

An Evaluation of Gender Equality Policies: A Case Study of Afghanistan Civil Services

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Abstract: For decades Afghan women were deprived of a proper education and denied equal opportunity in the public sector. A Taliban policy designed to systemically discriminate against women has had a lasting negative impact on Afghan women and hindered their progress in increasing their roles in public sector employment. These limitations have existed for decades and have subjected women to widespread deprivations. The years of excluding women from public life, especially in education and in the workplace, limited the involvement of women in the public sphere and confined them to their homes. Even when women did become involved in public life and politics, their presence did not last for long, shattering all hopes of increasing women's participation. Even though women's rights improved considerably after the fall of the Taliban, to reach a state where women's participation equals that of men will take years. The numbers of women are increased from day to day in the civil services of Afghanistan.

Keywords: Afghanistan, Civil Services, Equality, Gender, Policy

1. Introduction

Gender refers to the array of socially constructed roles and relationships, personality traits, attitudes, behaviors, values, relative power and influence that society ascribes to the two sexes on a differential basis. Whereas biological sex is determined by genetic and anatomical characteristics, gender is an acquired identity that is learned, changes over time and varies widely within and across cultures. Gender is relational and refers not simply to women or men but the relationship between them (Anna Wordsworth, 2008).

Gender equality entails the concept that all human beings, both men and women, are free to develop their abilities and make choices without the limitations set by stereotypes, rigid gender roles, or prejudices. Gender equality means that the different behaviors, aspirations, and needs of women and men are considered, valued and favored equally. It does not mean that women and men have to become the same, but that their rights, responsibilities, and opportunities will not depend on whether they are born male or female.

Gender equity means fairness of treatment for women and men, according to their respective needs. This may include equal treatment or treatment that is different but considered equivalent in terms of rights, benefits, obligations, and opportunities. In the development context, a gender equity goal often requires built-in measures to compensate for the historical and social disadvantages of women.

This paper discusses the gender equality policies and their effectiveness in the civil services of Afghanistan. The historical background of women in civil services, current policies and its effectiveness, the main achievements of gender policies in recent past years, main challenges face gender equality in the civil services in Afghanistan.

2. Research Objectives

1. To understand the concept of gender equality policies in Afghanistan's civil services.
2. To describe the Gender Equality Policies of the Afghan government to promote gender equality in civil services.
3. To evaluate and analyze the effectiveness of gender equality policies of Afghanistan
4. To identify the main challenges in the implementation of gender equality policies.
5. To suggest measures to promote gender equality in the civil services of Afghanistan.

3. Research Questions

1. What are the policies of the Afghanistan government to promote gender equality?
2. Which initiatives have been taken by Afghanistan's government to promote the effectiveness of gender equality policies in the civil service?
3. What are the main challenges to gender equality in Afghanistan?
4. How the gender equality policies can be made more effective and efficient?

4. Research Methodology

This paper is based on secondary data, which is analyzed using a broad framework of policy, includes governmental documents, laws, policies, plans, reports, books for the historical background of gender policies in Afghanistan, governmental and non-governmental websites, previous researches in the field of gender equality policies.

• Gender equality in Afghanistan

According to the constitution of Afghanistan: Any kind of discrimination and distinction between citizens of Afghanistan shall be forbidden. The citizens of Afghanistan, man and woman, have equal rights and duties

before the law. (Constitution of Afghanistan, 2003, article 22)

The state shall devise and implement effective programs to create and foster balanced education for women, improve education of nomads as well as eliminate illiteracy in the country.(constitution of Afghanistan, 2003, article 44)

The citizens of Afghanistan shall be recruited by the state on the basis of ability, without any discrimination, according to the provisions of the law. (Constitution of Afghanistan, 2003, article 50)

According to the civil servant law, permanent employee and constrictor employee or non-permanent employee shall be not discriminated among sex, religion, in recruitment (civil servant law, article 10).

Besides these laws, there are numbers of policies, plans, and programs to support gender equality in Afghanistan. Some important is Afghanistan National Development Strategy (ANDS), as the main strategy for achieving gender equality in Afghanistan. Second National Action Plan for the Women of Afghanistan (NAPWA). It is a 10-

year National Action Plan for the Women of Afghanistan. (NAPWA) has been designated in the I-ANDS as the principal tool through which to support gender mainstreaming and is due to be “fully” implemented by the end of 2010. The vision of this plan is that “Afghanistan will be a peaceful and progressive country where women and men enjoy security, equal rights and opportunities in all aspects of life. Goals are NAPWA will pursue the twin goals of women’s empowerment and gender equality. This plane also includes some strategies to achieve those goals these are strategies Elimination of discrimination against women, Development of women’s human capital, Promotion of women’s leadership.

