



Afghan Women's Network

September 2016

Position Paper: Voices from Afghan Women

1. About Afghan Women's Network

Afghan Women's Network has over 3500 individual members and 132 women's organizations in its membership. Afghan Women's Network has active and considerable presence in Kabul, Herat, Balkh, Kandahar, Bamyān, Paktia, Nangarhar and Kunduz, and is also active through its member in other provinces of Afghanistan. Afghan Women's Network works as the umbrella for its member organizations. AWN has been able to carry on policy advocacy, awareness and capacity building and networking initiatives related to (gender-based violence, women, peace and security, women leadership and political participation as well as women's legal and social rights) in close collaboration with its member organizations and individual members.

2. Background

After the incident of 9/11 and fall of Taliban regime, Afghan women once again struggled to make historic contributions to enable better environment for half of the population as well as for contributing in the development of the country. In the past 15 years Afghan women have worked hard and emphasized for their inclusive participation as well as their role as decision makers. Women have watched the slow progress in sectors of good governance, rule of law and peace processes and have raised credible concerns and provided key solutions for their meaningful and equal participation.

Afghanistan has been in the center of discussion of global policy makers in the past 15 years. International community and Afghan government have meet several times in the past decade to discuss the development of the country, measure the progress and agree on better mechanisms and approaches to improve specific sectors. Follow up Tokyo Conference in 2012¹ and London Conference in 2014², Brussels Conference on Afghanistan is scheduled on 5 October 2016³. After withdrawal of international troops in 2014, inauguration of national unity government and its progress, Brussels conference is a significant venue for attracting international community's ongoing support to Afghanistan as well as ensure Afghan government are sharing key progresses they have made since establishment and their future plans.

On the occasion of Brussels conference on Afghanistan, Afghan Women's Network led series of consultations with women in Kabul, Badakhshan, Baghlan, Bamyān, Daikundi, Farah, Ghor, Kandahar, Urzgan, Herat, Kunduz, Nangarhar, Samangan, Paktia, Khost, Logar, Takhar, Mazar, Laghman, Kunar and Nooristan . AWN has focused on

¹ http://www.mofa.go.jp/region/middle_e/afghanistan/tokyo_conference_2012/tokyo_declaration_en1.html

² https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/383205/The-London-Conference-on-Afghanistan-Communique.pdf

³ <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/meetings/international-summit/2016/10/05/>

four main topics Good Governance, Rule of Law, Women in Peace Process and Aid Effectiveness. AWN through this Position Paper would like to share the voices of women from 21 provinces who have shared their views on current situation of Afghan women, the existing issues and their calls and recommendations both for Afghan government and international community beyond October conference on Afghanistan.

3. Current Situation

Women and Good Governance:

While speaking to women in above mentioned 21 provinces, it is obvious that women's inclusion and effective role in good governance in Afghanistan has been fairly slow and low. Women's presence have been recognized in two level within the governance structure in Afghanistan, the high level which include women in the cabinet, parliament, senate, provincial councils, ministries and local governance.

Women in Leadership	Number
Ministers	4
Deputy Ministers	9
Ambassador	4
Parliamentarians	69
Senators	22
Provincial Council	296
Governors	1

The second level of women are comprised of those carried mid level operational roles and responsibilities. These include directors and manager level positions. Data gathered from most of the provinces show that women's participation in mid level within government is fairly low.

Women and Rule of Law

Afghan Women have number of achievements related to rule of law. Women welcome the Afghan Attorney General's recent decision in turning the EAW Special Attorney Office to a Deputy Attorney role. At present 6 percent⁴ of prosecutors are women. Women have noted the historical move of President of Afghanistan for introducing for first time as female judge for the membership in the Supreme Court High Council. 8% of judges are women⁵. Afghan women believe women play a major role in bringing peace and security in Afghanistan. Women's participation in Afghan National Security and Defense Force has improved up to date. So far Women presence in rule of law sector is indicated in the table.

Institution	Percentage of Women
Attorney General	6%
Supreme Court	8 %
Ministry of Interior	2 %
Ministry of Defense	1 %

Women and Peace Process

On February, 2016, a major change in HPC and APRP role and responsibilities were as well as leadership took place by the President. This included HPC new leadership with a Chair and six deputy chairs. HPC has a female deputy chair and two female advisors⁶ who are part of the leadership to provide strategic advice now. Women

⁴<http://www.scoop.co.nz/stories/WO1403/S00272/women-in-afghanistans-justice-sector.htm>

⁵ Ibid 4

⁶ <http://www.khaama.com/syed-ahmed-gilani-appointed-new-chairman-of-afghan-high-peace-council-0131>

have welcomed this major change in finding women at the leadership level. Similarly women deputy chair of HPC was involved in direct peace negotiations with Hezb-e-Islami⁷ which is considered the result of years of advocacy by women movement. Women welcome the consultation HPC held with women representatives from various sectors on HPC Strategic Plan⁸.

Women and Aid Effectiveness

Afghan government and International community have played a major role in the past 15 years for enabling platform for women empowerment. Improvements to women's life in various fields are directly linked to projects and programs that have been funded by international community. Women believe the allocated aid have helped women's participation in elections, contribution in government institutions, and civil society organizations.

4. Ongoing Challenges

Women and Good Governance:

- I. Women participation in local governance is fairly low. In 10 provinces where women are consulted, they have shared that there are only 1-2 women holding leadership position across their province.
- II. Due low presence and dominance of men in most of the provinces, women are not consulted on important provincial discussions and decisions.
- III. Protection and safety of women working in key positions across the country is one of the key challenges that have already affected women's participation.

