternal mortality rate has dropped from 1,600 per 100,000 births in 2000 to

327 in 2010. Moreover, the number of health facilities has increased significantly, from 496 in 2004 to 2047 in 2012; and the number of female nurses has risen from 467 midwives in 2002 to 4600 midwives — which has been having a positive impact on the mortality rate. As of 2014-2015, Afghanistan has 153 government hospitals and 2197 health centers; of the 2197 health centers, 411 are comprehensive, 932, basic, and 854, health sub-centers.

In Afghanistan, emphasis on providing access to basic healthcare services and building healthcare infrastructure has been more. The quality of services and capacity-building for treatment of severe diseases have been placed less emphasis on. “Afghanistan’s basic focus was to facilitate Afghans’ access to primary healthcare and to further develop the primary healthcare system. It constituted the right investment at the right time,” asserted Dr. Najibullah Safi, Team leader, WHO (Kabul). Indeed, it was a correct investment at the right time but despite these achievements and progresses, in matters of advance treatments, Afghanistan’s healthcare system continues to face a number of major challenges. “If we compare Afghanistan’s healthcare status from 2001 to 2014, a lot has been achieved, but if we compare it with healthcare systems of neighboring countries, we are far behind,” said Mr. Lais Mustafa, Director of Research, Afghan National Public Health Institute.

II. Factors and Situations that Cause Afghans to Opt for Treatment Abroad: An Overview

General dissatisfaction with the quality of national healthcare services appears to be one of the primary reasons why Afghans opt for medical treatment abroad. Of the three patients interviewed for this paper, two expressed deep dissatisfaction with the quality of medical services in the country. Before visiting India and Pakistan, each had visited, at least four times, four different doctors in Kabul — the city with the highest number of specialists and hospitals in the

country. Having once been diagnosed for cancer in Kabul, the third patient had not even visited any doctor in Kabul. He harboured the notion that Afghan doctors are simply “not capable enough to treat such serious cases” and hence went straight to Pakistan for treatment.

The common reasons for dissatisfaction of the Afghans vis-à-vis domestic medical services are:

1. Patients with complicated diseases

Often, Afghans opting for treatment abroad are patients with complicated health problems such as cancer, those requiring complicated surgeries, for infertility treatment, and heart problems. These are issues neither the Afghan government hospitals nor private hospitals in the country are able to treat. When Sher Mangal, realised he had cancer, he, without consulting any doctors in Afghanistan, decided to go for medical treatment to Pakistan, stating “I knew there is no cancer treatment center in Kabul.”

“For Afghanistan’s healthcare system, it’s challenging to treat the complicated diseases,” said Mr. Mustafa. “There is no special cancer-treatment hospital in Afghanistan, and it is a problem because cancer treatment needs sophisticated diagnostic tools, and here, we don’t have such tools and equipments. We have intelligent doctors but no equipment for the cancer diagnosis or treatment. That is why when doctors have even small doubts about cancer, they send their patients to other country for proper diagnosis,” he added. Dr. Aqa Meir Hufyane, Chief Physician, Arya City Hospital (a private hospital) in Kabul, concurred, added that “Our hospital doesn’t have the capacity to treat difficult heart diseases and cancers; so, we recommend our patients to get their treatment out of the country.”

The new Afghan government, the National Unity Government (NUG) however, appears committed particularly to advancing cancer treatment facilities. In October 2014, for the first time in 13 years, a breast-cancer awareness campaign was launched by the MoPH, an event which even the First Lady of Afghanistan, Rula Ghani, participated in.

2. Misdiagnosed persons

Inaccurate diagnoses by Afghan doctors too are resulting in patients going abroad for medical treatment. In the MoPH's 2010 study, titled 'Patients Acquiring Medical Treatment from India', the diagnoses made by doctors in Afghanistan were compared with those of doctors in India. It was found out that on most occasions, ailments were either under-diagnosed or over-diagnosed in Afghanistan. Such discrepancies in the ailment and the diagnoses have resulted in a negative impression of and lack of trust in the Afghan healthcare system among the patients. A doctor from the Afghan Swiss hospital said, "We, as doctors trust the reports we get from the laboratories; but we all know that the capacity of laboratories [in the country] are very limited. Most of the pathologists here have studied short-term courses for two years, which is not sufficient to properly diagnose the diseases."

"For a year, we were unable to identify what disease my mother had. Different doctors in Kabul diagnosed her with different diseases," lamented Hosai Wardak, whose mother eventually went to India for treatment. Wardak's mother had just returned after six months of treatment at the time of this interview, conducted in June 2015.

Moreover for a country with a population of over 31 million, at present, there are only 818 government-run and 917 private laboratories. But the MoPH views this problem differently. "Even in basic health centers, there is a laboratory where a person checks

the blood. In labs in Afghanistan, all the normal diseases are diagnosed in our hospitals, but complicated cases such as cancer or even DNA testing can't be handled here," Mr. Mustafa said. He added, that "90 percent of diseases can be diagnosed in Afghanistan, but the remaining 10 percent are complicated diseases that cannot be diagnosed in the country."

However, there are some hospitals, mostly run by foreigners, where the diagnosing system is 'good enough', and people appeared satisfied. "They diagnosed me [with] cancer in a hospital in Kabul, and when I went to Pakistan,[I found that] the diagnosis was correct," said Sher Mangal. He was diagnosed in Cure Hospital, which is funded by Cure International.

Some of Afghanistan's private hospitals often send samples of important tests to pathology labs in Pakistan for diagnosis, and their result is also reasonably good. "For pathology, we generally send our tests to Karachi, Pakistan, because here in Kabul, most laboratories are not equipped for such tests," said Dr. Hufyane.

3. Lack of healthcare specialists

According to the 2013-14 national statistics, there are only 1829 health specialists in the country, most of whom are located in big cities. Despite a population of approximately 31 million, in 2013-2014, Afghanistan had only 9184 doctors, 16382 health-associate professionals, and 1607 pharmacists in the country. The nationwide ratio is 3.3 physicians per 1000 individuals. Pan Afghanistan, there are only 1829 specialist medical practitioners. Additionally, several provinces lack specialists altogether; and overall, the number of specialists in the entire country is evidently insufficient. The following chart (Image 2) shows the numbers of specialist per specialisation, which is drastically shocking. For instance, there are only 328 gynecologists, 50 psychiatrists, 60 eye specialists and two tuberculosis specialists in the entire country. Mustafa, however, denied this. "In districts and on the provincial level, there is no lack

of specialised doctors,” he said, but also added that “in some provinces, at the district level, there might be a lack of specialists due to security problems.”

Number of Specialists Nationwide in 2013-2014

Number of MD Specialist in the country	
Internal Medicine	430
Obstetrician / Gynecologist	328
General Surgery	286
Pediatrics	229
Infectious diseases	102
Orthopedic	62
Eye	60
Ear, Eye, Throat	58
Psychiatry	50
Stomatologic	44
Dermatology	33
Pediatric Surgery	31
Thoracic	30
Pediatrics	23
Anesthesiology	11
Chest Internal	11
Medicine	
Radiology	11
Neurosurgery	10
Pediatric Dermology	7
Urologic	4
Cardiovascular	3
Forensic Medica	3
Tuberculosis	2
Total	1828

Image 2

In addition to the lack of healthcare specialists, another challenge is that those traveling abroad for their medical treatments have little trust in the academic credentials and expertise of Afghan healthcare specialists. “There [are] no good specialist[s] in Kabul; they are not updated with the new discoveries in the health sector, they are the old-[fashioned]people who know very little, and the problem goes back to our education system, in which anyone who has money can get into the medical college,” alleged Hosai Wardak. Many perceive the number of growing private medical colleges, with little facilities, as the reason for the poor quality of medical practitioners. They feel those who graduate from Afghanistan with medical degrees learn very little. “Medical colleges are another problem that is affecting the health care system negatively: becoming a doctor is so easy these days with the private medical universities into which anyone can get admission,” says Dr. Safi of the WHO. “So many nurses from such universities easily become doctors. Some of them start working (as medical practitioner[s]) during the day and take their medical classes at evening for two hours,” he added.

4. Promotions

Another factor that attracts more Afghans towards seeking treatment abroad are the promotions made via different media, such as doctors in Afghanistan having ‘relations’ with foreign hospitals, in India and Pakistan in particular. Such doctors usually charge a share (a percentage of proceeds from the hospital to which they refer the patients) for each patient they send. “Afghan medical staff played a very negative role [by] promoting the healthcare system of other countries that has simultaneously been disadvantageous for Afghanistan[‘s] healthcare system,” said Dr. Safi. “Although I don’t practice as a doctor, many times, I have been offered by hospitals in India and Pakistan to refer patients there and get a share per patient.” There are also advertisements in some

of the most popular TV channels of Afghanistan of a private hospital in Kabul inviting specialist doctors from abroad (generally from India), for a day or two; patients can visit them for free. However, in many of those cases, visiting patients are advised to go to India for 'full treatment'," he continued.

5. Competition and/or Bragging (*Seyale wa Shareke*)

Competition among Afghan families and relatives to 'show off' could also be a reason Afghans seek medical treatment abroad. "It is not always about the lack of medical facilities inside the country or the obligation of people to travel [abroad] for medical treatment; but from [among] the number of patients visiting other countries, there is also a group [that] goes because of the unhealthy competition of 'show[ing] off'," Dr. Safi of stated.

6. Mistrust

There is an immense general lack of trust among the Afghans regarding the capabilities of doctors in the country. This mistrust can automatically and psychologically convince the patient that his/her doctor is not helpful in curing their ailment. One of the reasons for this mistrust can be the hostile and/or inconsiderate behavior of the doctors toward their patients. Patients interviewed for this study expressed disappointments in this regard, based on personal experiences. The 2010MoPHstudy on "Patients Acquiring Medical Treatment from India" also pointed towards 'bad behaviour' of doctors toward the patients as one possible reason why many chose to go abroad. This bad behavior can also be explained in the sense that doctors lacking adequate knowledge often failed to satisfactorily answer and/or clarify queries (that arise due to apprehensions) to the patients and their kin.

Shafiq's (name changed upon request) experience illustrates this issue. Shafiq, a patient interviewed for this study, had a bone

conjunction problem in her knee for two years. She said, "In the past two years, I visited most of the popular orthopedic doctors of the Kabul, but it was of no use." She alleged that the doctors had been very rude to her, and that most of the times she had visited a doctor after waiting in long queues for an appointment, she was not provided with adequate explanations as to what exactly the problem was and why it had happened to her. "My experience with doctors (in Kabul) has been very bad. With the exception of a few clinics, most of them are overcrowded and never had enough time to answer my questions or explain my problems to me properly."

7. Low qualities of medicines

The use of low quality medicines is also considered one of the reasons treatment in Afghanistan does not prove effective. "Quality of medicine is one of the main problems. Sometimes the diagnosis is correct, and the prescription is fine, but since the quality of medicine is not good, our treatment does not help the patient to get well," said Dr. Rafhie, Technical Deputy, Afghan Swiss Hospital. However, the 2011 MoPH survey, "Afghanistan Medicines Sampling and Testing" refutes this claim. For this survey, 348 samples of medicine were tested. The top suppliers of the medicines sampled and tested in this survey were Pakistan (24 percent), India (20percent), Iran (17percent), and China (11percent). 91 percent of the 348 medicines sampled and tested met the US Pharmacopeia and International Pharmacopeia standards; the remaining 9 percent failed.

III. Impact of Outbound Medical Tourism on Afghan Healthcare

Medical tourism can affect Afghanistan's healthcare system in a myriad of ways. If the amounts of money that have been flowing out of the country for medical treatment are spent inside the country on national medical services, a vast number of

improvements could be made. Health services are supposed to be provided free of charge in Afghanistan for all citizens, and hence government-run hospitals are not really affected by this outflow of money. However, this has clearly hampered the growth of private hospitals. "It has no direct impact on [the] healthcare system of the country, because based on the Constitution of Afghanistan, people are currently treated for free (in government-run hospitals). The health-care system is free of cost. But medical tourism is affecting the trust relationship [between] patient[s] and doctor[s]. People are losing their faith in the healthcare system at home," Mr. Mustafa said.

IV. Impact of Medical Tourism on Local Economy

In 2011-12, private sources, mainly households, were the main financier of the Afghan health care system, accounting for nearly 73.6 percent of national health spending. The Afghan government, international donors and the international community had smaller roles in health spending than the common Afghan people. In 2010, the Afghan MoPH, based on the Kabul airport data collection, estimated that Afghan patients spent \$26,970,425 (1USD=45 AFs) in India alone. This estimate excludes the expenditures made by patients visiting Pakistan or other countries, including Iran and Turkey. Although precise data is unavailable, it is possible that the numbers of patients traveling to Pakistan might be as high if not higher, as Pakistan shares porous borders with Afghanistan and is connected by roadways. Considering all these factors, it can be safely said that the total expenditure of Afghans going abroad for their medical treatment, not only India but also Pakistan, is much higher than previously estimated.

Sher Mangal, a patient diagnosed with cancer who was interviewed for this research says, "It has been three years I am under medication and I have visited the doctor in Pakistan 14 times,

having spent over \$10,000 in the process, which has been mostly paid for by the health insurance by my office in which I work as a guard else I would have died as I don't have any money for my treatment.”

“73percent of healthcare expenditures in Afghanistan is out-of-pocket of the people, and it shows that if we establish a mechanism by which the money they spend on their healthcare is used properly inside the country, then we could gain their trust in the local healthcare system. This would eventually cause a drastic decline in the number of patients going abroad,” says Dr. Safi.

V. Conclusion

Since the MoPh report ‘Patients Acquiring Medical Treatment from India’ was conducted five years ago and it focused only on patients going to India, and that too, only from the Kabul airport (thus excluding a large number of patients going to Pakistan or taking other routes), a more comprehensive situational assessment system needs to be designed and implemented. The research should focus not only on why Afghans are going abroad for treatment or how much they spend, but also on what types of problems they face while acquiring treatment abroad. Most writings on Afghans visiting India for medical treatment portray the positive side of medical tourism, and consequently, end up presenting the health system in Afghanistan in a poor light. There have been no systematic studies on what challenges and difficulties Afghans face in their quest to seek medical services abroad. To address this problem, once the research has been completed, a policy should be developed, in which the challenges Afghan patients face should be clearly defined, and solutions thereof should be formulated to address this problem in a time-bound manner within the next five years.

As promised in President Ghani's manifesto, constructive steps should be undertaken to advance the medical education system, including both government and private medical schools. This will help new the generation of doctors build their capacities and become up-to-date with the knowledge required to address various relevant challenges. More scholarships should be given to Afghan students by members of the international community for medical studies. For instance, India gives 1000 scholarships annually to Afghan students. A bold number of these 1000 scholarships should be demarcated for medical studies; and the application procedures and regulations for these scholarships should be transparent so capable individuals can avail them. A cancer treatment and diagnostic center, a heart disease center, and a gynecology center should be opened in Kabul and in the (other) five big cities of Afghanistan, with collaborations from countries such as India. The MoPH should now focus on building the capacity and infrastructure for advance treatment, and work towards building trust among Afghans towards the country's healthcare services. The government should encourage Afghans to seek treatment inside the country by organising health camps, particularly in the more remote provinces. Afghans should be provided with more health-related information, especially in schools, mosques, communities, etc., so that precautions can be taken and they visit medical professionals in a timely manner for treatment of potential/pending ailments.

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Women's Roles and Perspectives in the Security Sector in Afghanistan

By Fazila Rahimy³

Men and women experience war differently and thus hold different perspectives and have different tactics in settling disputes. In Afghanistan, women as victims of war and terror have the knowledge of and ability to tackle violence. Women's participation is critical not just because they constitute almost half the country's total population but also because their involvement makes the community more secure for women and men.

Afghanistan is a traditional male-dominated society but there are matters where men cannot be the representatives of women. Since women have experienced war differently, their presence and involvement during peace negotiations and decision-making processes are vital to present their viewpoints and recommend best possible solutions. They convey the spirit of human security as they reflect on their own experiences, and demand greater freedom.

The purpose of this paper is neither to argue gender equality in advocating women's participation in national matters nor to oppose the proposed increase in quotas allocated for women. Instead, this paper aims to shed light on two important aspects related to women's participation in the security process: their role in the security sector, and their perspectives of security. Given the relatively high need and urgency for security in the country, this paper poses the following questions:

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- a. To what extent are women actually involved in the security sector?
- b. To what extent are women involved in key decision-making concerning security issues, such as national security?
- c. Are women's viewpoints considered seriously when decisions on these issues are made?

This research paper is a source for providing Afghan policymakers with sound alternatives to the aforementioned matter of national importance. It aims to elaborate on:

- a. the security situation
- b. the legal provisions for women's participation in the security sector
- c. the role of women in the current security sector
- d. discuss the activities that strengthen the security sector
- e. identify the challenges that obstruct and hinder the participation and involvement of women already in this sector
- f. Identify recommendations from the findings to overcome the problems in the system

Sources and insights for this paper include research reports, Afghanistan's constitution, news portals, and interviews with officials from the Afghan Ministry of Defense, the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, the Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, and other Civil Society Organisations.

Based on the reports reviewed and interviews conducted, it can be inferred that women are largely excluded from the security sector and conflict resolution processes. They tend to be absent in the security sector and are underrepresented in policy-making circles.