The recent and very important policy for gender equality in civil services is the policy on women increasing participation in civil services which became to practice on January 10, 2018. This policy has good support of the politician and international community to increase women's participation in civil services in Afghanistan. Policy on Increasing Women’s Participation by 2% in Civil Service for the year 2018. And to totally increase this participation to 30% to 2022.

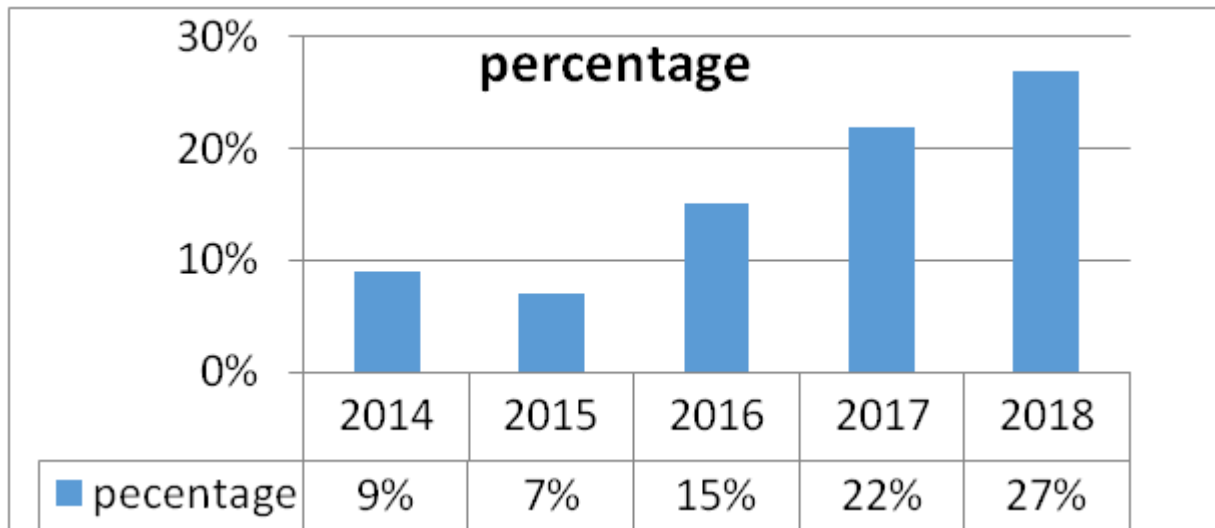


Figure 1: Shows Female recruitment status in the past five years

Source: <https://iarcsc.gov.af/en/recruitment-of-thirty-thousand-employees-in-a-year-iarcsc-annual-report/>, 2018.

• **Historically Background**

More than half part of afghan society is formed by women but unfortunately the whole history of Afghanistan shows the poor role of gender quality of the society. We can say, that afghan society is a man-orientated society and women are deprived. But the role of women in different activities within Afghan society is changed from time to time and not stable. In some governmental regimes in Afghanistan the women came to empower and in some other women lose the empowerment. For example, before 1919 theirs were no women participation in government administration. Previous kings because of religion reason made them out from social activities and governmental services. But in 1919 when Afghanistan got freedom and new monarchy government under Amanullah Khan came to exist. The first constitution of Afghanistan became enforced the women came to empower in the first time in

the whole history of Afghanistan. The first lady (lady Soraya) of Afghanistan supports the right of Afghan women and made a movement to change the life of women. She built the first girls school in the capital city of Kabul-Afghanistan. For first time Girl access to education, health, and social activities. Loygergah (the highest decision and advisory body in national issues in Afghanistan) held in 1928 the king’s sister spoke about the freedom of women and the third day of the Gergah finally the equal right for women and man passed by Gergah. After Amanulla Khan’s government, unfortunately again for some time afghan women were deprived, but during Zahirsha and Doud Khan governments the women came in power again and for first time in 1965 two women became the member of senate and number of women came the member of common house of parliament and numbers of women worked in civil services of Afghanistan.

Approximately after 50 years' peace country became under the long war which is going up to now, in this long time of war there was no specific regime that we say it was good for gender equality or the right of women, in fact, women were not active in this long term, but after 2001 new government came to existed with fully supported of international community.

- **The influence of international community on policy making**

From 2001 when the new government came to exist by the supporting of the international community, the infrastructure was damaged, the rate of unemployment was high, there was no recognition of gender equality in totally we can say there was no proper administration system in the country.

The international community supported the Afghan government to make infrastructures, improve good governance, and human rights. They spent billions of dollars in Afghanistan, but the result was not such as expected, corruption became expanded day to day, security problem of the country is still there, and other challenges and problems also exist in front of the Afghan government and the international community.

