



2014

WOMEN PARTICIPATION IN PEACE PROCESSES IN AFGHANISTAN



TAWANMANDI
Strengthening Civil Society
in Afghanistan

HRRAC Research Team

HUMAN RIGHTS RESEARCH AND ADVOCACY
CONSORTIUM/HRRAC

9/30/2014

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|--|------------|
| LIST OF ACCRONYMS | iii |
| EXECUTIVE SUMMARY | iv |
| 1.0 INTRODUCTION | v |
| 1.1 The Human Rights Research and Advocacy Consortium (HRRAC)..... | 1 |
| 1.2 The Research on Women Participation in Peace Processes | 1 |
| 1.3 Research Objectives | 2 |
| 2.0 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY | 4 |
| 2.1 Review of Documents and Tools Development | 4 |
| 2.2 The Research Team | 4 |
| 2.3 Sampling and Data Collection | 5 |
| 2.3.1 <i>Women Consultation at Community Level</i> | 5 |
| 2.3.2 <i>Key Informant Interviews</i> | 5 |
| 2.3.3 <i>Focus Group Discussions</i> | 5 |
| 2.4 Study Limitations..... | 5 |
| 3.0 RESEARCH FINDINGS | 6 |
| 3.1 The Institutional Arrangements for Women Participation | 6 |
| 3.2 The Institutional Arrangements for Women in Peace Processes..... | 9 |
| 3.2.1 <i>The Consultative Peace Jirga’s Resolution 1389</i> | 9 |
| 3.3 Women Participation in Peace Processes | 11 |
| 3.3.1 <i>High Peace Council</i> | 11 |
| 3.3.2 <i>The Provincial Peace Councils</i> | 15 |
| 3.3.3 <i>The Women Groups in Peace Processes</i> | 21 |
| 3.3.3 <i>The Local Community Peace Committees</i> | 26 |
| 3.3.3 <i>The University Students Peace Processes</i> | 30 |
| 4.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS | 32 |
| 4.1 Conclusion..... | 32 |
| 4.2 Recommendation..... | 36 |
| 5.0 REFERENCES | 39 |

LIST OF ACCRONYMS

| | |
|-------|--|
| ANDS | Afghanistan National Development Strategy |
| CDC | Community Development Committees |
| CEDAW | Convention on Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women |
| CSO | Civil Society Organization |
| FGD | Focus Group Discussion |
| GIRoA | Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan |
| HPC | High Peace Council |
| HRRAC | Human Rights Research and Advocacy Consortium |
| LPC | Local Peace Committees |
| MOWA | Ministry of Women Affairs |
| NAPWA | National Action Plan for Women of Afghanistan |
| NGO | Non-Governmental Organizations |
| PEC | Peace Executive Council |
| PPC | Provincial Peace Council |
| SSI | Semi-Structured Interviews |
| UN | United Nations |

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

a. Background

The Human Rights Research and Advocacy Consortium (HRRAC) is an Afghan-led human rights membership (more than 12 members) organization established in the year 2003 as an independent research organization mainly focusing on research and advocacy towards women and children's rights, economic, social and cultural rights, security and sectoral reforms as well as public participation. HRRAC recognizes the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (GIROA) commitment to women rights including women participation in Peace Process. In particular, the Government conducted the Consultative Peace Jirga Resolution 1389, which gave birth to the Peace Council (PC) operating at national, provincial, district and local levels to operationalize the resolution itself, where-in-all, inclusion of women issues and women participation are highly featuring.

At this point, after some years of implementing the resolutions by the government through the Peace Councils, HRRAC conducted research to assess to what extent women truly participate in peace processes at different levels (national, provincial, district and community). The findings compliment findings of earlier HRRAC research work; Women participation in Decision Making and Peace Talks 2012; and the two form a stronger basis for advocacy for women participation in peace processes in Afghanistan. Furthermore, the research analyses opportunities that the HRRAC would take into account to maximise strengthening multi-level advocacy towards women's rights and increased participation in peace processes in line with its mandate.