This research paper is largely composed of quotes and perceptions of individuals in positions of authority, with first hand information regarding women's roles in the security sector; It also elaborates on how women's participation can accelerate the efficacy of conflict resolution and peace-building and thus have a positive impact on the security situation in Afghanistan. Some of the experts consulted for this paper are: General Khatool Muhammadzai, Ministry of Defense (MoD); Halim Kousary, General Coordinator, Centre for Conflict and Peace Studies (CAPS); Nooria Wesal, Member, Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) and a former journalist who reported from the field during the Taliban rule era; and Mir Ahmad Joyenda, Deputy Director, Communication and Advocacy, Afghanistan's Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU).

The subsequent paragraphs highlight the current security situation and discuss the impact women's participation can have in the security sector.

Security Situation in Afghanistan: An Overview

The security situation has deteriorated drastically in Afghanistan. 2014 and 2015 have been the most violent years of the past decade. According to the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) annual report, in 2014 alone, the Taliban publicly claimed responsibility for 382 attacks. As days pass, Afghanistan faces a gradual but steady erosion of its security, giving way to suicide attacks by anti-government elements and increasing incidents of looting, kidnappings and sexual assaults by the rising numbers of criminals. According to reports, conflict-related violence has risen throughout Afghanistan over the past year. As a result, civilian injuries and fatalities have also risen to unprecedented levels in 2014. According to an UNAMA report, there were 10,548 civilian casualties (3,699 deaths and 6,849 injured) in 2014 – a 25 percent increase in civilian deaths, a 21 percent increase in injuries, and an

overall increase of 22 percent in civilian casualties in comparison to statistics from 2013. 2014 was evidently the most fatal year in the past decade, witnessing the highest number of civilian deaths and injuries in a single year since 2009. The fragmentation among the local Afghans and the government makes the environment conducive for the growth and spread of the Islamic State (IS) and other terrorist groups.

Additionally, nepotism in the government structures has resulted in corruption and insecurity in the country via alternative alliances, including ones with external powers.

Emphasising on the consequences of nepotism, Mr. Mir Ahmad Joyenda, stated that there's nothing remotely capable of bringing peace without true unity, passion and love towards one's country; and that that comes when the rule of law and good governance are practiced in a country. "We have a weakened security system. Individuals in the security sector are appointed based on nepotism rather than merit," he added. Groups with vested interests in continuing the instability in Afghanistan make such appointments. Therefore, majority of the individuals working in this sector are not passionate about what they do, and instead occupy the space to fulfill their ulterior motives.

As Mr. Joyenda added, "Corruption in the civil service commissions and ministries is at its brink." For instance, there was the least amount of corruption during the communist period, and 40 percent of the government employees comprised of women. In 2008, it decreased to 18 percent; now women comprise only 9 percent and corruption is at its peak." The infiltrators within the government support only those who are connected and would abet them. To strengthen national security institutions, there is a need to assign

the right person, one who is committed, passionate, and works for the interests of Afghanistan.

Above all, one of the key factors causing the lack of security is an increase in the gap between the locals and the authorities. The wider the gap, the more indifferent the locals tend to be towards national issues. This can have a negative impact, particularly for security sector, if this gap continues to widen. Any progress and advancements in the security sector can be possible and successful only when the local population is involved and cooperates. The efficiency of this sector can be strengthened if its members reach out to people with true willingness to help. Ms. Nooria Wesal, in her interview with this author, shared her thoughts based on her experiences and said, “Be with people. Know them from the heart; and that will result in gaining people’s sympathies and trust and they will ultimately, willingly assist when it comes to the national issues.

Women’s Definitions of Security: What are they? Why aren’t they Considered?

In conflict environments, different actors tend to perceive and define conflict differently. The state perceives security as having a strong and capable army that can defend its borders and maintain national sovereignty. Locals – females, males, young and old – define security within the societal and domestic framework. For instance, they perceive security as an end to suicide attacks and to the Taliban’s presence; end of corruption; increase in employment rates; and an improved economy.

More specifically, women and girls in Afghanistan tend to identify lack of security as lack of education, lack of jobs, domestic violence, lack of rights and forced marriages. Unlike men, women tend to view conflict as more than just hard security issues; they place more emphasis on socio-political issues because the conflict has affected

them differently. For instance, as highlighted in the Afghanistan National Action Plan (ANAP) on United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325, the conflict that has spanned over three decades has affected women in all aspects of life. Women were vulnerable to sexual violence, including rape, sexual harassment, trafficking, forced prostitution and forced marriages. In times of conflict, women lacked proper access to healthcare services, education, and employment opportunities; and lastly, women also suffered the highest rates of illiteracy and unemployment, maternal mortality rate, and internal displacement. Thus, women living in conflict-affected regions and communities are particularly vulnerable to insecurity; and as a result, they view security differently from the way their male counterparts and the state do. Though the status of women status has changed since 2001, “they still remain to a large extent excluded from social and political life, and decision-making pertaining to their own security and well-being.”

In the context of Afghanistan, as in any other post conflict country, an equal involvement of men and women is essential for the development of the country. Therefore, “men and women must possess equal access to opportunities and resources to achieve this goal.”

However, while the Afghan government has affirmed its intentions to implement the UNSC Resolution 1325, and has in the past implemented policies such as the National Action Plan for the Women of Afghanistan; the Afghanistan National Development Strategy (ANDS); the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW); and the inclusion of Article 22 in the Constitution, women are still largely excluded from decision-making processes and their perspectives are not being taken into consideration.

Legal Provisions for Women's Participation in the Security Sector

Women have important roles to play in fostering inclusive and lasting security. Their inclusion will enable the government to achieve the fundamental objectives it has laid out in the Afghan constitution and allow for meet the country's international declarations and commitments.

The Afghan government has undertaken several efforts in collaboration with its international partners to promote and secure women's equality and inclusion in the peace building process. Some of these efforts are Afghanistan's affirmation of a number of UN conventions and resolutions that directly address the protection of women's rights. These include the UNSCR 1325 and the CEDAW. These conventions and resolutions emphasise on the enhancement of women's role and decision-making capacities with regard to conflict prevention and peace-building, and to significantly address issues that directly affect women's security. They also play a key role in gender mainstreaming in all government ministries and agencies. Some of the results of these efforts are the creation of the Afghanistan Women Council (AWC), which empowers women by building their capacity and by strengthening their socio-economic status in society; and the National Action Plan for Women of Afghanistan (NAPWA). The NAPWA is an effort by the Afghan government to support the advancement of women via gender equality in all social and political realms of the public sector and includes Resolution 1325. Ultimately, the NAPWA's main objective is to meet the development goals with a gender-mainstreamed vision and as a framework to reach gender-related commitments made in the constitution.

Not only should laws be passed in order to remove the cultural barriers obstructing women's participation in governance, justice, security, peace-building and policymaking sectors, legal provisions too should be created and implemented to ensure women's participation.

Women's Role in Security Sector:

The composition of security forces should be a reflection of the society at large. As the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 points, women's participation – along with men – is crucial to creating structures that are representative and thus trusted and legitimate. At present, women comprise a small fraction of the Afghan security forces in comparison to men. Statistically, women constitute approximately one percent (1,570) of the Afghan National Police (ANP) and three percent (465) of the Afghan National Army (ANA); and women in the Afghan Air Force (AAF) constitute 0.7 percent (52) individuals, including pilots. According to a 2012 UN survey, the public acceptance of women in the security sector is growing. The survey shows that women in the security sector are easier to speak with and more trusted to resolve a crime fairly than their male counterparts.

Violence against women and girls comes from both within and outside their homes, leaving many with no refuge. Often in domestic violence, victims face physical and psychological abuse that includes forced and underage marriages, beatings, stabbings, burnings, rapes, forced prostitution, kidnapping, murder and murder threats. Additionally, a majority of the sexual assaults remain notoriously underreported, let alone getting investigated and delivered justice for or punishment. Furthermore, the cultural shame associated with women who have been affected prevents reporting in such cases; and the existence of lawlessness also obstructs women from speaking up. Unless a woman has a strong backing, it is often men who win the case even if they are guilty.

As for the few women who report abuses, the prosecutors and/or the policemen misuse the cases. An AIHRC report alleges that the ANP officials committed nearly 15 percent of the honour killings and sexual assaults recorded between 2011 and 2013. This deters

women from seeking help from police. As Selay Ghaffar, Spokesperson, Solidarity Party of Afghanistan, and a women's rights activist, says, "We need more than a shelter for women's protection. We need females in the security sector, who know the laws and know they have a responsibility to act."

Family Response Unit

Family response units (FRU) were established as specialised three-person units to tackle domestic violence and to support the victims of violence more effectively. Attempts have been made to empower female presence in specialized roles in this sector. The presence of women in security – particularly in the police department – has improved the overall effectiveness and acceptance of the Afghan national security personnel. Mazar-e-Sharif-based FRU police officer Captain Raheema pushed the case of a 16-year-old seven-month pregnant woman whose husband had beaten her till her unborn child died. The police in her home village had initially refused to investigate, let alone bringing the case to justice. Captain Raheema not only insisted on opening the case but also ensured that the culprit was brought to justice (3 years jail term) via subsequent media pressure.

Night Raids

To ensure optimal results of special operations conducted by security sector officials, night raids require the presence of officials from both genders in the teams. Night raids are usually conducted by the Afghan forces jointly with the U.S. forces, in which female Afghan Special Forces soldiers play an important role. They are the key members in protecting society from potential dangers of female suicide bombers or militants disguised in women's attire. According to Colonel Jalaluddin Yaftaly, Commander, Joint Special Unit, ANA, they faced problems when they did not have female Special Forces in their units. According to Lena Abdali – one of the first women to

join the special unit in 2011 – a woman conducting night raids alongside male soldiers in a conservative country like Afghanistan is still not socially acceptable. Before she leaves to fight the enemy in military operations, she has to struggle with her family, relatives and others who disapprove of her work. Agha Sharin Noori, an Afghan Special Forces soldier who has served in the unit for over two years, said, “In a military operation, we need our sisters as much as we need our brothers.”

Afghan Air Force (AAF)

The AAF, like the other wings of the Afghan military, too requires female presence to effectively run the team. Although negligible in numbers still, Afghan women have successfully made their way into the AAF. Captain Niloofar Rahmani made history in Afghanistan when she became the first female fixed-wing aviator in the country’s air force. She became the first female pilot to join the Afghan military since the fall of the Taliban in 2001. Despite the death threats from terrorist groups and even from members of her own extended family, she persistently continued what she had begun.

When she joined the air force academy, Niloofar has said she wanted to fly with her brothers and serve her country. Rahmani’s advancement in this sector inspired other young women. As Captain Rahmani stated in an interview, “You can't just see yourself as a woman, but as a human and believe in yourself...It was not easy finishing flight school, it was very hard, but someone had to accept the risk so that other women can do what they dream.”

At present, 52 women serve in the AAF and the number is expected to increase.

Roles Women Can Play in Efforts towards Curtailing Insurgent Activities

As members of a substantial section of the society and having experienced decades of war, Afghan women are in a good position to tackle and reduce conflict either via acquired skills (in the security sector) or via the inherent compassionate nature (in informal settings). Highlighting insufficient numbers of women in the security sector, Mr. Halim Kousary, General Coordinator, CAPS, stated in an interview that “there is a need to strengthen the ANSF and a critical part of the strength comes from women’s involvement in the force.”

“Lack of women’s presence in this sector is majorly due to the traditional mindset and societal barrier.”

Taking advantage of the absence of female patrol police officers, insurgents often don *burqas* or use women to facilitate their attacks. The Taliban successfully deployed a female suicide bomber in Afghanistan for the first time in 2008.

Furthermore, in some cases, the wives of the Taliban members also play supporting roles in the insurgency. Journalist Terese Christiansson who interviewed the wives of some Taliban members in Ghazni and Kunduz provinces stated in her report that “not only do they believe in the cause, but also assist their husbands by smuggling weapons under their clothes, carrying messages and taking care of wounded Taliban fighters.”

Furthermore, as they live in the same house, the wives of the Taliban members are well aware of the likes and dislikes of their husbands. According to an article in The Friday Times, the wives of Taliban members, regardless of being bartered, they adjust to their

lives by trying to find what upsets and how to appease their husbands' anger.

However, reports also show that wives of Taliban members have at times played a role in reducing the latter's violent attacks, on both local and national levels. Moreover, females can have a powerful role in convincing and encouraging insurgents and combatants to join the peace process in their domestic circles. Mothers, in particular, can be very convincing in educating their children on the right paths to follow. For instance, a reintegrated former Taliban member from Herat Province – after joining the peace process – said in an interview that it was his mother who believed and would always advise him to lay down his weapons to government and join the peace process. This exemplifies both the important domestic role women play in drawing combatants into reintegration processes, as well as the importance of women's opinions within the domestic sphere.

Often, many insurgents maintain communication with their families while fighting for armed militant groups. Therefore, families continue to constitute an important support network for insurgents. As another reintegrated former Taliban member from Herat Province stated, "women have a major role in peace process, because the insurgents are their relatives and they can meet with and advise them to join the peace process."

This phenomenon could be optimised at community levels if these women are provided with the support of legal bodies and backing.

Roadblocks to Greater Participation of Women in the Security Sector

Afghan women continue to experience social and cultural barriers when it comes to joining the security sector. Although statistics show that some communities appear to support women's presence in this sector, many families are reluctant to allow their own daughters and sisters join the force – which is still perceived as job of low status and as a dangerous field for women.

Women members employed in the security sector are viewed as being of particularly low status due to several reasons such as working together with policemen; sharing living and eating quarters; and staying away from home during nights that their work requires. These give way to widespread rumours of abuse and harassment, including allegations of prostitution within establishment premises. This perception of the sector and of women's involvement in it makes it difficult to attract larger numbers of women to join the security forces.

Apart from the negative perceptions about the sector, women face life-threatening dangers in this field. Policewomen, those in leadership positions in particular, face an additional threat of being targeted by insurgents. One such case among many was that of Lieutenant Colonel Malalai Kakar's. Kakar, Afghanistan's top policewoman and one of the highest profile women in Afghanistan's security sector, was shot dead by the Taliban in 2008. Persuading families to support women towards joining the Afghan security forces thus continues to remain a difficult task; and will remain so unless the Afghan government ramps up measures encourage and protect women in service.

However, the idea of having women in the security sector is gradually being recognized among the people. Women's presence

in the security sector has resulted in positive security conditions, which is appreciated by locals in some parts of the country. This indicates that people are ready to change and assist the security sector if they understand the benefits women bring towards enhancing security.

Afghans have begun to admire and encourage roles of both genders in the security sector and acknowledge the positive results achieved as a result of an increased presence of women in the sector. Ms. Nooria Wesal stated in a recent interview that “Regardless of having a traditional society, people like and respect female police and army.” The numbers of women members are rising in the Afghan Ministry of Interior (Moi) as well as the Afghan Ministry of Defense (MoD). Rules and regulations that protect women’s right to joining this sector have been put in place to facilitate their participation. Due to reservations for women, many women are now employed in key wings of the security sector; and some of them serve in senior positions such as at the Criminal Investigation Division (CID), and at Counter Narcotics Police (CNP). Colonel Hekmat Shahi, Head, Gender and Human Rights Unit (GHRU), is the second female Head of the unit at the Moi.

Despite challenges, there are women employed in this sector, who passionately proceed with delivering their duties and going about their tasks, with the hope of a peaceful future. Brigadier General Khatoool Mohammadzai, the first Afghan woman to be promoted to a general officer rank, said she can and will give all that takes in her ability to help Afghanistan. As Brigadier General Mohammadzai stated, unlike the endless bureaucratic nature of other governmental entities, her department tries to assist those who seek help with the least possible delay. Her commitment to work and honesty has also generated a large number of foes who oppose her.

Despite receiving death threats on a daily basis, she stands firm on doing the right thing. She said that as a woman, she has sympathy and can feel the needs of the deprived women and girls who have suffered harsh conditions, especially the ones who approach her. Like Brigadier General Mohammadzai says, supporting female war victims, distributing aid to families, and imparting trainings have never been optimal, effective and/or productive without the presence of women in the MoD.

Culture moulds to what is preferred and accepted. The presence of women in the Afghan security sector is like an elephant in the room. We have the presence of women in this sector but no one talks about the roles these women play, their skills, their hard work, and/or their several successes. The Afghan society has prevented itself from accessing the treasure that lies beyond its cultural barriers. Nadia, a policewoman in Kunduz Province said, “The way a society needs women doctors, it needs women in the police force.” Underlining the importance of advocating the presence of women in the security sector, Nadia added that, “the levels of awareness and education among people must be raised. The media should advocate the importance and role of policewomen in the society.”

Women’s Perspective on the Causes of Insecurity

The downfall of nations is not the result of weak security forces but a side effect of factions of the nation being controlled by external forces. Afghanistan suffers from discrimination not just on the basis of gender but also on the bases of ethnicity, affiliate groups and religious parties, among many others. Those who are not directly affected by this problem are subconsciously influenced by the different types of media; and the media is being used as a proxy arena by external powers to spread false information among Afghans. The government must prioritise tackling this problem that exists within the system, because, regardless of the strength of the

security forces, ignoring effective, transparent and true information dissemination will do more damage.