Gender equality is also one of the main problems which are still there after spending lots of money but not transparent, accountable and responsive to a specific address. So, the influence of the international community on policy-making processes in civil services agencies and ministries is highly significant to how those processes play out.

It is common for ministerial policy in Afghanistan to be guided by international (often donor) organizations and influenced strongly by ANDS processes. have been allocated substantial international assistance (both financial and technical) in the building of their ministry policies. This influence directly contributes to the extent to which and how gender and gender perspectives.

The international community, particularly the United States of America, the United Kingdom, Germany, and the United nation, can play a key role in gender equality policies in Afghanistan because they fund the government of Afghanistan.

- **Increasing Gender Awareness**

A means of training staff in gender awareness popular with national and international facilitators alike is that of workshops. Gender workshops are however described by participants and trainers in abstract, vacuous terms and are not linked to the ways in which gender sensitivity might be implemented practically. They are also brief, unsustainable and largely used as a means to demonstrate superficial achievement (with a "checklist" approach). A more substantial means of training staff in gender is needed.

A key area to assess within the current context in ministries is the way in which information about gender

and its implications is being disseminated internally. It is necessary to look at how national and international actors are attempting (if at all) to raise the gender awareness of ministry staff, a necessary precursor for gender mainstreaming. By far the most common means of "training staff in gender" is through workshops (also called trainings, "awareness raisings" or seminars). Given that this capacity building technique is so widely used, it can be assumed that it is considered effective by those choosing to provide them. However, a number of problems are identified with this approach, such as the vague discourse with which they are described, and the brevity of workshops.

Women should be informed of vacant positions in the government. Awareness workshops should be organized in governmental and private universities explaining the nature of exams and the types of questions and methods of recruitment to increase women's participation in the government and provide general information for new graduates Capacity (policy on increasing women participation, 2018).

- **Policy on Increasing Women Participation in Civil Services**

The policy of Increasing Women's Participation in Civil Service is developed in order to promote safe work environment and encourage them to increase their participation in civil services. The policy of Increasing Women's Participation in Civil Service has been approved by the Cabinet and implemented from January 10, 2018 by all government agencies.

Women's Civil Service participation policy covers eight working areas, identifying women's problems, recruitment processes, key positions for women, women's capacity building in civil services, gender based database, workplace safety, publication of women's success stories in civil services, and co-ordination with agencies. (IARCSC, 2019)

Unlike in theoretical approaches, this policy is based on everyday observations and experiences of women in the workplace and on a critical analysis of the status of working women in Afghanistan. The main purpose of this policy is to provide possible facilities for women and bring about safe work environments and encourage them to participate in public service.

When women are called for interviews and exams, the environment should be welcoming and friendly. The location of the interview should be free of psychological pressures so that it will not cause fear or concern. IARCSC should develop strategies to implement the aforementioned suggestions.

Various mechanisms for the promotion of gender mainstreaming currently exist in ministries. These include gender units, working groups, women's shuras, focal points and international technical assistants.

Most mechanisms are short-staffed and under-funded. Issues of capacity, relationships between gender mechanisms, political will of senior staff and the varying agendas of international agencies also affect the functioning of these mechanisms. One of many ways to encourage the increasing effectiveness of these mechanisms could involve lobbying those designing ministerial tashkeels to re-position them in locations with maximum vertical and horizontal (operational) influence over ministry operations.

• Positive discrimination

In addition, to achieve gender equality in the government, the recruitment process has been made flexible for the women. To women applicants a positive discrimination score of 5 was conferred in the second stage (the oral exam) of the recruitment process in the past (mbariz, barai, 2019). But this score is going to be awarded in the first stage (written exam) from now onwards. The new policy also reduced the requirement of working experience as one of the criteria for women which will encourage and make women applicants eligible for civil service positions.