In the execution of the research for evidence-based advocacy, the Human Rights Research and Advocacy Consortium (HRRAC) engaged the services of International Consultant to provide technical back up to the HRRAC internal research team and employed a number of study techniques, such as;

- Literature Review on a number of documents
- Focus Group Discussions (FGD) with human rights partners and institutions
- Key Informant Interviews (KII) with specific and strategically positioned persons in government, civil society, provincial administration and local leadership
- Semi-Structured Interviews (SSI) with women in networks and communities as well as male and female students in the Universities

In turn, the study was successfully conducted as intended and did not meet any describable challenges that might have affected proper execution, except for the fact that there is lack of human rights practitioners in Afghanistan, and sometimes issues can easily be exaggerated.

b. Findings

Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (GIROA) has over the years demonstrated strong commitment towards women's rights, inclusion and participation. For example (1) The government is a party to and a signatory of the Bonn Agreement 2001. (2) Since 2003, Afghanistan is a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (UN-CEDAW). (3) The Constitution of the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan has the reflection and commitment for women's cause provided for under the Articles 83 and 84, guaranteeing seats for women parliamentarians. (4) In domestication of The Bonn Conference (2001), the government established the Ministry of Women Affairs (MOWA) which takes lead in implementing women related development targets of the Afghanistan National Development Strategy (ANDS) (2008). The commitment attests to women rights and participation in development.

Regarding Women and Peace, the Government has undertaken similar commitments at international and national levels along the lines of peace, reconciliation and development. At the international level, the GIROA is a party to the United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325, It has regularly convened Loya Jirgas in 2002, 2003 and 2010 and the formulation of *Commission or High Peace Council to implement the recommendations of the Consultative Peace Jirga 1389 and lead the peace process in the country, with expansion to provinces, districts and communities*. The commitment in general then transcends to the commitment towards women rights and participation in peace processes.

I. Actual Existence of Peace Committees in Afghanistan

Peace Committees at different levels are the main-stay of peace processes as provided for under the Consultative Peace Jirga 1389. Therefore, their existence is key to peace processes and women participation. High Peace Council was established in 1389 and still exists, but [while entailing women participation] with an inherent 11% women composition and no deliberate 'quota provision' or 'deliberate target' for women composition. Furthermore, the formality of the Council is not widely understood as only 48% claimed that it has any formal operational frameworks and very few could explain its documented mandate.

Similarly, Provincial Peace Councils (PPC) exist in each of the provinces, but with an inherent 13% women composition and no deliberate 'quota provision' or 'target' for women composition. At this level, there were also glaring inconsistencies on the explanation on how the Council was formed. The majority (33%) indicated that the Provincial Councils were formed out of presidential order, others claimed they were created by members themselves (12%), house of elders (27%), Peace Jirga

(9%) while the rest could not tell. Even on *eligibility for membership*, opinions differed even further, including 'how the 13% women were incorporated'. Regarding formality of operations, 41% admitted that they were operating without any documented strategy or guideline and so many could tell the mandate of the peace councils.

Finally, it was confirmed that such committees exist at community level. However, in the target areas, only 23% are aware of Local Peace Committees. And only 13% of community members participate 'in any form of committee'. And women composition is as low as 4%. It was little known about the committees' mandate, with 18% saying 'such committees are mandated to build schools and roads'. They have no guidelines at all and 98% could not even explain how they execute the peace processes.

II. Execution of Peace Processes

All (100%) respondents at High Peace Council Level confirmed that the Council has conducted 'so many' peace processes in the past. It was confirmed that key issues or points of discussion in the processes had bordered around war, peace, reconciliation and development. However, there was no access to documentation to completely and objectively verify these facts.

As is expected, there were many peace related activities (formal and informal) taking place at provincial level. The activities, however, did not really have clear titles/themes, but all claimed to be towards peace building. A few specific ones were identified such as; WADAN, Unity, AFYAR, Students Awareness, General Public Awareness of Women, Adras Kan (where even Taliban attended), Koshk Robat Sange, Pashton Zarghon, among others. Furthermore, it was established that **there were no clear cut or uniform procedures in pursuing the same**

The community at large including members of the Local Committees themselves are only informally aware of what such institutions are doing, only a few of them could be specific about the Peace Processes. All respondents indicated that "they are negotiating for peace with government and the insurgencies". And, only 23% of those involved expressed knowledge of how peace processes are conducted, but could not, in turn, articulate how it is done

III. Women Participation

While the women are few in the composition of the High Peace Council (HPC), the research found out that they take part in the [decision making] process. On the other hand, deliberate efforts are being made to coordinate women of High Peace Council with women groups who are doing formal or informal activities about peace. The council indicated that it is emphasizes raising the awareness

about women importance in peace process and during collection of signatures for the High Peace Council and Provincial Commission. On another note, there are no specific NGO or CSO solely known to champion the increased participation of women in peace processes to collaborate with HPC.