Discrimination can be disastrous, particularly when practiced at national level. The hope that accompanied the first Karzai government for a better future for the country, is not enduring.

Brigadier General Mohammadzai stated in an interview that “Corruption and discrimination took place as years passed since 2001. People’s interest shifted from patriotism to self interest and the quality of efforts being made towards the betterment of the country decreased because interest towards the cause changed...The key that shifted the gear is discrimination. Discrimination can be seen at all levels – gender, position, ethnicity, sect, and affiliate members.” As a consequence, today Afghans do not have the right person for the right job, and the wrong person can never do the job right.

Given how discrimination is practiced on a nationwide scale, it will take years to undo the consequences it has brought upon the country.

There is another vicious dimension of the ongoing conflict in the country: A proxy war controlled by people or entities with vested interests using Afghans as a front to achieve their ulterior motives. These groups include mafias of the Uzbeks, Pakistanis, Chechens, Russians, Arabs, and Iranians, and they are well embedded within the government. As we can observe, the discrepancies aren’t among Afghans; external forces incite Afghans against each other via different tactics. In order to reach out to Afghan locals, these groups heavily depend on and use broadcast media – that has a countrywide reach.

The misuse of media – especially social media and other internet-based platforms – causes serious problems such as: discrimination among Afghans at different levels – gender, sect, ethnicity, position, group, and preferred affiliates; fabricated reports about insurgents; and an exaggerated image of the society's overall failure.

Ms. Wesal's assessment concurred with that of General Khatool's when she stated that a big source of problems lay in the misuse of the Internet and other media where the Taliban and other insurgent groups are depicted as brave and fearless people. There are reports portraying the Islamic State (IS) in Afghanistan as an undefeatable group – whereas those calling themselves the IS in Afghanistan are in reality merely the disgruntled ex-Taliban members who switched groups, changed the color of their flag from white to black and called themselves the Daesh (The IS's alias) to impose additional pressure on the government. In addition to insurgents, as Ms. Wesal said, "media indirectly embeds grudge within the society among people. Individuals are manipulated and misled by parties against others." We have a great opportunity and tool in the form of different media platforms for spreading awareness; but it is a double-edged sword and if not handled properly, it can be the deadliest enemy.

Ms. Wesal, based on her own experience and encounters with the Taliban, describes them as cowards who do not have the power to confront the ANF. She says they instead fight civilians and carry out any orders they are given, like cowards. She describes them as nothing more than thieves, traders, and illiterate puppets. She also expressed that from their actions to their looks, no sign of Islam can be seen in them.

How to Increase the Presence of Women in the ANA and the ANP?

The ANP is still far from being a law enforcement force that has an optimal gender balance. Colonel Hekmat Shahi Rasooli, Chief of Gender and Human Rights, MoI, says that “At the moment we have just 1600 policewomen; the number is expected to be increased to 5000 in near future.”

At present, women constitute only 1 percent of the entire Afghan police force, and working conditions must improve to make employment in this sector attractive to women. Ms. Rasooli added that “Women are part of the society, and their presence within the police is of vital importance.” Women exercise strong influence within their families and community networks. Involving women in the security sector can help bring credibility to new systems and oversight mechanisms as well as improve public perceptions of security sector institutions.

For an effective security force to have an enduring positive impact, it is vital for the ANA to increase the number of women in their team. Afghan villagers do not like foreign forces carrying out operations in their homes, but they have welcomed the Afghan Special Forces units and cooperated with them in many operations. Along with male members, there is a critical need for female members in these units of the security force. Despite cultural and societal barriers to women joining the army, there are many women, albeit a small number proportionally, serving in the Afghan army. Sediqa, a member of the ANA, said she joined the army because she wants to serve her country. As Colonel Jalaluddin Yaftaly, Commander, Joint Special Unit, ANA, said, “We faced so many problems when we didn't have female Special Forces in our units.” He added that “female Special Forces are quite useful.” By increasing the numbers of women in the army, the team as a whole will be able to conduct their operations more effectively.

Proficiency and efficiency at work has remained an issue, which begs the need for building the capacities of female members of the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) along with those of their male counterparts. To that end, the EUPOL Training Component held a Female Leadership Development Course for senior policewomen. Aimed at developing personal and professional skills, the training addressed issues such as communication, assertiveness, networking, effective leadership, getting recognition to enhance the leadership, and management skills of female security forces. Lieutenant Shekiba Barakzai, an employee of the Criminal Technique Unit of the CID in the MoI, responsible for criminal investigation of various cases such as murder, sexual assault, armed robbery, as well as collecting fingerprints at the crimes scenes, also participated in the training. She said “We learn a lot from courses which have the topics such as how to lead and manage. I have improved my skills and capacity with attending such courses in the past and will continue to take part in such workshops and courses in the future.” Women’s participation is important and equally important is building their skills in relevant aspects as that is a fundamental factor that has an impact on the effectiveness of their presence in the security sector.

How advocacy by provincial elders and mullahs can help?

Islam is an important but under utilised tool to improve the status of Afghan women. Gender equality and women’s rights will progress if set within an Islamic framework. This is because the gender-based constraints are caused due to cultural barriers masquerading as religious principles; these cultural barriers are in essence wrong interpretations of religion.

Working closely with community leaders and religious scholars on issues such as social justice for women and to advance women’s

rights in the context of Islam is the primary means to ensure wide acceptance of women in security forces in the Afghan society. Gaining the support of community leaders, particularly those of religious leaders, is vital. As a certain Afghan policeman said, "If mullahs talk positively about female police at Friday prayers, others will follow them as leaders." They can help in advocating for advancements in women's rights in Islamic law and key national laws.

Despite the small number of policewomen, proportionally, each of these women members of the Afghan police force has tremendous achievements to their name. Informing people about policewomen's success stories, benefits female police bring in security sector, and their skills, can change the culture that prohibits women from joining this sector. Getting the success stories of women members of the security sector to the public will not only broaden women's presence in the security sector but will also help break the taboo of women in security forces and encourage more women to join this sector.

Gender-friendly Police and Justice System

The ANSF needs a large number of women to meet the security and justice needs of Afghan women and girls, as well as to help change the ANSF into an effective, accountable police force.

The potential of positive impact of having more women in the police and justice systems is clear. Although Afghanistan's constitution and laws are designed to protect and uphold women's rights, they are not consistently enforced. A more female-friendly ANSF would increase women's access to the formal justice system and assist the implementation of, for example, the historic 2009 Elimination of Violence Against Women (EVAW) law, which criminalised child marriage, forced marriage, rape and other violent acts against women and girls.

Challenges

Despite positive efforts by the Afghan government and donors, only a few capable female police officers exist so far. There are several underlying factors that obstruct and prevent women's presence in different sectors, and in the security sector, in particular.

Societal Barrier

The regressive views about women are not just a Taliban curse, but are a deeply entrenched characteristic of the Afghan society. The Afghan society is strictly traditional. Having women in security sector is a new phenomenon. Not being aware of the benefits that policewomen contribute, many disapprove their presence in this field. However, Brigadier General Mohammadzai is optimistic about the situation and said "challenges exist but we are patient and we believe in what we do." Behaviours have begun to change for good but it is taking place at a slow pace. Being discriminated with by the neighbours for wearing the police uniform, Sergeant Masooma Khalili, Member, Recruitment Unit, Kabul City Police Headquarters (KCP), stated in an interview that "we faced a number of challenges at the beginning, as first we had to change the perception of people and families about women working within the police force." Conflict and discrimination biased against women arise not only in important matters such as employment or inheritance, but also vis-à-vis symbolic values.

Prejudice and conflict don't just stem from competition for scarce resources, but are also fed by the perception that the other members of the society do not share the values, attitudes, and moral standards. Many traditional thinkers, insecure male security personnel, and those who do not share the common interest of development are against women's participation in the security sector. The prejudices against women are solely due to the fact that their beliefs and behaviour differ from the mainstream.

Unequal Treatment

Despite holding similar positions as policemen, many policewomen end up performing menial tasks or administrative work. With the exception of female body searches, women are rarely able to engage in core police functions such as investigating crimes or carrying out arrests. A policewoman from Heart lamented and complained stating “we are not treated the same as the men. Even when we’re at the same rank as the men, it is us that the commander asks to make tea or do typing.” Discrimination and conflict intensify when people feel they are at a disadvantaged position in comparison to their counterparts. They are more likely to be disrespect others and more likely to behave aggressively, and this applied for all genders. It is therefore extremely important to minimise the gender gap and economic inequalities, if we want harmony among the sectors, and especially in the security sector.

Transparency in the recruitment

Transparency in the recruitment of security staff is of vital importance. There is no stable mechanism to recruit deserving women in this sector. An report shows that people are increasingly being hired as in charges of the district police and/or provincial district police based on their connections. Brigadier General Mohammadzai, highlighting this as a major problem stated that “people hire their family members in high positions rather than to meet the purpose of the position.” Sergeant Khalili too emphasised on the same issue and stated that “the more transparent the recruitment process is, the more educated women will be recruited within the police.” Expressing her concern vis-à-vis the importance of the relationship between recruitment in the security sector and the confidential nature of the work in the sector, Brigadier General Mohammadzai added that “Trained individuals should get the deserved position instead of people making gains via nepotism. A wrong person in the wrong position will not only jeopardise the image of the security sector but is also dangerous for the whole country.”

Lack of Women's Presence in the Government

Afghan women are still not in leadership positions and they are not well represented in the government. Only four out of twenty five ministries are headed by women. These four ministries include the Ministry of Women's Affairs, a position women are better placed to assume than men, so far. The negligible numbers of women in the Afghan security forces, judiciary, and justice systems are partially responsible for the lawlessness and discrimination against women. As Mr. Joyenda stated, "an increased number of women in the judicial and justice systems will help in bringing rule of law in Afghanistan." However, peace and solidarity is not being encouraged because women are marginalised and those women who are capable are discouraged from joining governmental sectors.

Conclusion

Women and girls in Afghanistan view conflict as more than just hard security issues; they place more emphasis on sociopolitical issues because the conflict has affected them differently. Their experiences can help the security sector achieve the purpose of their existence more effectively. Unfortunately, due to cultural and societal barriers, they are still largely excluded from the security sector and are grossly under-represented in policy-making circles. This has proven to be extremely detrimental for the country.

The instability in the country has left many Afghans horrified and affected, but they still proceed with their day and look forward to a better tomorrow. With careful and strategic steps, and with the government's support, Afghans can find peace and security in the future.

The following recommendations have been made towards ensuring measureable progress in the security sector by means of involving

more women members. Some challenges that have been observed are highlighted with possible solutions to Afghan government and international communities to address the same:

1. To ensure the development of a strong and effective ANAP to implement the UNSC Resolution 1325, the Afghan government should provide platforms for increased women's participation in the security sector, particularly at decision-making levels.
2. To ensure national policies are implemented, the MoI and the MoD should ensure its policies are in line with national and international standards of gender sensitivity. Efforts must be increased and intensified to implement national policies supporting and promoting women's participation on all levels in the security sector. The aforementioned ministries should establish monitoring mechanisms and appropriate disciplinary measures to ensure this is done, potentially by making monthly progress reports mandatory.
3. To ensure that women have fair access to career development opportunities, the MoI and the MoD should set targets to promote women to higher levels – ensuring that promotion is merit-based while also addressing the specific challenges that women face (such as lower literacy rates) – and establish fast-track promotion schemes alongside leadership trainings and mentoring by experienced foreign security personnel.

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Afghanistan: The Looming Spectre of HIV?

By Fatema Ahmadi⁴

The long-term nature of many non-communicable diseases (NCDs) demands a comprehensive response by the healthcare system that brings together a trained workforce with appropriate skills, affordable technologies, reliable supplies of medicines, referral systems and empowerment of people for self-care, all, over a sustained period of time. At present, many low and middle-income countries have health systems that do not meet the requirements for continual care to address HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria. Combating HIV/AIDS is Afghanistan's sixth millennium development goal (MDG). The Afghan Ministry of Public Health (MoPH) and the National AIDS Control Program (NACP), via a comprehensive process involving a wide range of stakeholders and development partners, have developed an HIV&AIDS National Strategic Framework (2006-2010).

Reliable data on HIV prevalence in Afghanistan is sparse. To date, 1,250 cases of HIV have been reported. However, the UN Program on HIV and AIDS (UNAIDS) and the World Health Organization (WHO) estimate that there could be between 2,000 and 3,000 Afghans living with HIV. This paper argues that in order to effectively combat HIV/AIDS in Afghanistan, the country needs to address the rise in drug abuse and sexually transmitted HIV/AIDS simultaneously, given how the two phenomena are closely related.

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Afghanistan is considered a country of low HIV prevalence but at high-risk of spread of HIV infection. There are several reasons for this as the past two decades of protracted armed conflict has resulted in the extremely low socio-political and socio-economic status of women; displacement of populations in large numbers both internally and externally; the extremely poor social and public healthcare infrastructure; drug trafficking; use of injected drugs, and the lack of blood safety and injection practices.

These risk factors lead officials to warn of the urgent need for early interventions to prevent a potentially rapid spread of HIV in Afghanistan. One ANCP report identifies the modes of spread of HIV in four categories. They are:

- a. People who [use] Injection Drugs (PWID)
- b. Men who have Sex with Men (MSM)
- c. Female Sex Worker (FSW)

Afghanistan is one of the world's largest producers of opium. Opium and heroin abuse appear to be more severe in areas where those drugs are produced. Research conducted by the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health on Pakistani and Afghan drug users at high HIV risk indicates that only 16 percent of the study participants had heard of HIV. All of the Afghan drug users who had sex had never used a condom. Although only 6.3 percent of the respondents had reported drug injection, 43 percent of this group had shared injecting equipment, on average with 4 to 6 users in one session alone. That means, the most common ways of drug use is smoking, inhaling and injecting. A recently published UNODC study on Kabul heroin users indicates that heroin abuse is spreading in the city. This study found that there are at least 7015 heroin addicts in Kabul city (and perhaps more), of which over 400 are

injecting drug users. This information suggests that users of intravenous drugs in Afghanistan who risk spreading HIV/AIDS.

During this author's interviews with HIV positive Injection Drug Users (IDUs), it was found that the most common medium for the spread of HIV in Afghanistan is through the IDUs' shared usage of needles that may be contaminated.

In April 2015, when this author interviewed Kabul-based Mariam who suffers from Opium addiction, the latter stated that might have HIV/AIDS. She was found under the Pole Sokhta Bridge. She wore an unwashed Burqa and did not want to reveal her face. Mariam said, "I am 32 years old, got married and have two children and they are living with their grandmother. I have been using drugs for four years since my husband was deported to Afghanistan. When he returned, he was addicted to opium. He could not earn money in Afghanistan. We faced many difficulties because we had children and no salary for supporting them. I could not cope with these difficulties alone. I began using opium like him. My husband and I share syringes, and I might be HIV positive, because he uses syringes from other addicts. I have never gotten tested for HIV. I think the government and people have forgotten us. There is no help from government and international organisations for controlling this disaster in our country. I hope somebody helps us stop using opium and hope I can go back to my normal life and living with my children."

This author also interviewed Kabul-based Reza, who was an opium addict and has been tested positive for HIV. Reza is a 35-year-old single man. He began using heroin when he was seventeen. In the initial years, it was easy to procure money for his drugs, and his family members too gave him money. When he came to Afghanistan, he began working in the Afghan National Army (ANA)

and also earned money with his drugs. "I am HIV positive and I have been living with this disease for two years. When I was an addict, I used other addicts' syringes, and I think I contracted the disease from contaminated needles. My sister and her family knew about it. They couldn't support me financially but they helped me emotionally. An Afghan-German hospital helps patients who have HIV and provides us with treatment every month, with a checkup every six months. Additionally, they hold trainings on living with people without infecting the others. The Afghan government does not pay attention to individuals in my situation especially. The MoPH should inform people about HIV, because when people have a good understanding of the issue, we can live more comfortably in the community."

According to the Afghanistan National Urban Drug Use Survey 2012 (ANUDUS), "The population of Afghanistan has been estimated at about 25.5 million to 30.4 million people. About 24% of Afghanistan's people live in urban areas of the country (about 6 to 7 million people). Based on the ANUDUS results it is estimated that there are as many as 384,100 individuals who use drugs in the urban areas, including 262,900 to 313,600 adult drug users and 59,100 to 70,500 children affected by drug use." It continues to say that "With three quarters of Afghanistan's population living in rural areas of the nation adult drug use and the percentage of children affected by opioids is suspected to be higher in rural areas than what was found in urban parts of the country." This population is high at risk of an HIV outbreak.

Furthermore, according to the data collected for a 2012 report by AVERT, "a study of three major cities in 2009 found HIV prevalence among IDUs had more than doubled since 2006; this is now at 7 percent in 2011. As a result, Afghanistan is now considered to have a concentrated epidemic. It is estimated that 8 percent of the adult

population use drugs, yet only 10 percent of drug users access harm reduction services. Moreover, awareness of the risk of HIV transmission is low among this high risk group, particularly among young IDUs. In 2010, it was reported that 40 percent of IDUs are sharing injecting equipment.”