• Challenges in Implementation

1. **Sexual harassment:** this is the biggest problem that affects gender equality in public sector, because the work environment is not so safe for women, on the other hand there are the cases of sexual bribery paid by women to get a job in public services (bbc, 2019)
2. **Unequal implementation of the gender equality policies:** in practice, the implementation of these policies is limited to some main and developed provinces of Afghanistan such as Kabul, Herat, Balkh, Nangarhar where the degree of education and awareness is high among the women and society, but there are numbers of provinces that are deprived and the level of gender equality is very poor, for example, Urozgan, Nuristan, Zabul, and so on.
3. **Illiteracy and lack of awareness among society:** Afghanistan has one of the lowest literacy rates in the world, currently estimated at about 31% of the adult population (over 15 years of age). Female literacy levels are on average 17%, with high variation, indicating a strong geographical and gender divide (UNESCO, 2018). So, in such a scenario, it is very difficult to bring gender equality. The media, religious scholars, civil society and other influence parts of society can play a very significant role to help the government to make the people aware and to impart quality education. It will help to achieve the goal of gender equality in civil services also.
4. **Gap in policies and practice:** A number of laws and policies are introduced in Afghanistan to promote gender equality and ensure a safe working environment for women in civil services. It is a positive discrimination to attract and recruit more women in civil services. Unfortunately, in practice the laws and policies are not so effective, because of security problem, sexual harassment, non-commitment of policymakers or politician, non-useful expenditure of

funds provided by international community, corruption and other problems.

5. **Security problem:** security problem has not just affected gender equality in Afghanistan, but other sectors also. Women are the major victim in war in Afghanistan. In the provinces and territories which are under the power of Taliban, women are not allowed to work outside of home particularly in civil services except in health and education sectors.

• Suggestions

1. Equality should be expanded to less-developed provinces, in other words, the policies should be implemented equally in all provinces. It should not be limited to main provinces such as Kabul, Herat, Balkh, and Nangarhar, but to cover all parts of the country. So, the government should adopt an inclusive approach where no area should be left behind in terms of policy implementation.
2. To avoid sexual harassment at the work place, government should introduce some other supporting policies and take some preventive measures. It is suggested that security cameras should be installed at workplaces, penalty system should be an effective one, glass partition should be preferred in offices, training sessions must be organized to make the employees aware of their rights and policies of the government.
3. The government should take initiatives to spread awareness in society. Religious scholars, mass media, teachers, the campaign by civil society and social movements can help to minimize the cultural and religious constraints in the implementation of gender policies.
4. Apart from the relaxation in marks, the positive discrimination should be expanded to other aspects of the recruitment process also such as- interview, shortlist, qualifications and skills required for the position, and final evaluation, so it should not have limited just in five positive marks.
5. More facilities in government organizations should be provided for women such as kindergarten, separate washrooms and toilets, and so on.
6. The role of local government should be promoted in all the phases of the gender policy making, as it knows the issues, problems and challenges at the grassroots level.

5. Result and Conclusion

The main objective of this paper was to understand, evaluate, and analyze the effectiveness of gender equality policies of Afghanistan and also to identify the main challenges in the implementation of gender equality policies.

The constitution, others statutes and policies are very clear in the issue of gender equality, and recognized the gender equality. So, it is the obligation of the state of Afghanistan to bring gender equality in civil services and eliminate all types of discrimination and distinction between citizens of Afghanistan. Constitution of Afghanistan has granted equal rights and duties to its citizens. And the constitution adds, this is the duty of the state to devise and implement

effective programs to create and foster balanced education for women, improve the education of nomads as well as eliminate illiteracy in the country.

To promote the gender equality policies in recruitment in civil services, the government of Afghanistan has initiated such policies, programs, and projects which helped to increase the number of women in civil services. The Afghanistan National Development Strategy (I-ANDS), is the main strategy for achieving gender equality. Further, National Action Plan for the Women of Afghanistan (NAPWA) 10-year National Action Plan for the Women of Afghanistan (NAPWA) had been designated in the I-ANDS as the principal tool to support gender mainstreaming, and to be “fully” implemented by the end of 2010. The vision of this plan is to envision that “Afghanistan will be a peaceful and progressive country where women and men enjoy security, equal rights, and opportunities in all aspects of life.

Recently, the government of Afghanistan has initiated a very beneficial and useful policy for gender equality in civil services recruitment. This policy was implemented on January 10, 2018. According to the Independent Commission of Civil Services of Afghanistan, this policy increased women’s participation in civil services from 22% in 2017 to 27% in 2018, and the entire goal of the policy is to improve women participation in civil services to 30% up to 2022. So if we analyze the participation women in civil services, we can say that this policy is very effective and successful in its mission, and it seems to be able to achieve the given target in the next two years.

The effective implementation of gender equality policies in civil services in Afghanistan requires more support of international community, because it plays a key role in the development of Afghanistan and has adequate influence on the policymakers of Afghanistan. International donor community such as USA, UK, UN, UNDP and EU have funded many programs related to women participation in civil services. But unfortunately, the large amount of the funds is not used for the implementation of policies because of the corruption.

There are some challenges also, which affects the effectiveness of gender equality policies in the civil services of Afghanistan. The major challenge is the illiteracy and lack of awareness among women and society. The society has a narrow perspective - women must stay at home. This perspective has its cultural and religious roots in Afghan society.

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