

Women Empowerment in Afghanistan Since 2001

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Abstract: *This study explores the situation of women empowerment after the Taliban regime collapsed and the new administration established in Afghanistan. As most parts of the infrastructure tumbled-down in Afghanistan, women were also one of the figures affected during the civil wars and militarization in Afghanistan. In fact, the situation of women in Afghanistan changed when some of their fundamental rights have guaranteed which were exploited under Taliban regime. Today 50% population of the world is combination of women ((Ritchie & Roser, 2019). The need for women's empowerment is felt because of the status they have in society since the beginning. Establishing safe environment for women where they can make decisions of their own for their personal benefits as well as for the society is willing to empower women in Afghanistan.*

Keywords: Women Empowerment

Afghanistan. Afghanistan is still one of the worst places in the world to be a woman. Over half of the population lives below the poverty line and this hits women the hardest (Graham-Harrison, 2014). You can tell the condition of a nation by looking at the status of its women (Jawaharlal Nehru).

According to Amnesty International¹ analytical status, the Taliban were ousted from power by the end of 2001. In the years following international intervention, many schools opened their doors to girls and women went back to work. There was progress towards equality: a new constitution in 2003 enshrined women's rights in it, and in 2009 Afghanistan adopted the Elimination of Violence against Women (EVAW²) law (Amnesty International, 2014)

Harmful traditional and customary patriarchal practices are respected beyond the religious beliefs of the people in Afghanistan which limits the women's mobility to the boundary of their homes and deprives them of their most basic and legitimate rights defined within the framework of Islamic texts and country's prevalent laws and constitution. Though the situation has improved to some extent in the urban areas but the condition of women dwelling in rural areas has still remained murky and oblique. Women are directed to stay at home and are deprived of access to economical, educational, health, legal and other services destined to each and every citizen of the country irrespective of their gender, ethnic, religious beliefs and social status much of whom are attributed to low awareness, literacy and knowledge levels on the women's rights stressed upon in the Islamic Sharia, country's constitution, civil codes, conventions signed and ratified by the government of Afghanistan.

According to the research held by NPP³ of Afghanistan, the current level of women's formal economic contribution to Afghanistan's development is low. In 2016, the NSIA⁴ estimated the total population of Afghanistan to be 29.7million, 48% of which are females. Among the

working age women, only 29% are economically active and most are employed in the agricultural sector (66%) while 24% are in manufacturing. The share of women in wage employment in non-agricultural sector is only 10%. Only 19% of the female population is literate (versus 49% for men), although this figure nearly doubles to 36% if only the female population under 25 is counted. This drastic increase is a significant testimony to the advances that have been made over the past decade in increasing literacy rates of women (NSIA, 2016)

Furthermore, with respect to employment, women still earn significantly less than men. Specifically, for the same type of job, women on average earn 30% less than men. Among those women who earned money themselves, only 34% reported that they could decide how to spend their money(NPP, 2016).

It is expected that national and international donors shall be emerged focusing on facilitating employment opportunities for women and as well without discrimination in the governmental and non-governmental entities based in Afghanistan.

According to recent surveys of "Afghanaid" reveals that 87% of Afghan women are illiterate, only 2% of women have access to higher education and they still face major barriers to accessing employment. This excludes them from playing a meaningful role in decision-making processes, both within their homes and wider communities and inhibits them from seeking and using information for the betterment of the health and education of their families.

Moreover, sources say that close to 90% of Afghan women and girls suffer from at least one form of abuse, including physical or psychological violence, and 70-80% face forced marriage, many before the age of 16. Many have little influence over the issues which affect their day-to-day lives the most, like marriage and family planning, and a lack of knowledge contributes to the fact that 1 in 50 newborn babies die in the first month after birth (AfghanAid, 2019).

According to USAID⁵ major highlights, from 2015 to 2018, USAID's direct women empowerment program served

¹As a global movement of over 7 million people, Amnesty International is the world's largest grassroots human rights organization.

² Elimination of Violence Against Women

³ National Priority Program

⁴ National Statistics and Information Authority (NSIA) of Afghanistan

⁵United States Agency for International Development

over 61,000 women with leadership skills, business development services, civil service training, job experience, and civil society advocacy that allow women to contribute to their country's peace and prosperity. In 2018, women businesses negotiated over \$5 million in contracts at trade shows that build markets for women's production in food processing, tailoring, fruits and nuts (USAID Afghanistan, 2019).

In terms of engaging women in development matters, the government of Afghanistan must reduce bureaucratic hurdles to women's participation in the economy, such as by eliminating barriers to women's access to credit and by adopting legal frameworks that create an enabling environment for women to start their own business in the communities of Afghanistan.

Margaret Hall in his book "Women and Empowerment: Strategies for Increasing Autonomy" believes that in order to move in the direction of empowerment, women must make specific choices. Although options may be dazzlingly varied, given the rich contrasts in the particular circumstances of women, the following list suggests some of the concerns that women need to take seriously if they are to live as fully as possible.

- Women must consciously and deliberately choose to live fully if their other choices—about family, religion, and work—are to be effective.
- Women must choose to see their lives in the broadest possible social context if they wish to expand their vision and increase their options.
- Women must choose to become aware of the subtleties and intricacies in the relationships between their private and public domains if they are to function optimally.
- Women must choose to see the interdependence of their individual status and the status of other women throughout the world if they are to understand themselves fully.
- Women must choose where they stand in relation to feminism if they are to know the depth of the influence of gender in their lives.
- Women must choose to end their oppression themselves, rather than wait for legislation or other people to accomplish this for them, if they are to be truly empowered (Hall, 2010).

Referencing to above suggests, the women living in Afghanistan, still need to be independent living as active figures and supporting Afghanistan for developments.

As of today, 27.7% of seats in Parliament of Afghanistan are held by women, which is the largest percentage of women in power in Afghan history. Afghanistan has also become one of the rare South Asian countries to implement a National Action Plan that includes U.N. Security Council Resolution 1325, which is a resolution promoting women in leadership and peace-building positions.

The Elimination of Violence against Women is a recent law passed by presidential decree in 2009 that provides hope for the improvement of women's rights and their

access to justice in Afghanistan (Soutoul, 2017).

Efforts over the last 15 years by the GoIRA⁶, donors, and civil society organizations have supported progress for women and girls, including in education, political participation and their increasing economic role and have successfully implemented policies and laws improving the lives of Afghan women by representing them on the political field, increasing their economic roles within Afghan society and providing them with better labor rights. Yet Afghan women remain concentrated – especially among the poor – in informal, precarious self-employment and micro-enterprise rather than formal wage jobs.

Today women in Afghanistan have driven the civil society organizations and governmental entities and stand together with men and cooperating Afghan men in development sectors. Playing an active role to bring changes in Afghanistan. This is an example of improvements seen in Afghanistan and a big change where I am in India for taking time and studying my master program in the field of "MA. PP" and as well other girls and women studying in different sectors in abroad align to purposing to support our country and as well the other women around the world by contributing our knowledge, experiences and innovative programs and ideas.

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⁶ Government of Islamic Republic of Afghanistan

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