The Afghan government and international partners should work together to address this issue and help generate support and treatment for individuals who suffer from HIV /AIDS. Regarding to National Strategic Framework on HIV /AIDS for Afghanistan II 2011 – 2015,

One of Afghan government’s key recent achievements on this front has been the establishment of the Anti-Retroviral Treatment (ART) and the development of the Adult ART Guidelines in the country. At present, the MoPH provides treatment for HIV at two ART Centers established in 2009, i.e. the Infectious Diseases Hospital in Kabul, and at the Public Health Hospital in Herat.

By December 2010, People Living with HIV (PLVIH) have been registered at these centers, including 70 of them currently on treatment. The primary services available at these centers are ART treatment services, treatment of opportunistic infections, and tuberculosis diagnosis. Currently, the ART centers also provide hemoglobin determination, full blood count. Additionally, the UNODC currently runs two HIV prevention treatment and care projects for female drug users, prisoners and refugees.

During an interview with Dr. Hussain Ali Yousufi, M&E, Surveillance & Research Consultant, National HIV/AIDS Control Program (NACP), MoPH, he stated that “the NACP is the part of the MoPH’s follow-up to the National HIV/AIDS and Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) Strategic plan to coordinate prevention mechanisms and

HIV/AIDS treatment options in Afghanistan. We cooperate with international NGOs and local centers that support HIV positive patients for registration and cure. Afghanistan is one of the biggest opium producers and has one of the highest rates of addiction in the world. Based on our previous figures, the numbers of HIV/AIDS [patients] increase proportionally to the increase in IDUs. This risk often stems from contaminated needles being shared among each other. The effective solution for decreasing risk of HIV/AIDS in Afghanistan is the prevention of opium cultivation.”

To conclude, Afghanistan is a country that continues to experience the consequences of war, where ethnicity, gender and patriarchy decide privileges and benefits including life, justice, education, employment and even access to healthcare. These factors will have a bearing on combating and eliminating the issue and threat of HIV/AIDS.

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POLICY POINTS

The Decade of Transformation: Afghanistan's Political, Security and Economic Future

By Mariam Safi⁵

2014 was a formidable year for Afghanistan and its international partners. Growing fears amidst the pending withdrawal of the NATO forces from Afghanistan left Afghans uncertain of their political, economic and security future. Afghans questioned the ability of the new National Unity Government's (NUG) to strengthen good governance; to improve the deteriorating economic conditions; and the capabilities of the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) in bringing stability, something they could not achieve even when there were over 150,000 foreign forces in the country. International actors, who had been involved in state-building in Afghanistan for over a decade too were worried. They questioned the type of state they were leaving behind; the Afghans' capabilities in sustaining the young democracy they had helped build; and the prospects for stability in the country in the absence of foreign military assistance. Propitiously, the doomsday predictions exuded by most local and international officials and armchair analysts did not take come true. However, we saw a state wounded by a duplicitous presidential election; the formation of a NUG that essentially lacked the glue required to bring it into being 'unity'; the depreciation of the Afghani; and a sharp rise in insecurity. While it was clear that the country was not necessarily going to crumble under the pressures of these challenges, it also

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became evident that any transition from war to peace that had been underway since 2001 would continue – though with nothing more than a bantam of hope.

The findings of this Policy Points document coincided with a process of considerable change in Afghanistan, such as the induction Ashraf Ghani as the Afghan president in September 2014, the formation of a unity government together with Dr. Abdullah Abdullah as Chief Executive Officer (CEO), the limited presence of foreign troops at the end of 2014, and a decline in international aid and attention. This marks a historic transition period in the country, as the new government identifies new policy priorities and the resources to implement those policies, and as its international partners consider future development aid and assistance. Key to the NUG's reform policies has been Ashraf Ghani's approach and rhetoric to 'peace' with the Taliban. Ghani has centered all his efforts, in addition to other state matters, around his narrative for peace, arguing that a sustainable economy cannot be developed without security, and security, is not achievable until we have a successful peace initiative with the Taliban.

Thus, the Organization for Policy Research and Development Studies (DROPS) conducted seventeen in-depth interviews with representatives of the NUG, civil society organisations, the private sector, and the academia, to gather their opinions and insights on the challenges facing the state and recommendations to help local and external decision-makers to address critical issues in the coming decade.

The interviewees included representatives and/or employees of:

Government: Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Commerce and Industries, Lower and Upper Houses of the National Assembly, the

Afghanistan Investment Support Agency, and the High Peace Council.

Academics/NGOs: Professors of Law & Political Science at Kabul University and Fanoos Institute of Higher Education, political analysts, researchers representing the think-tank community in Kabul, members of local non-governmental organisations and civil society and human rights activists.

Private sector: The Afghanistan Chamber of Commerce and Industries, and members of private industries.

There are two purposes for drafting this Policy Points document. First, to highlight to policymakers key concerns stakeholders from diverse backgrounds hold concerning the government's agenda towards peace, security and the economy. Second, to provide policymakers with recommendations for addressing the highlighted concerns. By taking local perspectives into consideration – that often go missing in policymaking – the NUG will be able to develop a better and well-informed consensus on its peace, economic and security initiatives.

Methodology

DROPS conducted interviews with 17-targeted stakeholders and asked them to share their perspectives on three key questions:

- How would you assess the potential for reconciliation with the Taliban and other anti-government armed groups under the NUG?
- What are Afghanistan's prospects in its efforts towards war-to-peace transition, especially in the aftermath of the end of the NATO's military mission in the country and the unity deal that

followed the 2014 presidential election? Is there any likelihood of an escalation in the conflict?

- What economic challenges does the NUG currently face? How would you assess the potential for growth in trade, transit and foreign investment between Afghanistan and its regional neighbors in the next decade?

Outcome

PEACE PROCESS

Interviews for the purposes of this policy points document were conducted prior to the announcement of the former Taliban Chief Mullah Omar's demise. However, the perspectives shared below still remain relevant as they echo present day sentiments concerning the NUG and its handling of the peace process with the insurgency.

As a newly elected President, Ashraf Ghani, during his first official visit to China, made it clear that “peace” was “the highest priority of the Afghan government.” Since then, the NUG’s stance has been that it will continue fighting on the ground while reconciling and reintegrating insurgents who are willing to join the reconciliation process and renounce violence. Following his remarks in Beijing, Ghani’s second strategic trip was to Islamabad, where he reached out to Pakistan to improve relations and persuade the Pakistani establishment to support Kabul’s efforts to reach a settlement with the Taliban. Many felt that Ghani’s appeasing tone towards Pakistan was daring and a politically costly gambit. As an upshot of that visit, Pakistani delegates began visiting Kabul on numerous occasions leading many to think that Afghanistan-Pakistan relations may have turned over a new leaf. Ghani showed extraordinary confidence that Pakistan’s “undeclared war” with Afghanistan has locked the Taliban into a fight against Afghanistan and believed that

if the two governments could work towards convergent interests, the conflict would inevitably be addressed. Initially, his efforts did not seem futile. The Taliban who had refused to speak to the Karzai administration began meeting officials from the NUG, parliamentarians, women's groups and civil society members, in what were described as preparatory meetings that could potentially lead to official talks.

On 7 July 2015, local media outlets reported that the first official meeting between Afghan officials was held in Islamabad. It seemed that the NUG's efforts paved the road for what seemed like the most significant step forward in peace efforts since the launch of the process in 2010. However, after the devastating Shah Shaheed attack in Kabul that was followed by a string of attacks in the city and elsewhere in the country, leaving hundreds dead or wounded, it became apparent that the skeptics were right and that Ghani had no choice but to reverse his once naïve approach to Pakistan. In a televised address to the nation, President Ghani stated that "The last few days have shown that suicide bomber training camps and bomb-producing factories which are killing our people are as active as before in Pakistan. We can no longer see our people bleeding in a war that is exported from outside." However, the damage had been done. The NUG lost all political capital, local support for the peace process diminished further, and a sense of hopelessness intensified amongst Afghans.

Recommendations

1. The NUG needs to design a united, clear and more pragmatic policy towards peace with the Taliban and other insurgent groups.
2. Internal divisions and views regarding the Taliban within the NUG leadership have jeopardised approaches to peace and

have sent mixed, and at times confusing, messages to the general public, its neighbors, the international community and the Taliban. The NUG needs to mend internal differences, develop a united stance on peace with the Taliban and deliver a coherent policy for peace which must be conveyed with transparency to the all stakeholders involved.

3. The NUG must ensure that its peace policy remains transparent and all findings related to it are included, and, shared with the Wolesi Jirga [Lower House of the Afghan Parliament].
4. The conditions for talks are acceptable but not ideal in the current climate in Afghanistan. The insurgents have been growing in strength and the NUG, weaker. This means the government is still not in a position of strength to negotiate with the Taliban. Military progress is extremely necessary and should receive critical attention in order to convince some sections of the insurgency to be on board for negotiations in such a climate.
5. The Taliban are far from united and many of the different factions also have internal divisions – this means that while some may not be agreeable to talks, there are others within the Taliban who are more likely to embrace talks if provided with sound alternatives to fighting. The NUG must ensure that it provides those Taliban willing to join the peace process with long-term economic incentives such as livelihoods that can ensure they have a conducive environment to return too.

6. The NUG has not created an atmosphere that can meet the demands for peace. A strong, not weak, government can bring peace and to have a strong government you need good leadership, all-out reform programs and the required human and material capital to implement programs. Until such time that the NUG demonstrates that it meets these three prerequisite criterion, it can reduce violence, meet the basic needs of its citizens, build a cooperative and genuine relationship with its neighbors, and thus create a conducive environment. This will enable the NUG to speak from a position of strength, which will yield the desired results from the peace process.

7. The NUG has taken a drastically new and optimistic approach towards Pakistan, making significant concessions to Islamabad and its allies, including Beijing, Riyadh, and Washington, in order to give Pakistan the required security and economic assurances it needs to change its course and policy vis-à-vis Afghanistan. The change in policy towards Pakistan was intended to convince Islamabad to bring the Taliban to the negotiation table and eventually reach a peaceful political settlement. The reasons for this being that successful negotiations with the Taliban would benefit tremendously – if Pakistan can be brought on board, or at least become less supportive of the Taliban. However, Islamabad is yet to reciprocate in the same degree to Afghanistan. Pakistan should ensure it takes concrete steps in the immediate future to reciprocate the same concessions that the NUG had extended to it. This is extremely necessary if constructive joint cooperation is to be developed in the pursuit of bringing peace and stability to Afghanistan and the Afghanistan-Pakistan region.

SECURITY CONDITIONS

2015 has proven to be Afghanistan's bloodiest year since the start of the international intervention in 2001. Following the launch of the Taliban's 2015 spring offensive 'Azm', [meaning perseverance or determination] on 24 April, they Taliban have engaged in fierce battles with the ANSF in almost 17 of the country's 34 provinces. Exploiting divisions within the government, an incomplete cabinet and no progress on the appointment of provincial and district governors and police chiefs, the Taliban have upped the ante in their attacks. It is clear that this year the Taliban have been able to expand the battlefield, use their tactics to test the capabilities of the ANSF, and place itself in a position of strength for when they decided to enter official peace talks with the national government. As a result, there have been 5,363 insecurity incidents between January and the end of June 2015 alone. Furthermore, during this period, casualties also rose to a total of 14,597 marking a significant rise compared to the same period in the previous year. Additionally, the Taliban's efforts to consolidate their attacks on city centers, have seen them capture entire districts and encroach upon city centres, which has resulted in over 100 ANSF casualties every week. Between January and the end of June 2015, there have been a reported 1,485 ANSF deaths.

The Asia Foundation's annual survey reflects the impact the security situation has had on Afghans, the survey finds that locals continue to identify insecurity as the biggest problem facing the nation following unemployment. Nowhere is this more visible than the number of Afghans leaving the country. Over 5,000 people visit the passport office every day. Rising insecurity and mounting socio-economic issues have led many to predict an escalation in conflict. This is reflective of ground realities as the country tries to transition from war-to-peace in the aftermath of the withdrawal of the

international military mission and the oncoming decade of transformation.

Recommendations

1. Insecurity is the biggest hindrance to economic growth, trade and foreign investment in Afghanistan and success in overcoming these hindrances depends heavily on the national government's ability to convince anti-government elements to join the intra-Afghan negotiations, jointly identify solutions, and reach a ceasefire that could bring a level of stability and peace.
2. Women's voices and perspectives need to be include in all security decisions in order to build a sustainable security framework. The National Action Plan (NAP) for the Women of Afghanistan, which sets the framework for the implementation of the UNSC Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, is a good starting point to ensure that women do not merely have a symbolic presence but also play a genuine and substantial role in peace-building . The effective implementation of the NAP will depend on several factors. First, raising awareness among key stakeholders and the public on the critical importance of NAP is a must. This should be carried out by launching a national campaign that promotes debates around the NAP and showcases its potential to bring about positive change in Afghan society. Second, the NUG must also re-examine previous policies and their limitations so to ensure that they are not duplicated. Third, communication and coordination among government officials, independent organisations, CSOs and the public should be strengthened during the implementation of the NAP. Lastly, the NAP should be used to accelerate the implementation of the National Action Plan for the Women

of Afghanistan's goals, and funding should be allocated in a long-term framework to help sustain both frameworks.

3. The NUG represents both an opportunity and a threat to Afghanistan's decade of transformation. Its internal disputes, ethnic divisions and sheer lack of unity has threatened the country's war-to-peace transition. Without unity – the glue that initially brought the government together – the NUG will be unable to embed the principles of good governance. Such a state of affairs will in turn be exploited by anti-government elements escalating conflict. Therefore, the NUG must address internal differences within the government and strengthen the administrative capacities of its ministries and civil service, implement its reform promises, and focus on creating a sustainable economy.
4. During this decade of transformation, more focus should be laid on the rank-and-file of the Taliban. International and local studies and reports indicate that there are at least three different factors that play a role in individuals getting recruited by the Taliban:
 - a. Financial benefits
 - b. Local grievances
 - c. Ideology

The NUG and its ministries responsible for security related tasks should first consider the threat of these recruitment sources by prioritising them and then devise strategies that systematically address each of these sources comprehensively.

5. The withdrawal of the international forces left a security vacuum that the ANSF are unable to fill. Despite the existence of UN Resolute Support Mission, security conditions are rapidly deteriorating. New actors such as the Islamic State have emerged, and the ANSF is dealing with an unsustainable casualty rate in addition to capacity and equipment shortages. The U.S. and its allies must revisit their post-2016 commitments and ensure that financial aid is continued to Afghanistan for the development of the ANSF – and that there are adequate numbers of international troops left in the country post-2016 to train, assist and support the ANSF.

AFGHAN ECONOMY

Afghanistan is currently facing an enormous structural fiscal gap, which has been building up over the past several years. The Chicago and the London Conferences on Afghanistan in 2012 revealed that the total fiscal gap in Afghanistan would be between \$7-8 billion, annually. Since 2012, economic growth has declined drastically. The Afghan economy grew at 3.7 percent in 2013, dropping to 2 percent in 2014 and increased, only slightly, to 2.5 percent in 2015. This rate is much below the 4 percent growth rate that was previously forecasted. The current fiscal crisis can be largely attributed to the political uncertainty stemming from the 2014 presidential elections; corruption in tax collection; stagnant government revenues; and rising insecurity. In 2014, Afghanistan's trade volume declined by 20 percent – a trend that continues, while foreign investment dropped by 30 percent in the first half of 2015. Moreover, official estimates place unemployment at approximately 35 percent; and unofficial figures suggest it could be as high as 50 percent. The withdrawal of international troops and the reduction in foreign aid alone have cost the country anywhere between 100,000 to 150,000 jobs. The Afghanistan Chamber of Commerce

and Industry's August 2015 survey indicated that the business environment deteriorated substantially from January to June 2015 as the Afghani depreciated by 5.7 percent against the dollar in the same period. There is growing fear amongst locals that the economy will collapse and, there are serious concerns that this potential situation coupled with the increasing insecurity will lead them back to the grim past they thought they had left behind. The question many are asking now is whether the national government can pull the economy out of this fiscal crisis and build a functional and independent economy in the decade of transformation.

Recommendations

1. The revitalisation of the Silk Route can help Afghanistan regain its position as a regional hub for trade and transit, allow it to integrate into the economies of South Asia and Central Asia, and enable neighbours to benefit from expanded regional linkages. However, though initiatives have been taken in this direction, factors such as political uncertainty, insecurity, and lack of infrastructure in Afghanistan coupled with regional dissidence has prevented this process from making substantial progress and thus is becoming more of an aspiration than a reality. In order to actualise the New Silk Road vision, the NUG, the regional countries and the international community should focus on implementing various short-term and long-term mechanisms. In the short-term, a one-window custom clearance system by Afghanistan and improved border sources at Torghundi, Hairatan, Torkham, Chaman, Wagah and Sher Khan Bandar, among others, could be created to reduce time and costs of crossing. Regional entrepreneurship exchange programmes to promote trade and investment opportunities could be carried out as well. In the long-term, emphasis should be placed a regional infrastructure trust fund, with India, Turkey, China, Russia, Pakistan and Afghanistan as donors

invest in designing, developing and expanding transport means – railways, in particular; and the implementation of the CASA-1000, The Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India Natural Gas Pipeline (TAPI) project and other regional energy projects should be expedited.