At provincial level about 66% confirmed women participation in the deliberations, of which only 35% participate in decision making process. And, 31% confirmed that NO WOMEN are allowed to take part in decision making.

At community level Women Participation in the peace activities and even decision making processes remains tricky. Regardless of women presence and issues being dealt with concern women, findings show that decision making process follows other prescription and not left to the community level structures.

IV. Others Categories of Society

a. Women Groups

Findings confirmed that there are women groups at national as well as provincial level and very few groups if any, that directly focus on peace and security issues and not even cultural issues. However, it is good that many of them are focusing on women's economic and civil rights. What is interesting is that, the composition of women groups was 34% males and 66% females. As is the case with other groups, only 34% of the groups have operational guides, hence difficult to trustfully engage them in peace discussions.

Furthermore, 58% of the Women Groups are basically aware of the Peace Processes, however 21% of which are part of the peace process while others only follow through the media. Extending to the peace processes, women participation from these women groups is rated as follows; low (59%), medium (32%) and could not tell (9%). It is deemed that even though some are involved in the peace processes, their meaningful contribution is minimal. All this was attributed to; Afghan Culture and Traditions, Literacy levels, Lack of Political will, Women Fear and Male prejudices/dominance.

b. University Students

In a nutshell, peace processes groups exist in the University, albeit very few (8%) directly tackling issues of peace and reconciliation. As is the case with others, they are largely male dominant, averaging 65% male and 35% female. Even though operating at a small scale, most of them are connected to entities outside the University, mostly the Civil Society organizations

It was found out that a few peace processes take place in the University, though, they are mainly in closed door. This is understandable as Universities are not really niches for conflict. In summary, it was found out that the following processes take place; Publishing peace articles in magazines, Conducting different and periodic seminars about peace, Celebrating international peace day in the University Campus, Preaching peace and solidarity within University Campus, among others.

Further analysis showed that despite current modernity, there are fewer students being involved in groups (only 33%). There is a significant 26% of the student who are quite aware of the various groups and networks, but they would not want to participate

V. Constraints and Challenges to Participation in Peace Processes

Women participation in the High Peace Council is as low as 11% and it is still hard to increase women participation in the peace process due to among other things; Lack of Confidence among women as the processes are still new, Low awareness of women's rights among both men and women, Low literacy levels among women, High prejudices upon women, The Culture and Traditions that do not value women (including at family level), High insecurity, Low government commitment to increase women participation regardless of commitment on paper, Extremist thinking of the Insurgents and Opposition about women, hence they demand that women should not participate in Peace Processes

The same trend continues with 'Women Restrictions' in the provinces which in turn scare away the women from public life. For example; insurgencies demand that women should not work with government, women not allowed to move freely in districts [but cities], women not allowed to go out of the country without Mahram, general insecurity, PPC does not give enough chance, culture and customs and women are not valued enough

At Community level, women realize the 'restrictions' and challenges posed by the Afghan setting. Among the challenges most cited by local women include; Woman is always the obliged follower of a man, Security problems (from insurgencies), Limited education, lack of empowerment, poverty and dependency, women not accorded rights and freedoms, tradition and family prescriptions

In other women groups, existence of 'Restrictions' to women participation in public life, including decision making is also high. It is an indication that many men and parents usually do not want women and girls to be on the fore, including working. In the end, women and girls are not exposed to the required knowledge. There also seems to be negative portrait against women who are active in society. Women are then embroidered in restrictively culture. In other cases women reveal

instances of 'receiving warnings' regarding their participation. There is also lack of confidence in the government structures in protecting women as many lament that 'the government will not be committed to cooperation with women'

Among students, most cited reasons were; Lack of time due to studies (50%), girls do not believe in groups/No interested (25%), groups did not engage the female youngsters for participation (16%), they are only for men and fearing parents (8%)

c. Conclusion and Recommendation

In conclusion, the study is a valid undertaking in that in Afghanistan issues and challenges of peace and insecurity are still high. Along the same lines, women participation is still a new phenomenon in the Afghanistan cultural setting. The Government of the Republic of Afghanistan has taken necessary steps to improve legal and policy environment for women participation in Afghanistan. However, the local leadership, cultural setting including family and traditions largely constrain the extent to which women can participate in public affairs [such as peace processes]. This is confirmed with the fact that among the constraints to women participation, 'cultural setting' scores highest

In its recognition of the problem and investing efforts, the government has taken necessary steps in the past decades. It is a party to the Bonn Agreement in 2001, the UNSCR 1325 and then CEDAW in 2003, there has been a national drive through Loya Jirga's Resolutions 2001, 2003 and 2010, the latest of which stands out as the Consultative Loya Jirga's Resolution 1389. However, there is not much change because, up to the time of this research, women composition in the Peace Councils at different levels is still low and has not yet been reviewed. Many structures such as women groups and peace committees remain informal and composition of women rarely reaches 20%. Thus, women have failed to take part in decision making amidst a cultural cobweb of restrictions.

