

INTEGRATING WOMEN IN THE DEVELOPMENT PROCESS IN AFGHANISTAN: SOCIO-CULTURAL BARRIERS

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Abstract: This study focuses on certain, hard core, cultural factors militating the national efforts of integrating women in the development process in Afghanistan. The study argues that though the government of Afghanistan. And its international devolvement partners have made considerable efforts through policy certain amount of cultural practices within the society of Afghanistan continues to bottle against the realization of women's empowerment. The study made use the following people: member in integration activities, Member of Women Ministry and member of women organization through interviews and questionnaires. The study reveals that cultural practices like the traditions and customs in some part of the country takes the right of women away from them. More so, the absence of women in political activities continues to be worrying. Education of women continues to become an abomination, leading to low education levels among women. Recommendations were made for the continued efforts of the international organizations and the government of Afghanistan, through educating women and girl child. Also efforts should be made to discourage stigmatization of women in the political process of Afghanistan. Since most of the cultural factors have its root in religion it was recommended that the government of Afghanistan should collaborate with spiritual leaders in this effort against the factors working against women's empowerment.

Keywords: Afghanistan, Cultural Barriers, Culture, Development Process, Empowerment, Women.

Introduction: The new constitution of Afghanistan gives all citizens equal rights under the rule and law. The country's national development structure (2002) emphasized on special attention to women and girls, by increasing their capabilities and participation in all stages of reconstruction planning and development.

The Transitional National Strategy initially concentrated on reforms on health and education and invited projects to address non-formal education opportunities for poor and illiterate women. Likewise, the strategy seeks to enhance health facilities and access, increased employment opportunities, and improved capacities for women's non-governmental organizations [1]. Additionally, it seeks to assess the expansion mechanism for women's social and political opportunities. Basically, the strategy seeks to increase and strengthen women's integration in the development process in Afghanistan. This objective is also the aim of this study. Additionally, the study is interested to know the condition under which equal participation can advance women's social and political statues and lastly to suggest possible areas for likely policy mediation in Afghanistan. The study further explains the reasons behind the imposition of several restrictions on women's political, social and cultural participation in the development process of Afghanistan.

The main concern is the integration of women in the development process in social and political life of Afghanistan. Alternatively, the study will find out how to make them able to participate in social and political activities. Obviously participation of women in the development process is the only way to encourage women's participation and improve their life.

Research Methodology: The paper has been structured mainly with the combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches. These methods including interview and questionnaire, were employed to obtain the required data. The research sample for this paper consists the following people: member in

integration activities, member of women ministry and member of women organization. Finally, coding, categorizing and classifying the data was analyzed and reported based on the objectives of the study. All the necessary equipment, tools and resources were provided as per the need of the study to ensure effectiveness for the implementation of the study.

Objective of Study: The main and specific objective of this paper is to get a detailed understanding of women integration in the development process. Additionally, it looks at the level of women participation and the various role played by women in Afghanistan toward the development process.

To provide theoretical background of contemporary social and political activities: challenges and opportunities.

To assess the current state of women's integration in the development process of Afghanistan.

Literature Review: Women's education has always been an issue in Afghanistan. Deliberately, women have been kept away from education for cultural reasons, resulting in large numbers of women being illiterate, thus disqualifying them from taking up certain positions of higher levels in Afghanistan. From different sources, various cultural and social practices have worked to prevent the integration of women in the development process in Afghanistan. They (cultural and social practices) deprived women from their political and social rights for so many years. Particularly from the Taliban era, women were in a very tense situation. They (women) were deprived from all their rights and all of their political and economic opportunities and activities were taken from them.

The barriers integrating women in the development process in Afghanistan including lack of equality to education services, limited access to conventional and non-conventional justice sectors, and inadequate political representation. In this case, the foundation for women empowerment programme to support the empowerment of women began. A national support for women's rights and increase their opportunities for all public participation became a key national focus (Asia foundation, 2016).

A new constitution and election law of Afghanistan reserves a number of seats for women in parliament. The year 2002 saw an elimination of all types of violence and discrimination against women. National and international councils and institutions, such as UNIMA, Women's organizations in Afghanistan, played a key role in supporting the socio-economic development activities of state institutions and women's organizations [2]. Asia foundation joined women empowerment process and prepared different context for women's integration in the development process in Afghanistan. The foundation's works encouraged women's participation at all levels of public decision-making and political life, focusing on women as voters, as candidates, and as observers [3].

Now women, with ample knowledge, are given the chance to take part in the social and political positions in the country. Participation of women is changing and the presence of women has increased as a result of United Nations' support for women's involvement in social and political activities. Women have been promoted in Afghanistan over the past ten years from the intervention of the international community, women right and the government of Afghanistan [4].