2. Afghanistan's reserves of gas, oil and other elements such as iron, lithium and rare earths, is estimated to be worth approximately \$1-3 trillion. This has the potential to wean Afghanistan off its dependence on foreign aid and boost economic growth in the long-term. The extraction of these resources can create massive employment opportunities, economic opportunities in the private sector, manufacturing sector, attract foreign investment and provide South Asian countries access to these much needed resources. However, the future of Afghanistan's mining industry risks being jeopardised as a result of corruption, opaque foreign contracts, non-engagement and/or involvement and employment of individuals from local communities, and absence of key safeguards. Additionally, the country lacks institutions required to manage its natural resources and local capacity and expertise.

In order to develop these resources for the benefit of its citizens, the NUG must create a more transparent, predictable and appealing business climate to attract international investors. The NUG must ensure that all foreign contracts are drafted in accordance with the country's mining law while simultaneously working to make processes efficient and less vulnerable, and that they reflect international best practices in terms of, but not limited to, land rights, legal and regulatory codes, financial and investor protections and revenue collection procedures. The implementation of the Afghan

government's policy, 'Towards a Self-Sustaining Afghanistan', will ensure that a candid approach is taken towards reform and realistic steps are taken to help transition Afghanistan from donor dependency to self-sufficiency.

3. The huge potential of growth that comes with the involvement of women in the labour force remains largely untapped and unaccounted for in Afghanistan. There is a critical need to engage women entrepreneurs and businesses to network and identify mechanisms via which they can facilitate cross-border trade amongst women, joint business ventures, trainings and capacity-building programs.
1. There is a need to identify new sectors of exchange between Afghanistan and the regional countries. New stakeholders, independent of the government and traditional sectors, should be identified and brought together to assess how they can contribute in their individual or group capacities; and an umbrella organisation could be created, under which they can work towards the promotion of better economic connectivity.
2. Countries in the South and Central Asian regions must take more ownership in reviving the Silk Road and to create a new Euro-Asia inland economic architecture by facilitating more equitable and coherent strategies for multilateral economic cooperation, and trade and connectivity. Placing the burden of reviving the Silk Road predominantly on the shoulders of the Afghans is impractical and will produce limited results. All bilateral and multilateral relationships should be based primarily on mutual respect, non-interference and sovereignty with a long-term focus on developing Afghanistan into a well-connected country that is economically integrated in the region.

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Supporting Civil Society in Afghanistan Post: 2014: How can SAARC Fill the Vacuum?

By Freshta Zarabi⁶

On June 5, 2015, the central Afghan province of Bamiyan was declared the South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation's (SAARC) cultural capital for 2015. This declaration was celebrated not only by Afghans but also by all SAARC countries; it was the first declaration of its kind by the SAARC. However, since Afghanistan's entry as the eighth member of SAARC in 2006, the forum has been unable to chart concrete ways to help the country's transition from war to peace.

Interviews conducted with civil society organizations (CSOs) in Kabul indicate that Afghans are doubtful and have limited expectations from the SAARC. This means Afghans still look to the West instead of their neighbours or regional institutions for support. However, this view needs to change if the region as a whole is to work towards sustainable peace and economic development. Moreover, Afghanistan's neighbours are better suited to understand and address the political, social, economic and security challenges faced by the Afghans, given that they face similar threats. One such area where this cooperation can prove extremely useful is in the SAARC's support for Afghan CSOs. Insofar,

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the SAARC's support for local Afghan CSOs has been piecemeal and haphazard.

Modeled after Western blueprints, the CSOs in Afghanistan not only lack the institutional and historical foundations but are also heavily dependent and shaped around donor priorities. CSOs are essential in rebuilding war-torn countries. In such environments, government institutions often struggle to meet the needs of its citizens and therefore rely on the CSOs' efforts to address the same. Although CSOs in Afghanistan have been recognised as possessing the potential to play a greater role in rebuilding the country, donors have been at a loss about how to support them. Hence, CSOs have received little consistent, substantial or helpful international support and as a result continue to struggle "with both the concept of civil society and how to develop appropriate programmes."⁷

This is more pronounced now than previously, as the withdrawal of international forces and the decline of international attention and aid are creating a vacuum, which if not plugged by regional countries, will chip away the few accomplishments made in this sector over the past 14 years.

The 2010-2020 period has been declared the decade of intra-regional connectivity. Yet, despite having become a part of the SAARC, Afghanistan has not been effectively integrated into the forum and vice versa. SAARC is the most populous forum in the world, with approximately 1.47 billion people represented by eight regional countries. Founding members Bangladesh, Bhutan, India,

⁷ Elizabeth, Winter. (June 2010) "Civil Society Development in Afghanistan," London School of Economic and Political Science, Centre for Civil Society and ESRC Non-Governmental Public Action Programme.
http://www.lse.ac.uk/internationalDevelopment/research/NGPA/publications/winter_afghanistan_report_final.pdf

the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka formally created the forum in 1983 after they adopted the SAARC Declaration and launched the Integrated Program of Action.⁸ The seven countries then agreed to work on five areas: agriculture, rural development, telecommunications, meteorology, and health and population activities.⁹

Although not established as a political forum, the SAARC does annually bring together regional heads of state to discuss issues of mutual concern and interest, and also holds Cabinet Secretaries Meetings. These meetings allow Afghanistan to highlight the political, economic, security and cultural challenges it faces, and to garner regional cooperation towards addressing them. The forum has also initiated educational and development programs that are underway in Afghanistan. The SAARC's Fellowship and Scholarship Scheme', created in 1987, provides Afghan students with an opportunity to study in one of the other regional countries. The program not only offers Afghan students with an opportunity to attain a higher education such as PhDs – that Afghan universities do not yet provide to its students – it also allows for “increased cross-fertilization of ideas through greater interaction among students, scholars, and academics.”¹⁰

The SAARC's Development Fund has nine ongoing projects across the region and Afghanistan is supposed to be a recipient of eight of those development projects. These projects have been initiated in as the following areas: Strengthening the livelihood initiative for home-based workers in Region; Strengthening Maternal and Child

⁸Nuclear Threat Initiative (April 2007) “South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation,” NTI.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰SAARC, ‘SAARC Chair, Fellowship and Scholarship Scheme,’ SAARC. Website: http://saarc-sec.org/areaofcooperation/detail.php?activity_id=16

Health Including Immunization; Scaling up of Zero Energy Cold Storage (ZECS) technology for the horticultural commodities in the high hills of countries; South Asia Initiative to End Violence Against Children; Post Harvest Management and Value Addition of Fruits in Production Catchments in SAAR; Regional Inter-professional Master's Program in Rehabilitation Science; Toll Free Helplines for Women and Children in Member States; and Strengthening of Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) services in selected areas of SAAR.¹¹ Unfortunately, these projects have resulted in slow-paced outcomes and not been realised in their full capacity yet. Most projects have either not been started or are still in the pipeline. This is because the SAARC has been unable to forge successful and meaningful relations amongst its members.

There are several reasons for the SAARC's failure to meet its single core objective of promoting regional cooperation between member countries. First, the SAARC countries are not equal partners because they have unequal economies. Second, political and security tensions and deep distrust amongst the most certain members, India and Pakistan, prevent regional connectivity. Third, member countries tend to view trade agreements with a parochial outlook. Fourth, like Nishchal Nath Pandey, Director, Director of the Centre for South Asian Studies (CSAS), Nepal, argues, while "there has been a lot of talk about a 'regional solution' for Afghanistan's problems...no country has a concrete definition of what constitutes this solution."¹² Lastly, as highlighted in a recent regional conference organised by the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung and the CSAS in Katmandu, member countries find it difficult to rely on the

¹¹ SAARC Development Fund, On-Going Projects. Website:
<http://www.sdfsec.org/?q=projects-listing>

¹² Pandey, Nishchal. (12 December 2011) "What can SAARC offer to Afghanistan?,"
Institute of Peace and Conflict Peace Studies. Website:
<http://www.ipcs.org/article/afghanistan/what-can-saarc-offer-to-afghanistan-3516.html>

SAARC “for any type of conflict resolution because it was created without any political or security role.”¹³ As a result, conference participants argued that the forum has little become more than a platform for annual talks among regional leaders because it is unable to harmonise regional interests and understanding, or share power and resources across the region.

However, although the SAARC has failed to provide adequate assistance to the Afghan people towards tackling the security, development, governance and/or socio-economic challenges so far, it continues to have a huge stake in the country’s stability. The regional forum first needs to understand what the needs of the Afghans are and how the region can meet those needs before asking what Afghanistan can offer the region. So far much focus has been placed on the latter. Afghanistan’s geographic location has for long placed it at the “crossroads of the Silk Route, making it the meeting point of great philosophic and cultural traits holding influences of the Indian and Zoroastrian traditions along with the Persian Greek and Roman empires.”¹⁴ As such, it has been regarded by the region as a connector and a land bridge between Central Asia, West Asia and South Asia. This enables Afghanistan to offer a great deal to the region in terms of being “a viable doorway for South Asian countries for access to the oil and gas of Central Asia Republics”¹⁵ and enhancing “cross-border and transit and trade” in the region.¹⁶ However, overall domestic stability is a prerequisite for Afghanistan to be able to facilitate economic growth in the

¹³ Centre for South Asia Studies, (14-15 May 2013) “Afghanistan in SAARC: Towards Deeper Engagement,” Policy Paper by Centre for South Asia Studies and Konrad Adenauer Stiftung. Website: afghan-conference-CSAS-KAS-paper.pdf

¹⁴ Pandey, Nishchal. (12 December 2011) “What can SAARC offer to Afghanistan?,” Institute of Peace and Conflict Peace Studies. Website:

<http://www.ipcs.org/article/afghanistan/what-can-saarc-offer-to-afghanistan-3516.html>

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

region; this is where regional countries must step in and help the country find a regional solution to its problems. This paper aims to outline the standpoints of a diverse range of Kabul based CSOs on the role/the SAARC can play in assisting Afghanistan's transition from war to peace.

CSOs are considered one of the most important and powerful entities to promote democracy and to hold democratic governments accountable.

This author conducted interviews with numerous local CSOs – engaged in the education and public health sectors, and those involved in advocacy and vocational trainings – in order to acquire a deeper understanding of local perceptions vis-à-vis Afghanistan's role in the SAARC, the forum's impact in the country, and on the future course of action. Representatives of five CSOs were consulted. They are: Gulmakai Siawash, Kabul Orthopedic Organization (KOO), Noria Safi, Women's Capacity Building and Development Organization (WCBDO), Karima Rahimyar, Afghan Women Educational and Vocational Organization (AWEVSO), Karima Hedayat, Education Rights and advocacy Organization (ERAO), and Lailee Rahimi, Institute of Civil Society (ICS). These organisations and representatives were identified for consultations based on their former engagement with the SAARC, areas of work, and in recognition of their long history of service.

The interviewees were asked to share their views on various issues, as elaborated in the following sections:

“Has the SAARC forum succeeded in promoting regional connectivity?”

The women’s views differed slightly from one another in their responses. Rahimyar felt that it was a “successful and beneficial”¹⁷ forum because it created platforms for interaction between member countries. Siawash cited a trip to India where she was invited, along with a representative of the Afghanistan Ministry of Public Health, to participate in a conference on Community Based Rehabilitation (CBR), where they discussed programs and policies related to disability and rehabilitation. Hedayat shared Rahimyar’s point of view and said by facilitating interactions between different sectors of society from the region, it ensures that “they learn from each other’s experiences and share lessons learnt.”¹⁸ Though interviewees felt the SAARC platform had been effective in promoting dialogue between officials, the civil society and the citizens in the region, they expressed disappointment in the forum’s ability to move beyond interactions to actual implementation of promises made. Additionally, the interviewees felt the forum has so far failed to address the contentions that exist amongst certain member countries and towards building trust for mutual cooperation. Siawash expressed that although connectivity amongst member countries has been effective to an extent given that the SAARC serves as a platform to share lessons, in reality, the forum had done little towards addressing the real issue of contention between members such as Afghanistan, Pakistan and India.

“What has Afghanistan’s role in the SAARC been? Has its membership been beneficial for the forum?”

Siawash stated that Afghanistan’s involvement in the SAARC was indeed positive because it ensured that Kabul got an opportunity to

¹⁷ Interview in Kabul with Karima Rahimyar on 5 May 2015.

¹⁸ Interview in Kabul with Karima Hedayat on 5 May 2015.

learn from the successful programs being implemented in other countries. Similarly, Hedayat too felt that Afghanistan's entry into the forum had proven beneficial for the country. She talked about her participation in two conferences on education via which she was able to identify key activities for her organisation to implement in Afghanistan. A majority of the interviewees were of the opinion that Afghanistan's SAARC membership had resulted in minimal outcomes and its role has remained largely representative instead of literal. Rahimi expressed that Afghanistan had an insignificant role in influencing the forum's policies and decisions. According to Rahimi, the membership offered no benefits for Afghanistan except for the country's inclusion in the regional fora.¹⁹

Rahimyar too expressed a somewhat similar sentiment, but stated that Afghanistan has not been a very active member of the SAARC and has been unable to take advantage of the opportunities in the forum.

According to Hafizullah Zaki, a contributor to the Daily Afghanistan, an electronic Dari language news platform, opposing views held by different political factions within Afghanistan, conflict amongst members, the existence of widespread poverty, and the lack of economic development in the region have prevented Afghanistan and the regional countries from building sustainable cooperation.²⁰ However, the interviewees were hopeful that Afghanistan could play a greater role in the forum in the future. At the time of Kabul's induction into the SAARC in 2007, the then Afghan President Hamid Karzai had stressed that Afghanistan's full membership would allow both the country and the region to benefit from greater economic cooperation within member states.²¹

¹⁹ Ibid. Rahimi.

²⁰ Hafizullah Zaki (11 November 2011) 'SAARC, Opportunities and Challenges,' The Daily Afghanistan. http://www.dailyafghanistan.com/editorial_detail.php?post_id=122955

²¹ DAWN. (4 April 2007) 'Afghanistan inducted as 8th member: 14th SAARC summit begins. <http://www.dawn.com/news/240651/afghanistan-inducted-as-8th-member-14th-saarc-summit-begins>

“Has the SAARC-Afghanistan partnership resulted in positive outcomes for the Afghans?”

Rahimi felt that the SAARC could help Afghanistan in diversifying economic activities, supporting a culture of peace and unity, and garnering international support for Afghanistan²² Rahimyar stated that the forum could help by developing the national education sector.²³ Similarly, Hedayat argued for the SAARC to focus on developing the country’s education system and literacy programs because “these programs can help to facilitate peace in Afghanistan by making people more eligible for employment and to have a better CSO community.”²⁴

Rahimi felt the SAARC offered effective economic and advocacy initiatives from which Afghanistan could benefit.²⁵ These benefits could include the facilitation of enhanced cross-border trade and transit with Afghanistan’s neighbours. Additionally, road and railway connectivity could also be promoted by the members of the SAARC on a burden-sharing basis wherein neighbors share the cost.²⁶ For instance, the SAARC can play a key role in revitalising the ancient Silk Road which will allow Afghanistan to play its natural role as the Asian transit and trade roundabout, connecting Central Asia to South Asia and East Asia to West Asia. The Silk Road initiative could assist in addressing the problems associated with implementing preferential measures for least developed countries, especially for landlocked countries like Afghanistan. This road could potentially also provide Afghanistan and the region with multiple

²² Ibid Rahimi

²³ Ibid Rahimyar

²⁴ Ibid Hedayat

²⁵ Ibid

²⁶ Nishchal N Pandey (12 December 2011). “What can SAARC offer to Afghanistan?” Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies. <http://www.ipcs.org/article/india/what-can-saarc-offer-to-afghanistan-3516.html>

transit corridors between South Asia and the landlocked Central Asia and beyond while also ensuring the security of the corridors.

Rahimyar felt the SAARC had the best framework to help the peace-building process in Afghanistan via strengthening the country's education sector. South Asian countries share similar educational structures and are faced with common challenge to their primary, secondary, tertiary and professional education systems stemming from a shared legacy of colonial culture. To address these challenges South Asian countries have adopted Life Skill Based Education (LSBE) which looks to develop students "abilities for adaptive and positive behaviour that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life."²⁷ To be able to implement LSBE, these countries have developed a need-based, rational curriculum framework to train teachers at the secondary level.²⁸ This initiative illustrates an attempt by South Asian countries to follow contemporary global trends in education. As a result, all SAARC countries are currently in the process of integrating LSBE to their secondary teacher education curriculum.²⁹ In Afghanistan an LSBE curriculum has been implemented via the creation of a National Education Strategic Plan (NESP). Life skills in Afghanistan are "considered as moral education for the teaching of Islamic morality"³⁰ and deals with issues such as human rights, character education, peace education and health education. Life Skills is a subject area in itself and teachers currently partake in life skills workshops organised across the country in areas such as peace, health, psychology and manners. However, South Asian

²⁷ Krishnendu Muni and Debjani Guha. (Jun 2014) "status of Life Skill Education in Teacher Education Curriculum of SAARC countries: A comparative Evaluation": Journal of Education and Social Policy.

http://jespnet.com/journals/Vol_1_No_1_June_2014/13.pdf

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

countries have faced several programming challenges towards adequately implementing the LSBE. The SAARC members do not have conceptual clarity and shared understanding of life skills-based education. They do not have tools that define and measure performance. They need to develop and implement Life Skills Programming and ensure that the LSBE addresses societal issues that often contribute to the vulnerabilities and risks experienced by children and adolescents; and to develop communities that support the use of life skills.³¹ These challenges are more pronounced in Afghanistan due to the ongoing conflict and the lack of economic, political and social stability. The SAARC countries can work with the Afghan government and develop training and awareness programs along with the local CSOs to ensure that Afghanistan strengthens its LSBE curriculum.