The Civil Society is mushrooming, with a lot of organizations operating at different levels towards women cause. However, very few focus on peace, the CSO capacity needs improvement and the organizations are young. In fact, only 23% of the sampled organizations are more than 10 years in operation. Information shows that women networks are as young as the CSO themselves, with a lot of capacity gaps, knowledge gaps and without Operational Strategies where they can articulate their true culture and values which can then be used as basis for coalition. So far the findings conclude that there is no deliberate efforts or deliberate provision for inclusion and/or representation of vulnerable groups such as the physically challenged, internally displaced persons and others.

HRRAC is a consortium and is Afghan led. It has the opportunity to engage different stakeholders in the peace process without suspicions. HRRAC should utilize the link with CSO working at grassroots level to use them as vehicles to tackling culture injustices. As a consortium, HRRAC should engage multi-level donors and convince them from different angles in line with the existing members. The Resolution 1389 is still new and there is a lot of work to be done. In this view of HRRAC, it is recommended that;

- Expand the project beyond the current research itself
- Design Advocacy Project Activities aimed at Organizational Strengthening of Consortium members for effective service delivery
- Advocacy for Integration of Resolutions 1389 into the Operational Frameworks of Local Civil Society and Community Development Committees (CDC) to help link peace and development at local level
- There is need to advocate for the development of the National Peace Strategy and Action Plan in line with Resolution 15 of the Consultative Peace Jirga 1389
- Others are general recommendations

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Human Rights Research and Advocacy Consortium (HRRAC)

Human Rights Research and Advocacy Consortium (HRRAC) is an Afghan-led human rights membership (more than 12 members) organization established in the year 2003¹. It is an independent research organization mainly focusing on research and advocacy towards women and children's rights, economic, social and cultural rights, security and sectoral reforms as well as public participation.

In its mission, the HRRAC strives to advance the fundamental rights and freedom of all people of Afghanistan, particularly those most vulnerable to human rights violations. HRRAC does so by conducting evidence based advocacy for policy changes and raising awareness on human rights.

The overall objective of HRRAC is to influence policy change that will promote human rights and peace in Afghanistan through on-going action-research and advocacy. Going by its current Strategic Plan (2013 – 2017), the goal is to further establish itself as a leading afghan-led human rights research and advocacy organization with diverse areas of research, ranging from women and children's rights to social and environmental impacts of projects and policies that impact humans.

1.2 The Research on Women Participation in Peace Processes

The HRRAC thrives to advocate for the rights of women as outlined in the background above. With the same understanding, the HRRAC applauds the necessary commitments made by the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (GIROA) towards respect, protection and promotion of women's rights. The commitment of the Government is demonstrated through ratification of the United Nations Convention on Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (UNCEDAW), the United Nations Security Council Resolutions (UNSCR) 1325 and the Consultative Peace Jirga Resolution 1389, development of the National Action plan for the Women of Afghanistan (NAPWA) 2008 – 2018 as well as making women empowerment as a key cross-cutting issue in national development frameworks. The Resolution 1389 in particular gave birth to the High Peace Council (HPC) operating at national and provincial levels to operationalize the resolution itself. While peace processes are highly sensitive and delicate matters, the said resolutions highly recommend inclusion of women as well as highly featuring women's concerns regarding peace challenges in Afghanistan. At this point, after some years of implementing the resolutions by the government through the Peace Councils, HRRAC conducted research to assess to what extend women truly participate in peace processes at different levels (national, provincial, district and

¹ www.afghanadvocacy.org.af

community). The findings compliment findings of earlier HRRAC research work; Women participation in Decision Making and Peace Talks 2012; and the two can form a stronger basis for advocacy for women participation in peace processes in Afghanistan.