In this case Islamic Republic of Afghanistan made the following comments. These are: *Afghanistan's National Action Plan has four strategic pillars to improve women's status in the areas of legislation, policy, creating institutions and structures, and public mindset [5].*

Analysis and Discussion: Data shows the low participation of the women in political issues in Afghanistan. About 60 percent of the respondents marked the absence of women in political issues. There are a series of causes which restricts women in taking part at political issues. Low number of the women in decision making, absence of women in the structure of political parties, low presence of women in governmental bodies and absence of women are among the most causes of low proportion of women in political aspects. Traditional political system of Afghanistan does not allow the women to take part in political parties, particularly high levels of authorities. Illiteracy and lower capacity and

capabilities of women in general is also another major cause restricting women in being involved in social and political activities.

The majority of the respondents ranked “still there are some obstacles for women integrating in the development process in Afghanistan society” as a problem. They answered “Traditions and customs are the top (55%), followed by injustice, which is 25 percent. The rest are ethnic conflict, with 11 percent and the last one is gender discrimination, 9 percent as the barrier women face in Afghanistan. More detail are presented in Figure 1.1.

Similarly, the data ranked the traditions and costumes is also one the main barrier of integrating women in the development process taken place in Afghanistan. The traditions and costumes in some part of the country still remaining to forbid women from their rights.

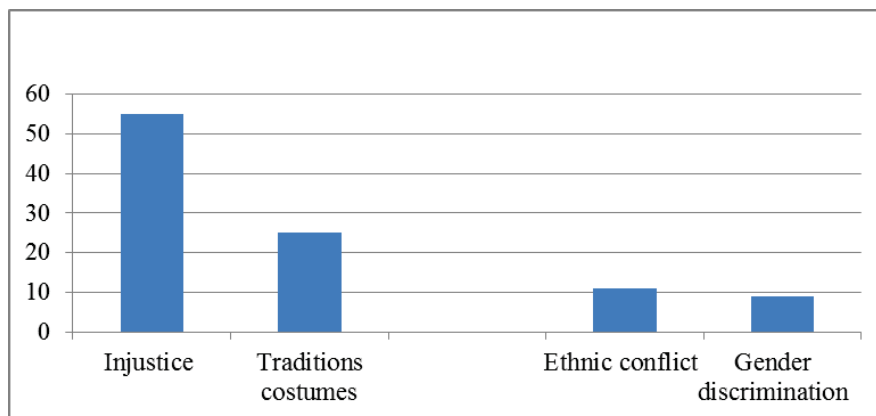


Figure 1.1: Absences of Women in Development Process
Source: Field Data, 2017

Causes and Barriers of Integrating Women in the Development Process: As I already stated in previous there are so many causes to be counted as restriction against integrating women in the development process in Afghanistan. Almost the equivalent of gender discrimination, illiteracy of women traditional culture was ranked as the major reasons of integrating women in the development process in Afghanistan. These factors were considered as major reasons but still there are reasons such as absence of women in political parties and organizational absence of women which are among the most important reasons restricting women. Almost in all parts of Afghanistan socio-political and cultural structures women have no equal. According to *UKaid and Landell Mills report, traditional social and cultural norms greatly limit the realization of women’s rights in Relation to marriage, divorce and ownership of land and other assets. For example, under Sharia law widows and daughters can inherit land, but in practice women often confer this right to a male relative, in line with social and cultural expectations* [6]. Detail are presented as below figure 1.2

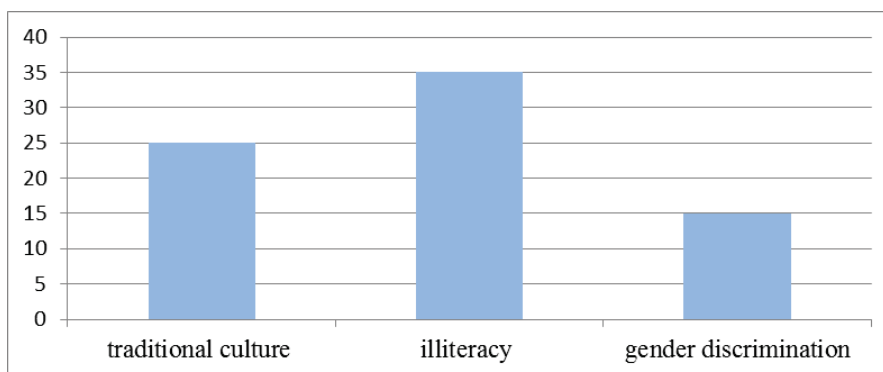


Figure 1.2: Causes and Barriers of Integrating Women in the Development Process
Source: Field Data, 2017