Hedayat also felt that the SAARC could play a substantial role in helping build the education sector in Afghanistan. Siawash had a unique suggestion: she believed that the SAARC could strengthen organisations in Afghanistan that work in supporting disabled persons. By creating jobs, a friendly environment and opportunities for education for the societal group in question, the SAARC can help existing organisations ensure that disabled persons do not feel estranged from others. Although Afghanistan has ratified the convention on the rights of persons with disabilities, there is a need to ensure that Afghanistan translates the convention into practice for persons with disabilities. The SAARC can play an effective role in this process. For example, the Disabled People International and National Federation of Disabled Nepal (NFDN) called on the 18th SAARC Summit to “develop a regional task force of people with disabilities to formulate a strategic action plan to make all the rights

³¹ Ibid. Krishnendu Munki and Debjani Guha. (Jun 2014)

real for persons with disabilities in south Asian region.”³² The SAARC can be instrumental in collaborating with Afghan CSOs to help the government in Kabul develop and implement such a plan.

“What can the SAARC do to help Afghanistan transition from war to peace after the withdrawal of the international community from the country?”

Noria Safi stated that the SAARC could assist Afghanistan by promoting trust-building with other member countries. She said, “in order to have a successful peace process, we need the region to facilitate an exchange of views amongst Afghanistan and Pakistan, so these exchanges could help bring a change in mindset of both countries.”³³ Siawash felt that the SAARC’s greatest contribution could be its role in strengthening the CSO community in Afghanistan.

Siawash said, “SAARC could help the CSOs in Afghanistan move from conducting donor-driven work to process-oriented work.” For instance, unlike Afghanistan’s newly developed CSO community, other SAARC countries have a longer trajectory of CSO engagement and development. Thus they are in a better position to advise Afghanistan on prioritising actions, creating locally rooted civic campaigns and movements, and towards identifying and developing local agents of change. The SAARC countries can also help Afghan CSOs in identifying smaller but long term and more flexible forms of financing. The SAARC itself can offer non-financial assistance in the form of training CSO representatives and helping

³²National Federation of the Disabled, Nepal (Nov 24, 2014). People SAARC Event-make the Rights Real!<http://www.nfdn.org.np/news/2/34/People-Saarc-Event-Make-the-Rights-Real.html>

³³ Ibid Safi

create an enabling environment, encouraging local philanthropy and social enterprise.³⁴

Siawash feels that this way, the CSOs could become sustainable and self-reliant, which is crucial, given how CSOs are essential institutions that aid the development of society and state. She stated that the CSOs could create an environment that improves the thinking among common people on social issues, thus advancing local capacities. She added that the SAARC forum could work with the Afghan government to reduce taxes on foreign aid flowing into CSOs in Afghanistan.”³⁵

Siawash also expressed that the SAARC could also work with the Afghan government to create employment opportunities, which can help preventing locals from joining the insurgency, and ensure people’s livelihoods improve. She said “we cannot bring peace strictly through ‘security’ means; the real reason for insecurity is economic issues and lack of employment... People struggling with economic and unemployment issues join armed groups and facilitate insecurity, so should work with the Afghan government to create employment opportunities for Afghans, which will in turn, help bring peace.”³⁶

“Has the SAARC shown support for civil society in Afghanistan so far? If yes, elaborate. If no, what activities can take on to change that?”

All the interviewees were of the opinion that the SAARC had not taken a predominant role in supporting CSOs in Afghanistan yet. Heydayat said she had not seen any instance where CSOs in

³⁴Maria J. Stephan, Sadaf Lakhani, and Nadia Naviwala(Feb 2015), United States Institute of Peace: Aid to Civil Society . www.usip.org

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid

Afghanistan were being supported by the SAARC. Safi and Rahimyar also concurred with Heydayat. Siawash said the SAARC platform had not directly supported Afghan CSOs; but she did say that it had ensured that the CSOs participated in regional seminars and conferences and that it was beneficial for these Organisations.

“What are your recommendations for the SAARC and the Afghan government towards improving the impact of this regional forum in Afghanistan?”

Rahimi stated that at present, Afghanistan does not play an active role in the SAARC and is simply observes activities instead of designing them. Therefore, Afghanistan should take serious measures such as maintaining active relationships with the SAARC platform and its members via governmental as well as civil society channels to actively share Afghanistan’s problems with them so that the commitments made for Afghanistan are followed up properly.³⁷ Safi stated that the SAARC could help the CSO networks in the region and create committees with specific activities and objectives such as working on the peace process or election observation. By duly practicing and promoting networking, the SAARC can also ensure that the CSOs coordinate amongst each other to help reduce their dependency on donor aid.³⁸

Hedayat asserted that the SAARC should continue to invite CSOs to its conferences, as this helps build their capacities. She also mentioned that the forum could promote primary education for female students in Afghanistan so as to create homegrown education facilities for girls, particularly for those who are not allowed to attend formal education, by funding CSOs that work in rural areas.³⁹

³⁷ Ibid.,Rahimi

³⁸ Ibid Safi

³⁹ Ibid Hedayat

Rahimyar stated that the SAARC could help peace-building organisations bring CSOs in Afghanistan and Pakistan together to work on trust-building activities to improve the status quo between the two countries. She asserted that the SAARC should work with CSOs to design programs that build women's leadership and education. She further stated that the forum could help CSOs build capacities of their female staff. She also suggested that member countries should be invited to participate as election observers in all local elections in Afghanistan.⁴⁰ Siawash was certain that the SAARC could work with the CSOs to help build the capacities of the members of parliament. She identified that the SAARC member countries could contribute to the Afghan peace process by working with the High Peace Council towards creating an inclusive peace process approach.⁴¹

Conclusion

Globalisation has connected and created inter-dependency between countries, particularly in terms of economy. Thus, without cooperation, it is impossible for countries to ensure economic growth and political stability. Therefore, in Afghanistan's context, relevant regional cooperation will determine the future of peace and stability in the country, especially after the withdrawal of the international community.

The SAARC is one of the most important regional fora in South Asia Afghanistan can use to establish cooperation between itself and other regional countries. However, during the nine years that Afghanistan has been a member of the forum, it has been unable to establish an active role for itself in assisting Afghanistan. The interviews showcased in this paper demonstrate some of the

⁴⁰ Ibid Rahimir

⁴¹ Ibid Siawash

prevalent opinions in the CSO sector in Kabul. Nevertheless, the CSOs did show some degree of hope in the SAARC's potential to play a more constructive role in Afghanistan. They felt that the forum would be well positioned to strengthen and support local CSOs in the areas of education, and to help the Afghan government create better informed policies, especially vis-à-vis the peace process; healthcare; promotion of coordination amongst local CSOs and those in the region; promoting cross-country knowledge and practices exchange by facilitating the intermingling of CSOs of different member countries; and carrying out capacity-building programs for CSO members.

While many analysts have pointed out the SAARC's potential as a regional forum best equipped to address the security, economic and political issues faced by its members, they have also noted that the lack of both trust as well as interference are key factors preventing such cooperation. However, by strengthening the civil society in Afghanistan and then connecting them to more experienced CSOs in the region, the SAARC can begin to overcome these barriers and build trust and confidence amongst members — which can then pave the way for cooperation in the economic, security and political domains.

The Role of Youth in Combating Corruption in Afghanistan

By Mariam Wardak⁴²

Nepotism, favoritism, tribalism, impunity, tyranny and inequality are all forms of corruption. Corruption destroys public trust, undermines the rule of law, skews competition and distorts resources. According to Global Post, Afghanistan is the third most corrupt nation in the world. The pervasive and devastating impact of corruption in Afghanistan impacts the biggest section of the country's population, the youth.

According to The Diplomat, 68 percent of Afghanistan's population comprise of youths below 25 years of age. The destiny of a nation is vested with the youngsters. These are the people who, if guided correctly, can modify the course of the country. Afghan youth have the might of extensive thinking, hard struggle, innovation and advancement. As discussed in a blog in the Huffington Post, contrary to the people who are mature and/or old, youth are ready to adapt to changes because they are young, in search of truth, and are open to different ideas.

This analysis explains the corruption that dominates the Afghan society and the role the country's youth can play in building an ethical society.

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Annually, the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan loses millions due to bribery and embezzlement of funds. Reports suggest that over \$60 billion have been wasted to fraud in Iraq and Afghanistan. A sum of this volume could have been used for the delivery of better services in areas such as education, health, infrastructure development, and job opportunities. An environment of such high levels of corruption in a country translates to citizens having to pay the money that is no longer incoming from developing partners. The citizens who are subjected to this predicament are those very persons who have been unable to attain sustainable levels of development due to the entrenched corruption in the first place.

According to Center for American Progress, one of Afghanistan's long-term threats is the pressing issue of widespread corruption. One of the biggest challenges Afghanistan faces on a daily basis is that of building a democratic society even with corruption. Anti-corruption is a key reform agenda of Afghan President Ashraf Ghani and his Chief Executive Officer, Abdullah Abdullah. Recently, President Ghani called on his country to initiate a jihad against corruption. Corruption remains a major issue in Afghanistan, and the youth in general are not being spared the consequences of it. Different players such as the civil society and other activists have and are attempting to fight unethical practices by means of various initiatives, but the results are yet to be felt.

Activists such as Nargis Nehan, Wazhma Frogh, Seema Ghani, Mohammad Yasin Osmani, Ikraam Afzali and Afghan MP Naheed Farid have been vocal on TV and social media about the scale of damage caused to the country due to corruption. The definition of corruption for the Afghan society holds many answers to whether or not a corrupt generation is an illusion or a possible reality. On December 11, more than 200 students from the American University of Afghanistan gathered to celebrate International Anti-

corruption Day, in an event that marked the culmination of a semester-long campaign involving workshops, seminars, and an essay contest on the problem of corruption in Afghanistan.⁴³ According to an article, in Canadian Women for Women in Afghanistan, in 2011, Facebook groups called for reforms, an end to corruption, or for Karzai to step down were springing up constantly. The 2014 Afghanistan National Youth Policy (ANYP) defines youth as those between 18 and 35 years of age, and also provides guidelines for adolescents between 12 and 18 years of age. Young people tend to be more exposed to bribery and are particularly vulnerable to corruption as they are involved in almost every aspect of society as a students, employees and consumers (Transparency International 2009).

According to Transparency International's 2013 Global Corruption Barometer, worldwide, 27 percent of people under the age of 30 paid a bribe in the preceding 12 months. Some country results exhibit the vulnerability of youth to corruption in specific country contexts, such as in Indonesia (44percent of youth for 30 percent adults) or Bangladesh (47 percent of youth for 37 percent of adults). An Afghan Institute for Strategic Studies survey, titled, 'Corruption mapping in Afghanistan' gathered local understandings and view points on corruption in 12 provinces across Afghanistan Kabul, Herat, Balkh, Kandahar, Bamyán, Badghis, Badakhshan, Kunar, Nangarhar, Jawzjan, Parwan and Kunduz. According to the survey, corruption is growing and is the third main obstacle in Afghanistan.

Conferring to the 2014 Atlantic Paper the Afghan youth— where seven in ten were twelve years of age or younger when the US invaded Afghanistan. Throughout the beginning years of democracy

in Afghanistan, the youth were excluded from the state-building process. In 2006, UN agencies and government ministries established the National Joint Youth Programme to ensure Afghan youth participation in governance and policy development by imitating dialogue, developing focus groups and representing a youth in most policy meetings.

For its part, the Afghan government developed the Strategy and Policy for Anti-Corruption and Administrative Reform. The strategies listed under this document offer solutions to effectively fight administrative corruption and are guidelines for reform. This document was based on the instructions of Article 50 of the Afghan Constitution. Activists mentioned above and Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) have been established to target factors of corruption. Tariq Eqtidari, a key youth figure, arranged a marathon to fight corruption as a corruption awareness campaign for youth. CSOs such as Afghanistan Forward held a cricket match in Jalalabad and Nangarhar to eliminate cheating, form of corruption, in sports. Youth groups such as '1400' are focusing on becoming political pressure parties to tackle this issue. Discussions and activities such as these and above on corruption are significantly more challenging to achieve, however it generates way that brings awareness along with helping citizens understand/think and contribute to dialogue which is a promising approach to civic duty.

In addition to civil society, the private sector has also contributed towards minimising corruption. Roshan, a telecommunication company in Afghanistan, is demonstrating how the cellular industry is spurring reconstruction and helping combat corruption via innovations such as M-Paisa mobile money service by paying salaries using M-Paisa instead of cash. A reduction in flow of physical cash cuts the urge and opportunity for people to steal because that money is not available in the open.

Another sector to promote youth awareness/participation against corruption in Afghanistan, is media. According to NBC NEWS, the average age of a Tolo News Agency employee is 24. ToloNews consistently holds youth debates and talk shows, such as Black and White and specific episodes such as Kabul Street Painting promoting citizens to create a neighborhood watch on corruption, on ways to tackle corruption within Afghanistan. The international community too has worked alongside the Afghan government to address corruption. For example, the second Afghanistan Youth Congress was held by the Colombo Plan, the International Narcotics Law Enforcement Affairs, the Afghan Ministry of Counter Narcotics, and the Afghan Ministry of Information and Culture. This event conducted two major panel discussions to decrease opium cultivation and drug use, given how these activities contribute to corruption.

Multiple efforts have been initiated by and in different sectors to address, tackle and end corruption. However, the efforts have had little impact as corruption does not just exist, but is also growing. A number of citizens have come to understand that many of these efforts are superficial and that they have not really affected the mentality of citizens. The Afghan public is aware that corruption is taking place but because it is not tangible, it is hard for them to grasp. The lack of education, knowledge, information and exposure has the public blindsided to corruption.

There is a three prong approach to combat corruption. The first initiative must take place through our religions, especially the religion of the majority. Afghanistan is a Muslim majority Islamic nation, in which every neighborhood houses a masjid (mosque). There are approximately 120,000 masjids in Afghanistan. The government must mobilise our young educated Ulemas to educate the public about what corruption is, the forms of corruption, the

effects of corruption, and most importantly, the penalty of corruption. The religious sermons are taken seriously by the Afghans and conversations on these sermons will travel to friends, families and colleagues.

The second initiative would be to introduce civic studies from the eighth grade of Afghanistan's education system. In civic studies, one would study and understand the constitution. As illustrated in an interview of a school girl in 'Life and Security in Rural Afghanistan states', "we did not study and don't know...but the new constitution sounds like it is of great interest to us, so we would like to know more."

The inclusion of the Afghan constitution in the curriculum will ultimately teach students the simple rights and wrongs to grasping the understanding of laws, from a young age. When a citizen is unaware of the law, how are they to implement or follow it? Afghan households partially depend on the younger members to provide information on market prices, general knowledge, and entertainment. These students, if well informed of the constitution, could also educate the members of their households and ultimately support the constitution.

The government has great discretion, or freedom to make choices on prosecution. An analysis of available records in the Afghan Supreme Court shows that the judicial population of the 1,415 judges is comprised of males at 97 percent and females at 3 percent. Of these, 37 percent are between the ages of 30-45, 10 percent are below the age of 30, and 34 percent are between 45-60 years of age.

This shows that the younger section of society comprises 47 percent of the judiciary – which leads me to my last approach: the

government should uphold its responsibility to make an example of the criminals.

Charge them publicly, hold public trials, and publicly sentence them. It is a key role for any government to maintain law and order on behalf of the whole society, hold those accountable. During the observation trials, the public will evaluate right from wrong. The human deceit itself will insinuate in peoples mind. The purpose of the judicial system should be reformation. The respect for rule of law is essential for the Afghan democratic society. Through trials it will organically generate.

Those who will implement as well as be the recipients of all three of the approaches are the youth. This can bring social change and justice within the society.

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Security and Economic Concerns: Factors Impacting Migration Trends Amongst Afghanistan's Growing Young Adult population

By Maha Khalili Sartip⁴⁴

*My heart is, in all circumstance, my sustenance,
It is in this world of existence, my sovereign,
And when I am weary of the reign of reason,
God knows how grateful I am to my heart.*

**-Khalilullah Khalili
(translated by Robert Darr)**

This paper aims to shed light on the factors impacting migration trends among the growing young adult population in Afghanistan. Located at the heart of Asia, Afghanistan is a country rich in history and culture. The Afghans have endured four decades of war and civil strife, and political and humanitarian hardship that have resulted in the failure and/or the collapse of governmental infrastructures; and the consequent migration that resulted in a large section of the Afghan population attaining refugee statuses. This is a major issue of concern. According to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), as of 2014, approximately four million Afghans have acquired a refugee status.

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Within two months of the U.S.-led invasion against the Taliban in 2001, Washington and the UN forces precipitately created an interim administration in Kabul under the Bonn Agreement. In 2004, Afghanistan conducted its first democratic election and Hamid Karzai was elected as the president. The new Afghan administration faced several challenges since it assumed office. In 2005, the Taliban began regaining strength in Afghanistan. More than a decade after the U.S.-led forces entered Afghanistan, The Nation still continues to struggle with insecurity and economic instability. This has once again led to a surge in the migration graph amongst the settled Afghan population.