Women and Rule of Law:

- I. While women welcome the nomination of first female judge for the Supreme Court High Council, it was disappointing to see her rejection through the democratic institution parliament.
- II. There have been recent appointments and transfer of attorneys and prosecutors by Attorney General Office across the country. Unfortunately one woman out of 50 was introduced. Women prosecutors are facing challenges increased insecurity, existence of Mafia and warlords as well as do not trust the system that will support their contribution.
- III. In 2016 most inhumane incidents of violence against women have occurred. From all the cases, there are not reports available on arrest and prosecution of perpetrators. Women access to justice is still a major issue.
- IV. While Warsaw NATO Summit announced massive amount of military support to ANSDF, there is lack of clear understanding on how much of the allocated budget would be used for women in this sector.

Women and Peace Process:

⁷ <https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/almost-signed-the-peace-agreement-with-hezb-e-islami/>

⁸ <http://hpc.org.af/dari/index.php/fa/2011-04-08-11-39-49/2011-04-11-04-45-06/823-2016-07-27-06-14-18>

- I. While women welcome the nomination of female vice chair and advisors to HPC new structure, the 9 women members (Kabul) and 133 (provinces) responsibilities are being on hold. Moreover since establishment of HPC, women roles and contributions are questioned due to their low level of expertise on peace building and conflict resolution skills as well as their leadership roles to take the lead on peace negotiations.
- II. In 2016 quadrilateral meetings held by four countries (Afghanistan, Pakistan, US and China) did not include any women in Afghan delegation. This clearly shows lack of political will to include women meaningfully beyond participation and giving them decision making and leadership roles.

Women and Aid Effectiveness:

- I. Short term projects implemented in the past 15 years did not have sustainability. While some of these projects touched upon important issues such as ending violence against women, strengthening women’s role in local governance and security sector, with the completion of projects, the initiatives impact and sustainability have also vanished.
- II. There are limited information shared where women are aware of bigger women focused projects and initiatives. While Promote is considered the first largest funding by USAID for Afghan women, women in majority of provinces consulted explained that this project is never introduced to them and that they are have not been part of any consultation. Majority of Promote focused scholarships for women and girls are through internet. Women believe this is one of the weakest approaches as all women do not have access to internet as well as their province face electricity shortage.
- III. Where Women still lack understanding of their basic rights in majority of provinces, projects funded on awareness raising and capacities building for women have been limited to number of bigger provinces where women have access and mobility.
- IV. Women organizations functioning in the past 15 years are shrinking and closing down due to limitation in access to funds and budgets. This affects the contribution such as awareness raising, advocacy and civil education initiatives at the local level upon closure of women NGOs. The largest USAID fund Promote even does not have a specific funding to support the sustainability of women organizations.

5. Key Recommendations

Good Governance	Rule of Law	Peace Process	Aid Effectiveness
Women representation at the local governance must increase. More women governors, directors and deputy directors must be planned by the government	Women can equally contribute in strategic decisions and policy making processes. We encourage ANSF to increase women leadership and decision making role ANSF beside Gender Directorates.	Women across the provinces consulted emphasize and call on increasing number of women experts with peace building, conflict resolution and negotiations skills within the new structure of HPC in Kabul and across the country. Women believe that their engagement with other women at community	Protection of active working women particularly women human rights defenders across the country must be supported by international community and Afghan government. The protection measures must be put in place and a system of prevention and relocation must be specifically designed including protection and safety trainings for all

		level can add a lot of strength and value on peace building efforts.	working women.
Women in governance must be politically supported. The political support should include respect, authority and effective role in influencing national decisions, participating in national programs implementation and presenting new ideas and initiatives.	Any kind of discrimination and violence against girls and women stamps Afghanistan with a darker scar of horror. Afghan government must ensure that incidents of violence against girls and women are considered top priority by the rule of law institutions. Perpetrators are found, arrested and judgment is done in accordance with national laws such as EVAW law	We call on NUG to select female participants in the upcoming peace negotiations on the basis of their knowledge of the issues, their speaking skills, and their decision-making, negotiation, mediation, and consensus building skills. At least 25 percent of the peace negotiators should be women.	International Community committing to support women empowerment initiatives must ensure that the new programs and projects are realistically funded based on the needs of women. Regular consultations and awareness raising of existing large women focused programs must always remain a priority.
Increase number of qualified, experienced and strong women in government across the country. Women must be assigned as per their expertise in government positions so that their contribution is measured and impactful.	Institutional Implementation plans for implementation of Afghanistan NAP 1325 must be developed to specifically make actions and steps towards implementation of all areas of the NAP related to protection.	Afghanistan National Action on implementation of UNSCR 1325 must be closely monitored. The successful indicator for effectiveness of this plan would be finding experienced and qualified women in HPC, during peace negotiations stages as well as after signing peace deals/ agreements.	International Community must take the shrinking environment and closure of women led organizations seriously. If this issue is not tackled, the 15 years achievements by women especially at the provincial level would be at risk.
Government should review the affirmative action policy with a view to increasing women's representation to 30 percent at all levels of governance as agreed in civil service commission strategies and plans.	Design awareness raising campaigns, media interactions, engagement of local authorities and influential leaders for finding prevention measures and solutions towards prevention of any form of violence especially sexual violence against women		Trust Funds and joint funding mechanisms specifically for women led organizations with clear processes would help a lot of medium to small level organizations access the available funds. This will be one of the means of sustainability of women's achievements.