Recent Plan for Women Empowerment in Afghanistan: Although recently the women taking membership for different political sectors and it seem to be encouraging the presence of women in every social and political aspects, but still there are a long way forward for women to access to the equal opportunities. According to Angel D the world gender Gap index presented the measure of one important aspect of gender equality the relative gaps between women and men across four key areas: health, education, economy and politics [7]. On recent plan, the respondents opted for Promotion of education, represented by 51 percent. This was followed by 29 percent for Creation of employment opportunities and 11 for Violence reduction and finally Intensification of social understanding with low 9 percent. The data show that present security situation is also in some part of Afghanistan is still insured and the security is not well Figure 1.3 present the details.

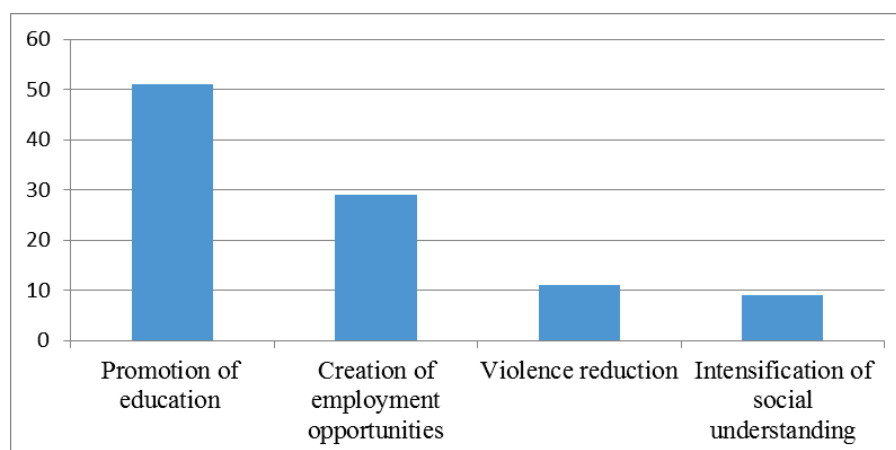


Figure 1.3: Recent Plan for Women Empowerment in Afghanistan

Source: Field Data, 2017

Conclusions: Altogether, the Integrating woman in the development process in Afghanistan in all provinces was not uniform, in some provinces; the Integrating women in the development process were some deal, especially recently reduced the Socio-cultural barriers such as provinces: Kabul, Bamiyan, Mazar, Herat and Dikundy provinces. But some other provinces still there some social and cultural barriers for the integrating women in the development process in Afghanistan, data ranked the women presence is very low in all part of the government and non-government I means the role women in the development process have not been active.

The presence of women in such types of socio-political and cultural structures is not equal. According to Oxfam case study the existing tribal, cultural and ethnic enmities are compounded by discrimination against women.

Although the status of Afghan women with comparing of during the Taliban regime have made remarkable progress, especially within the past fifteen years, but they are still facing major issues in accessing such as education, education, access to land and property rights, and conversion, for changing of women as capable member of society faced numerous challenges. Because the Afghan government has field to implement the law, which was promote the women integration in development process, still in Afghan society, uncontrolled governance to avoid corruption, drug issues, culture of violence all of these issues remain as a major problem.

According to the world partnership for education 2012, the education sector of Afghanistan faces several challenges: in some parts of Afghanistan still the low access to primary education, traditional barriers to enrollment, in special for girls, and very low capacity within the ministry of education to deliver quality education service. With these conditions, some of the people still cannot go to school, mostly in those parts of Afghanistan where the Taliban has strong influence among the people [7].

Acknowledgment: I thank the member in integration activities, Member of Women Ministry and member of women organization and non- government institutions. Special thanks to the entire respondent of the survey.

Recommendations:

- Women's rights gorgonians both national and international in Afghanistan to enhance the political participation of women in the social and political sectors should effort consistently and demand women's rights through the dialogue with authorities of affairs.
- The Afghan government should work to prevent violence against women in all provinces and work to enhance awareness of women's rights, enhance women's participation and effort for women integration in development process in Afghanistan.
- Those laws that are approved for the purpose to promote women's rights it must be implemented.
- Women must be work in anywhere without discrimination in all political and social sectors.
- All women's rights organizations should work in full harmony in all provinces of Afghanistan.
- The final recommendation is the continuation of international donors' support for Afghanistan's potential for women special role in social, economic, and political dimensions. This would cause backing efforts that lead the broad presence of women in the in the integrations development process and civil service, diversifying its support from civil organization, and helping the Afghan government fluid into women's potential for integrating development process in differ spheres.

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