Economic instability, continuous security threats, corruption, crimes such as human trafficking, and the lack of resources tend to be major issues of concern for Afghan citizens, and for the youth in particular. "Joint research conducted by the Afghan Research and Evaluation Unit and the UNHCR concluded that a very large portion of the world's illegal migrants are Afghan and most of them are just children." At present, Afghanistan's population mostly comprises young adults. As published in Youth policy, "According to the Central Statistics Organization, in 2011, 68 percent of Afghanistan's population of around 26.5 million people was under the age of 25, with people between the ages of 15-24 years accounting for 40 percent of the population." Due to the particularly high proportion of young adults and the typical working age in Afghanistan, which is between 15-24 years of age, addressing economic issues such as job opportunities is even more urgent for Afghanistan.

Afghan Demographics

Life expectancy in Afghanistan is extremely low. "Fifty-three percent of the population is between 15-64 years of age, and only 2.4 percent is 65 years of age and over." The elderly population is small in number, and the young adult working population

comprises majority of the country's total population. "The median age in Afghanistan is 17.6 years." To further complicate matters, household sizes in the country are typically large. "Forty-five percent of the population is between 0-14 years of age." This means young adults not only comprise most of the country's population, but are also responsible for the care of minors and the elderly sections of the population.

"This young population contributes to a very high dependency ratio. For every 100 persons in the working age 15-59, there are 103 million persons in the less production age of under 15 and 60 and over."

Major Factors Impacting Migration in Afghanistan

According to recent studies, security and economic concerns are the two most common drivers of migration out of Afghanistan. These factors have been a major issue of concern for Afghanistan's growing young adult population. The Asia Foundation conducted one of Afghanistan's largest annual surveys, titled 'Afghanistan in 2014: A Survey of the Afghan people', for which the organization "polled 9,271 Afghan citizens including 50.1 male respondents and 49.1 female respondents from 14 ethnic groups and across 34 provinces." Although the study was not age specific, the study spanned all major provinces and focused on youth concerns such as migration since majority of the population consists of young adults. The data gathered via the surveys suggested that although many factors play a role in the overall quality of life, major and primary concerns of the people in the region are security issues and financial/economic hardship. Furthermore, access to skills training and employment also remains an important factor impacting migration trends amongst the young adult population.

“Youth have played a prominent role in political violence throughout recorded history; and the existence of the ‘youth bulge’ (an unusually high proportion of youths 15-25 relative to the total population) has historically been associated with times of political crisis.”

This paper examines two specific issues – security concerns, and economic concerns – that have become a determining factor in the phenomenon of young adult Afghans migrating abroad.

1. Security Concerns

Security threats have been a major factor impacting migration trends amongst Afghanistan’s growing young adult population. “Thirty-four percent of Afghans surveyed, in the Survey of the Afghan People: 2014, indicated insecurity as a major concern.” Although, the U.S.’s involvement has drastically impacted a growing sense of security amongst the population, loss of lives and causality during military actions against the Taliban continues to be a reality in the region. With the recent US military presence decreasing, attacks by the Taliban have been on a rise. Human trafficking and sex crimes have also been on the rise in Afghanistan.

“Afghanistan is facing a mass population displacement. Many of the displaced persons have no secure place to stay and end up living in camps or open areas deprived of any basic social services. Woman and children living under these conditions are particularly at risk of being trafficked.”

Although, the data pertaining to crime, rape, and human trafficking is insufficient, the problem has evidently become more pronounced throughout the country.

“It is difficult to collect accurate data on the trafficking situation in Afghanistan because of the lack of understanding of the issues and general confusion about the concept of human trafficking, smuggling and kidnapping, as well as the strong sense of shame attached to sexual exploitation concerning women.”

To further complicate matters, there has been a growing perception of government corruption. Young Afghans have grown skeptical of various government officials’ mishandlings of funds and policy implementations. “A number of young people feel unable to go to the police for help, rendering them powerless in the face of abuse, exploitation, harm, or crime.” These perceptions, along with security concerns, play a major factor on the rate of migration of young settled Afghans.

“In 2014 a majority of Afghans (65.4%) report always, often or sometimes fearing for their safety or security or that of their family.” This overwhelming sense of insecurity can, for obvious reasons, not only impact an individual’s quality of life but also limit an individual from freely traveling within the region. Insecurity and perceived insecurity not only impact one’s ability to travel freely to seek employment within the country, but can also limit an individual’s involvement within their own communities.

“Around three quarters of Afghans say they would be afraid when traveling within Afghanistan (76.4%). A clear majority would be afraid to participate in a peaceful demonstration (69.4%), run for public office (70.8%), and encounter international officers (76.6%).” Providing Afghanistan’s youth population with a sense of security not only promotes an environment that fosters a positive outlook in their futures but also provides a sense of hope, which can ultimately lead to community involvement and rebuilding on both micro and macro levels. A sense of insecurity on the home front has

resulted in rising numbers of settled young Afghans to migrate internally, or seek circular migration, or seek permanent asylum abroad.

Security threats have impacted young Afghan returnees as well. “Fears over deteriorating security, particularly in the southern parts of the country, are pervasive among young Afghan returnees and refugees considering to return.” As a result, this sense of insecurity amongst young afghan returnees not only causes them leave their native lands once again but also deters their family and friends in neighboring countries to return to Afghanistan.

“Dissatisfaction with the security situation amongst the young Afghan returnees also influences the return perceptions of their relatives in neighboring nations.”

To complicate matters further, the lack of security in Afghanistan may also indirectly impact foreign investment projects aimed at helping stimulate the economy. Heavy insecurity not only impacts the nation’s economy but can also prevent future investors and foreign aid workers from traveling within the region. “The World Bank stipulated that in the next 12 to 24 months, political and security uncertainties may limit private sector growth from investors overseas.”

2. Economic Concerns: Skills Training & Employment

Economic concerns have become one of the major factors that have an impact on outward migration of Afghanistan’s young adults. A nation’s capacity to provide economic opportunities are as essential for a good quality of life as is the capacity to provide adequate shelter and security. This becomes even more imperative when a region endures an unusually high number of young individuals returning to their native lands. Afghanistan is ranked amongst the

highest sources of refugee population in the world. In 2001, when the US's presence was evident, many Afghan refugees, either by free will or by coercion of the neighboring host nations migrated back to Afghanistan. "Migration flows in Afghanistan since 2001 have been comprised primarily of refugee return flows."

Unfortunately, the numbers of Afghan refugee returnees have been inconsistent each year. UN data suggests that although the return flow of refugees varied each year, there were certain periods of high returnee trends immediately after the initial U.S.-led invasion. Approximately 1,801,406 refugees returned to Afghanistan in less than one year after the U.S.-led invasion.

Other sources of data suggest even higher numbers of returnees. Kronenfeld estimates that in 2002 there were 2,153,382 refugee returns. This immediately posed a major problem for the then Afghan government. For obvious reasons, the nation's preparedness to host nearly 2 million refugee returnees immediately following Afghanistan's plans for government rebuilding was dismal. This lack of preparedness not just creates an unwelcoming environment for returnees but can also foster a poor retention rate of families that currently reside in Afghanistan.

Generating household income too is among the key factors impacting migration trends. A high unemployment rate combined with poor skills training in a country that has over 40 percent of the population at a working age – and that has the highest ratio of minor dependents – can effect migration trends wherein young adults leave Afghanistan. Lack of availability of skills training and employment for the young adult population is an issue of serious concern both for Afghanistan's settled population as well as the population that returns to the country. "New returnees lack the skills that are needed in their areas of origin." This can play a major factor on the young adult population.

“Seventy percent of the population is involved in agriculture and 48 percent are unemployed. There is a great need for opportunities for work especially for male youth- an important demographic segment of the migration population.”

Afghanistan’s unemployment rate is yet another issue that needs to be addressed urgently. “With regard to the self-reported unemployment rate, the percentage of Afghans who say they are unemployed and currently looking for work increased significantly from 6.6% in 2013 to 10.7% in 2014.”

Settled Afghans not only migrate internally but also migrate to neighboring countries for employment. “Among Afghans who left the country, 27.0% say they did so due to the economy or lack of jobs, and among those who moved from one province to another, an even higher proportion (38.8%) moved for economic or employment reasons.” Providing education and skills training for young Afghan adults not only will ensure a higher chance of population retention but can also foster a robust and healthy economy.

Since the majority of the working class population is young adults, employment opportunities are a significant factor in determining a family’s decision on where they take residence in Afghanistan. Afghans settled back in Afghanistan search for employment within the region of their newly-established residence. Additionally, although both men and women are allowed to work in Afghanistan, women face more obstacles and limitations in their attempt to avail opportunities due to cultural factors. And if work cannot be found nearby, then in most cases, the head of the household (often a male member) temporarily migrates internally to seek employment. If a young afghan male is unable to obtain employment in Afghanistan, then he typically seeks temporary employment in

neighboring countries. This form of migration is better known as circular migration. “It has been a common pattern for sons to work in Pakistan or Iran for a year or so to earn the necessary funds.”

Returning Afghans often wish to remain in their native land before having to move their family and restart their lives once again. Typically, Afghans live near their extended families. “Family ties are very strong and family members will generally wish to stay in regular contact.” Having a young adult member of the family migrate temporarily may be the first option when families need to generate income.

Lack of adequate skills and/or access to educational opportunities too is a factor that has a bearing on migration trends within Afghanistan.

“The limited work potential among young Afghans who fail to obtain work with an NGO (through lack of skills or simply because there are not enough roles) includes working as a day laborer, mixing mud on the street, pushing carts and carrying things.”

A majority of young Afghans seeking asylum abroad and/or migrating to neighboring countries not only leave in search of employment and due to security threats but to also do so to seek educational opportunities for their children. “Some families take the option of having their adult child move across the globe, particularly given the high value given in higher education.” This quest for a better quality of life for themselves and their dependents – which has not been made available to them in their home country – plays a huge role in the nation’s inability to retain healthy numbers of the newly resettled young Afghan adults.

Conclusion

Security and economic concerns are extremely important dynamics that influence migration trends of young Afghan adults. Afghan youths and their families have to migrate to avail security for their families and job opportunities from themselves. Addressing Afghanistan's changing demographic population, which shows a visible youth bulge, should be a priority not only for resolving migration concerns but also to ensure political stability. "Youth bulges have the potential to threaten political stability when combined with poor economic performance." Political theorists in the area of youth violence suggest that the likelihood of political youth violence may increase if the nation's youth population's needs (i.e. social and economic) are not met. Addressing security and economic concerns will not only decrease the rate of migration amongst young Afghan adults, but may also ensure the country's political stability.

Recommendations

Some initiatives the Afghan government can undertake towards addressing the issues that force the country's youth to migrate are:

- a. Make policies that address major security and economic concerns more gender-specific and age-specific (directed towards the growing youth population)
- b. Implementing specific effective and efficient initiatives – such as towards cracking down on drug trafficking and human trafficking – in collaboration with neighbouring countries as well as international agencies, to bring about an overall sense of security.
- c. The Afghan government must collaborate with foreign businesses to not only invest in the region's private sector, but also to also create business friendly policies that ensure long-term commitments focusing on creating jobs.
- d. Afghanistan must keep up with the growing needs of the youth population by making skills training and educational opportunities available for the young working sections of the

society. This can be done via trainings, seminars etc. conducted in collaboration with external corporate partners or non-traditional educational media that possess the means to reach out to a large numbers of people. For example, web-based learning can become an effective strategy in Afghanistan. Web-based modules allow for accessing a large base of the population with little infrastructure. This method of training/educating can be especially effective for individuals residing in rural areas that may not have access to transportation to schools and/or cities.

- e. Finally, there is a need for collaboration between policy-makers and international NGOs to formulate policies that meet not only the educational and financial needs but also the medical needs of young Afghan returnees. As the U.S. troops withdraw from the country, it will be up to the resilience and efforts of Afghanistan's own policy-makers and leaders to keep up the pace with their neighbouring countries in hopes of creating a future brighter than the past. Not doing doesn't just threaten the nation's future. It will result in Afghans having to leave their native lands yet again.

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Higher Education for Afghan Women: The Road to Transformation

By Roya Ibrahimi⁴⁵

For over three decades, Afghanistan faced constant war and terror that curtailed and abated progressive efforts toward a better future, taking the nation back in time. The result of the nearly 30 years of conflict has kept Afghan women from advancing in education, employment and society in general. These combined limitations restricted women's participation to households alone for years until the launch of the US-led mission in Afghanistan in 2001.

Since 2001, hundreds of foreign projects, resources, and even the Afghan government's commitment to meet the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), have not led to the creation of an environment conducive to gender-equality; and in the higher education sector in particular.

As Fred Hayward and Mohammad Babury said in their 2014 paper, titled 'The Struggle to Rebuild and Transform Higher Education in Afghanistan', "More than one million people killed, over six million who fled, most of its higher education institutions damaged, many of its institutions closed, women excluded from education and more than half its faculty members and staff lost."

⁴⁵ Roya Ibrahimi is an Afghan-American journalist who has worked in various capacities in both countries.

According to a 2011 study conducted by the UN, women constitute less than a quarter of the student body in Afghanistan. The aftermath of conflict and war jeopardised Afghanistan's higher education system.

In most cases, education is not an option for Afghan women. In 2013, the Afghan Ministry of Higher Education, in collaboration with the Ministry of Women's Affairs, released a Higher Education Gender Strategy that stated that women made up only 19 percent of all students enrolled in public universities and tertiary institutions. According to a 2013 World Bank report, "higher education enrollment in Afghanistan is one of the lowest in the world at a mere three percent." These numbers illustrate the scale of absence and under-representation of female students in tertiary schools.

The absence of gender balance and equality in higher education will continue to impact both women and society, on all levels. The results of women attaining higher education will have a positive bearing on economic, medical, and political levels in Afghanistan. Women cannot be excluded from leadership opportunities if a nation has to develop and become truly democratic; and access to learning is fundamental for women (and everyone else) to assume leadership positions. Higher education will pave way for economic empowerment and the combined power of education and economic empowerment will pave way for political emancipation. Challenges to recognising women as an integral part of the system and as leaders are endless. In a society that views women as incapable, some factors (among many) that do, can and will affect the abilities and potential of women, and their chances of demonstrating the same, include religious, cultural and political beliefs.

Women in Afghanistan: Life at Hand

One of the eight MDGs presented by the UN Development Program in Afghanistan is to “eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education preferably by 2005, and at all levels by 2015” as well as increase the “ratios of girls to boys in primary, secondary and tertiary education.” At present, gender disparity has not been eliminated in the education system, but the ratio of girls to boys in primary and secondary schools have improved since 2001. According to the UNDP, the “ratio of girls to boys in primary education is 71 percent” and the projected goal for 2015 is a ratio of 83 percent. Data collected in 2012 states that the “ratio of girls to boys in secondary education has also steadily improved...just over 30 percent.” However, the ratio between genders in the tertiary education level still remains alarmingly low.

The MDG was to achieve a 70 percent turn-around in the number of female students enrolling in higher education. However, the current state-of-affairs reveal that the achievements are far from the set target. The rate of tertiary school enrollment (ratio of girls to boys) in both universities and other higher educational organisations was documented at 36 percent in 2012. The data for universities alone shows it is as low as 22 percent.

With reference to the 2013 Higher Education Gender Strategy, the numbers of women students have improved since 2001 when female students were once non-existent in the university and higher education population. Among approximately 163,142 tertiary school students, 132,145 were male, and 30,997 were female – who constituted almost 19 percent of the student body. The numbers of women in higher education reflects the reasons for the low numbers and low rate of increase in female faculty members.

Efforts towards recruiting more female staff are failing due to the high numbers of under-qualified and low numbers of adequately qualified female graduate students. The Afghan Ministry of Higher Education and the Afghan Ministry of Women's Affairs reported that females constitute only 15 percent of the total university faculty and higher educational institutions' staff. In comparison to statistics from 2003, the World Bank reported that "12 percent of professors were female, which represented one-sixth with a bachelor's degree, one-thirteenth with a master's degree and two, who had PhDs."

The government of Afghanistan committed to pursuing and furthering the quality of girls' education at all levels, but evidence clearly lays bare the investment, or the lack thereof, in promoting education for females. The MDGs set by the Afghan government and international organisations will be achievable only by implementing concentrated efforts towards women's education.

Afghan Women: During the 70s Vs. During Taliban Rule

Historically, women have played a major role in Afghanistan by contributing to national development via their expertise and professional skills. A quick recap of the 1970s and times preceding that decade shows that the treatment of Afghan women was far from what has been the case over the past three decades. It was not always this difficult to be a woman in Afghanistan.

Data reveals that as of the early 1990s, 70 percent of females were school teachers, 50 percent were government employees and university students and 40 percent were doctors in Kabul.

Tertiary education was unavailable to women for 29 years following the establishment of Kabul University – the country's first university – in 1932. However, in 1961, Kabul University's faculties were made

coeducational. Unfortunately, the rate of female enrollment in higher education slowly dissipated as conflict and war intensified. As the Soviet forces withdrew from Afghanistan in 1988, the country descended into a civil war between the tribes and mujahideen.

In 1996, the Taliban came to power with their strict and oppressive version of Sharia law that required men to grow beards and women to be fully veiled. During the Taliban regime, women were disregarded, excluded, and stripped off of opportunities and rights.

The Taliban's aim was to create a "secure environment where the chastity and dignity of women may once again be sacrosanct." Afghan women were forced to quit their jobs; wear the *burqa* at all times; and were banned from attending school after the age of eight. Movement of, and access to medical care for, women were restricted. The Taliban rule impacted all women in education and professional sectors across the country. It greatly affected the capital, Kabul, which was a relatively progressive city in comparison to other provinces in Afghanistan.

In Kabul alone, the Taliban reign affected 106,256 girls and 8,000 university undergraduate students who were female. Roughly 8,000 female teachers were dismissed causing 63 schools to shut down due to lack of educators. In spite of the ban imposed on women from continuing their education, some women clandestinely ran schools inside their homes, fully aware of the consequences they would be subjected to if discovered by the Taliban.

Fall of the Taliban and the Re-rise of Afghan Women

In 2001, the Taliban regime came to an end as the US-led invasion in Afghanistan swept across the country. Since the fall of the Taliban, women's rights have significantly improved in the country.

The livelihoods of Afghan women have increased; countless opportunities have been made available and *that* has brought positive change and hope into their lives.

In 2001, the UNICEF recorded the enrolment numbers of both boys and girls in school at 900,000. In March 2002, just three months after the interim government was formed, three million children, of which one-third were girls, had access to schools. Records of Afghanistan's Ministry of Higher Education show that in 2002-2003, there was surge in female students who enrolled in higher education in Kabul. Approximately 11,000 students enrolled, of which 30 percent were females.

Essential changes have been brought to the education system, but a lot of work still remains to be done to improve the nation's educational institutions. The quality of basic education has improved throughout the country via international projects and training, but the overall quality of education has not adequately improved in tertiary education. "Major changes still must be made to recreate a culture of research, provide better student-focused teaching, challenge students to be creative and innovative, foster gender equity, and to expand decentralization."

To increase the numbers of female students in higher education, measures that promote women's inclusion in every walk of society have been undertaken by international organisations. The USAID, in collaboration with the Afghan Ministry of Education have trained nearly 25,000 women teachers through their education programs. Between 2002 and 2012, USAID invested \$885 million in education projects in Afghanistan. The funds were used to "expand access to basic education by training teachers, constructing and rehabilitating schools, distributing supplies, and offering accelerated learning programs to out-of-school youth, particularly girls."

In an effort to enhance education and to continue to promote learning, the Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund (ARTF) was established in 2012 to support the country's development projects in health, education and other sectors. The donor-financed budget totaled \$7.99 billion, which was administered by the World Bank "in close cooperation with the government of Afghanistan."

Through these projects and programs sponsored by the international community, women of all ages are being empowered. These initiatives are promoting diplomatic and democratic dialogues between the locals, nationals and foreigners, enabling the female community in Afghanistan to understand the strength of education and the power of knowledge. The key for rebuilding Afghanistan with overall socio-cultural impact is education, and in particular, education and literacy among women.

International projects and programs have brought about a fundamental change in the atmosphere in Afghanistan, but nothing has created sustainable long-term foundations. To increase enrolment in tertiary education, a country must have good quality basic level education; and in Afghanistan, this continues to be implemented via foreign aid. Once enrolled in higher education, the quality of education – curriculum, syllabus etc. – can be discussed in detail in the future. However, the absence and/or low levels of investment in tertiary education have been overlooked. Even as the Afghan government continues to grasp the concept and practices of democracy, accountability in the education sector continues to be neglected.

The current programs lack accountability and comprehensive oversight and supervision. Accountability is one of the essential factors that will have a bearing on the quality of education. The

curricula and syllabi of primary, secondary and tertiary schools must be updated periodically. There has to be an individual/department entrusted with the responsibility of ensuring that the curricula are of scholarly work, unbiased, and gender equal. These small factors are what play a big role in addressing gender disparity.

Education Key to National Growth

The successes, challenges, and failures of the MDGs have taken a toll on building democratic governance in Afghanistan. The goals should not only be to increase the quantity of female students, but also to promote good quality education; and the good quality of the education has to be retained and maintained.

At 15.9 million, women constitute 48 percent of the country's total population. If each of these women were provided access to go to school and then to continue on to receive higher education, the rank of the nation on all platforms – economic, political, healthcare etc. – would rise steadily. If the society and families of females encouraged them to avail higher education, the nation would gain more female doctors and the healthcare sector will receive a good impetus; there would be an abundance of female professors with qualifications higher than undergraduate degrees to influence young female adults attending universities; female entrepreneurs will be able to create jobs for other females and males as well as contribute to the economic growth of the nation; and most importantly, there can be strong, resilient female voices in the political sphere. The key to ensure all this becomes a reality is good quality primary, higher and tertiary level education.

Since the fall of the Taliban rule in 2001, the women of Afghanistan have been steadily rising against the social and cultural barriers they endure, to become credible and influential actors in the country's social, economic, medical and political processes. In

Afghanistan, there are endless limitations on women. Opportunities are many, but the accesses to them are held back. When she learns to read and write, she is mocked by society; when she begins to think for herself, she is viewed as ill mannered, and when she learns to guide those around her, she is seen as a threat. The road to rebuilding Afghanistan will be a difficult one without equal quality and opportunities in higher education for women.

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BOOK REVIEW

'The US in Afghanistan: A Case of Mistaken Identity'

Book: The Wrong Enemy - America in Afghanistan, 2001-2014

Author: Carlotta Gall

Publisher: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt; First edition (8 April 2014)

By Lailuma Nasiri⁴⁶

"The Taliban cannot work for a single day without our patronage, cooperation, and support; they are being protected here, equipped, and trained with the support and assistance from ISI and Military Intelligence," Mahmood Khan Achakzai, a Quetta-based Pashtun nationalist leader and a long time opponent of the government's support of Islamists, told Gall on her visit to Quetta.

'The Wrong Enemy, America in Afghanistan 2001-2014' investigates the US' invasion of Afghanistan in pursuit of al-Qaeda and the Afghan Taliban after the 9/11 attacks. It focuses primarily on one important premise: that the war in Afghanistan has been waged against the wrong enemy in the wrong country. The book is an honest journalistic work by Carlota Gall, a reporter for the New York Times, who has reported on Afghanistan and Pakistan for over a decade, since 2001. The title of the book, 'The Wrong Enemy' is a reference to the former US Special Representative to Afghanistan and Pakistan (2009-2010), the late Richard C. Holbrooke's statement, "...we may be fighting the wrong enemy in the wrong country."

In this book, Gall attempts to prove that the Pakistani military and the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) had been providing financial, military and

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intelligence support to the Afghan Taliban, first towards founding the movement in the 1990s and later, towards re-invigorating them after the US's 2001 intervention in Afghanistan to destroy the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan. Gall uses her years of interviews and visits to different parts of Afghanistan and Pakistan to narrate the story of how the Pakistani military and intelligence were involved in supporting, controlling and directing the Taliban. The Taliban-ISI relationship has been known for years but Islamabad has consistently denied this.

In 'The Wrong Enemy', Gall is critical of both Pakistani and US policies. She is critical of Pakistan for supporting the Taliban and al-Qaeda and criticizes the US Government for their disorderly war effort in Afghanistan over the past decade. Gall substantiates her analysis by identifying the US' errors in Afghanistan. One such error she identifies is that of Washington's non-pursuance of the Taliban members following the fall of the Taliban government and their escape, in 2001. Gall states in her book that the surviving members of the Afghan Taliban moved base to Pakistan after their 2001 defeat but the US never pursued them in Pakistan.

The Bush Administration never gave instructions to its intelligence officials in Pakistan to follow the Taliban. "The Taliban were defeated much more quickly than we expected. I was looking at them as spent force," Robert Grenier, the CIA station chief in Pakistan, told Gall.

Another mistake the US committed in Afghanistan was that Washington and its allies focused on stopping the terrorist activities of al-Qaeda and its Taliban supporters in Afghanistan, while instead the focus should have been on hostile forces in Pakistan. Gall reasons that the Taliban's continued existence; Osama bin Laden's ability to survive for long inside Pakistan; and Mullah Omar's residence in Pakistan until April 2013, was because the Pakistan Army and the ISI provided them with aid. Quoting leaders from the region, Gall argues that the US should have fought al-Qaeda and the Taliban inside Pakistan as opposed to invading Iraq in 2003, while they had already started a war in Afghanistan. Meanwhile, Pakistan not only kept its hold on the Taliban by providing military

support but also managed to keep the US and its NATO allies dependent on it for logistics supply into Afghanistan.

Gall argues that Pakistan played double games with the US and its NATO allies by committing support to the latter in public and simultaneously providing covert support to Islamists terrorists and Taliban in Afghanistan via the ISI.

The author also reveals that, for two decades, Pakistan used proxy forces, the Afghan mujahideen and the Taliban in Afghanistan, and Kashmiri militants against India, to project its influence beyond its borders. The facts gathered in this book contribute to the reader's knowledge regarding what had transpired and how; but the book might not contribute to the reader's knowledge of Afghanistan as it mainly discusses Pakistan's involvement in the Afghan conflict. What makes this work unique is Gall's extensive experience of working in Afghanistan and Pakistan and her firsthand account of Taliban leaders, Pakistani intelligence officials, US Generals, Afghan politicians, and the many innocents who were caught in this long war to prove her case of the ISI's upper hand in the Afghan conflict. Her evidence that Pakistan fueled the Taliban and protected Osama bin Laden is revelatory. This is an extensive interpretation of a war brought by well-intentioned US leaders against an enemy they hardly understood, and could not truly engage. What Gall has not predicted in her book is the emergence of the Islamic State (IS) as a new threat to the world and its possible presence in Afghanistan, once a safe haven for al-Qaeda.

In the concluding chapter, the author argues that the US is turning its back on Afghanistan because the former's leaders are tired of war and mistakenly view Afghanistan as lost. She says "...Pakistan is still exporting militant Islamism and terrorism, and will not stop once foreign forces leave," making the case for the US and its NATO allies to not walk away from Afghanistan with the job only half done.

The book provides many facts supporting Gall's identification of Pakistan as the real enemy and explains how the US went to war against the

wrong enemy in a wrong county. The book, however, may not get the US to change its plans to withdraw its forces from Afghanistan, as it has been published at a time when Washington is coordinating a withdrawal of its troops from the country; the Taliban continue to exist; and Pakistan's military and ISI continue to provide them with aid.

Gall provides specific information and highlights policy errors but does not provide any suggestions for the US government and/or its NATO allies to consider before they completely withdraw from Afghanistan.

Overall, 'The Wrong Enemy' is a useful source of information and an interesting read both for those who follow developments in Afghanistan closely, as well as laypersons who are interested learning the details of the same. This book is an exhaustive account of how Afghanistan has been a victim of strategies formulated by its neighbors and friends. For anyone who wants to understand what went wrong, this is a go to source.

PEER REVIEWERS

Dr. Althea-Maria Rivas

Dr. Althea-Maria Rivas specialises in the study of conflict, security and development with a focus on the relationships and modes of communication employed by and between various actors within sites of conflict and intervention. Dr. Rivas's research focuses on understanding the everyday politics, relationships and emotions that merge in conflict and post-conflict zones in Central Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa. Much of her work has focused on understanding local vernaculars and perceptions of violence, gender and peace processes and race, racism and development. She worked for over 10 years on humanitarian and development programs in Asia and Africa and has extensive experience as a researcher in Central Asia and southern and eastern Africa. Dr. Rivas completed her PhD in International Development Studies at the University of Sussex and is currently a research Associate at the Centre for Development Studies, University of Bath.

Dr. Liza Schuster

Dr. Liza Schuster came to City in September 2005 from the Centre on Migration, Policy and Society at Oxford University. Before that she was the T. H. Marshall Fellow at the London School of Economics, working on a comparative project that explored processes of inclusion and exclusion in four European states: Britain, France, Germany and Italy. Since then, she has offered critiques of access to the EU, British, French and Greek asylum systems, and developed a focus on deportation, examining the European returns directive, and the impact of deportation on those

returned to Afghanistan and Uganda. After three years in Afghanistan, she returned to City to teach at all levels on the undergraduate and postgraduate programs, including modules in general Sociology as well as Political Sociology and Global Migration.

EDITOR

Mariam Safi is Director, Organization for Policy Research and Development Studies, Afghanistan. She is also a columnist at the Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies, India; Resource Person, Lakshman Kadirgamar Institute for International Relations and Strategic Studies, Sri Lanka; and Country Representative, Peace Direct. As one of the few female researchers in Afghanistan, Ms. Safi has contributed extensively to the field of peace-building, rule of law, counter-insurgency and human security. Since becoming an active member of the think-tank community in Afghanistan in 2010, she has led six in-depth research projects that have provided the first baseline data on some of these topics. She has authored numerous book chapters, journals, and articles and has been quoted on various national and international platforms. Her contribution to the field was recognised by the Diplomatic Courier, which listed her as one of the 100 Top Global Women in 2014. Prior to this, she served in various capacities, including as Deputy Director, Centre for Conflict and Peace Studies, Kabul, and Co-founder, Afghanistan Justice Organization's Strategic Studies Program, Kabul.

COPY-EDITOR

Rajeshwari Krishnamurthy is Research Officer and Coordinator, Centre for Internal and Regional Security (IReS), Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies (IPCS), and Member, IPCS Editorial Board. She is also Member, Advisory Council, Research Institute for Women Peace and Security, Afghanistan. She focuses on the politics and security dynamics in South Asia (especially Afghanistan, Pakistan

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Contributors

Dr. Maha Khalili Sartip is a U.S.-based academician and professor. She teaches both undergraduate and graduate courses at the American Public University System and the American Military University. Her published work focuses on the female Afghan-American refugee population. She currently serves as Member, Executive Board, and Secretary, Montgomery County Muslim Council. Dr. Khalili Sartip holds a Ph.D in Public Health from Walden University. She resides in Bethesda, MD, with her husband, Dr. Kamyar Sartip and their two children. She is the granddaughter of the celebrated Afghan poet Ustad Khalilullah Khalili. She is an Afghan born in Iraq, and immigrated to the U.S. at the age of five. She speaks both English and Farsi.

Rahela Sidiqi is Founder and Strategic Advisor, Rasa Advocacy and Skill Building Agency (RASA), Afghanistan. She is also Chair, London Refugee Forum, and the Asian Middle East Women & Youth Society, where she provides support to women refuge and asylum seekers via research, consensus-building and advocacy. Ms. Sidiqi has 22 years of experience in the fields of governance, development and conflict resolution. She has developed relevant policy papers, strategic plans, and manuals for project programs such as the National Solidarity Program and the Civil Service Reform Manual for the Afghan government, the UN and the World Bank. During her professional career in Afghanistan, Ms. Sidiqi served as Senior Advisor, Afghanistan Independent Administrative Reform & Civil Service Commission, for which she developed several policies and cooperation with ministries for its projections the pilot phase. She has a Master's degree in Social Development from Reading University, United Kingdom.

Roya Ibrahimi is an Afghan-American who is an avid lover of all things journalism. During her college career at the University of Kansas, she actively raised awareness on international conflicts, spreading the knowledge of world cultures that are often misconstrued by media, and held political dialogues on international matters in an effort to encourage her peers to take a stand and make a change. Upon graduating from college, Ms. Ibrahimi travelled to Afghanistan to live and work in Kabul with the country's leading media house, TOLONews, as their Head of Online Communication. Her experience in Afghanistan motivated her to bring the world's attention to the nation's ongoing gender inequality, via the voices of women. Ms. Ibrahimi has a B.S. in Journalism and Global and International Studies from the University of Kansas.

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Lailuma Nasiri is President Afghanistan Justice Organization. She has over nine years experience in management, gender justice and human rights as well as that of working with national and international organisations. She is responsible for the overall management, implementation of projects and operations, and

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About DROPS

Organization for Policy Research and Development Studies (DROPS) is a women-led, independent and multidisciplinary policy-oriented research organization based in Kabul, Afghanistan. Established in 2012 by Mariam Safi (a researcher and analyst) and Naheed Farid (Member of Parliament). The synergy of both members reflects the organization's ultimate goal of harnessing the efforts of women to bridge the research and policy nexus in Afghanistan.

The existence of effective policy-oriented research institutes is vital in advancing and shaping the governance agenda in post-conflict countries. Therefore, at DROPS we are committed to strengthening democratic ideas and values in Afghanistan by (1) conducting research that provides policymakers with sound alternative solutions to national issues, and (2) increasing women's involvement in policy dialogue and research on a diversity of issues that are at play in building democratic governance.

At DROPS, our core beliefs are: “What we find changes who we become; innovation through research; understanding today for a better tomorrow.” In order to enable this mission, we produce public-driven research and policy briefs, we publish an annual Women and Public Policy Journal, we focus on building local capacities through our Research Methodology and Gender-Lens Training Program and we advocate our research findings through our Afghanistan Network of Women Thinkers and Researchers.

We are committed to promoting democratic values in congruence with local cultural sensibilities so that we can build a road map for Afghanistan's young emerging democracy.



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