1.3 Research Objectives

The overall objective of the assignment was to assess the extent to which women participate and meaningfully contribute in the peace processes in line with the Consultative Peace Jirga Resolution 1389 and the High Peace Council (HPC) as well as other supporting human rights frameworks. The findings deepen the understanding of HRRAC's and relevant stakeholders' understanding of the socio-political dynamics that hinder effective participation of women in peace processes and become basis for pragmatic recommendations and way forward to improve the situation. The Research unveils more information on;

- Policy and legal environment for women participation and CSOs practice within the current political dispensation and recommendations on strategies for engagement
- Space for political (democratic) participation of women with an evaluation of both citizenship and their local leadership, but also attitudes and culture that govern the domain of the legal, policy and practice ethics in Afghanistan.
- A para-discourse analysis on the relevant resolutions and legal frameworks that promote women participation, level of implementation and supporting institutions to reflect a true space for women participation in peace processes
- The real practice of engagement in the national and sub-national peace processes; and how this has contributed (or not) towards influencing the integration of women. What the implications are, and recommendations on improvement of such engagement
- The situation (outlook) of women discrimination in Afghanistan, taking into consideration the impacts of it, and proposed strategies to undertake interventions to deter such practices.
- A critical and concise investigation and outline of broad areas of weaknesses and strengths of CSOs undertaking work in the area of women's rights and good governance (popular women participation) in Afghanistan, with a review of the general outlook of the organizational (culture, values, practice, etc) and implementation (technical capacity and practice) levels, and recommendations towards improving institutional efficiency to deliver viable and sustainable interventions; but also sustainability of the institutions themselves
- A general assessment of the networks; alliances; coalitions; associations, clubs etc working in women's rights and governance (in various sectors e.g. university, Ministry of Women

e.t.c.), and their capacity to deliver on objectives, learning lessons on their efforts but also recommendations on increasing their efficiency

- A partial analysis of other excluded gender groups based on ethnicity, religion, age and other identity issues, economic status, locality e.t.c. in the peace processes
- Analysis of opportunities that the HRRAC would take into account to maximise strengthening of multi-level advocacy towards women's rights and increased participation in peace processes

2.0 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In the execution of research for evidence-based advocacy, the Human Rights Research and Advocacy Consortium (HRRAC) continued to collaborate with and consult a number of target groups and human rights partners such as; consortium members, the media, civil society organizations, government agencies and the local community members. The methods of data collection were thus tailored to their categorical classification. There included;

- Literature Review on a number of documents
- Focus Group Discussions with human rights partners, government entities, women parliamentarians, University students, community leaders and provincial peace committees
- Key Informant Interviews with specific and strategically positioned persons in government, civil society, provincial administration and local leadership
- Semi-Structured Interviews with women in networks and communities as well as male and female students in the Universities

2.1 Review of Documents and Tools Development

To ground out the study, a number of relevant documents were reviewed, namely; The Initial Report of Women Participation in Peace Process and Negotiation Table (2012), HRRAC Operational Strategy, the UNSCR 1325, the Constitution of Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, National Action Plan for Women of Afghanistan (NAPWA) and International Instruments supporting women participation. The information from these documents guided the formulation of data collection tools at different levels of stakeholders. There were;

- Semi-structured Questionnaire for collection of information from women at community level and students in the universities
- Structured Checklists with different guide questions for focus group discussions and key informant interviews. These were separate for each group and informant e.g. CSO, Women Parliamentarians, Media, Peace Council members, government officials and local leaders

2.2 The Research Team

The Research team comprised nine (9) researchers, mainly those with background in research and human rights as well as ability reach out to province and community levels. Preparatory orientation over the data collection instruments was conducted for a period of three (3) days after which the instruments were pre-tested for standardization. The pre-testing experience provided final and practical input to the data collection tools and concomitant pragmatic corrections were made. Actual Data Collection followed soon after input from the pre-testing exercise.

2.3 Sampling and Data Collection

2.3.1 Women Consultation at Community Level

The Study started with random sampling (multistage and proportionate) techniques to come up with the required number of respondents to be interviewed. All households were listed and 30% was factored into the Z-Statistic which yielded 325 sample size. The study targeted four (4) operational provinces, namely; Kabul, Helmand, Herat and Kandahar. However, the population of household was not the same in all the zones. As such, proportionate sampling was used (Probability Proportional to Size) to determine how many respondents should come from which province. The Research Team then followed up to interview women or their representatives in all areas in each province, using semi-structured questionnaires.

2.3.2 Key Informant Interviews

The study deployed purposeful sampling of key informants according to thematic areas of women participation in peace processes. Hence, the study drew opinions of a number of key informants from; parliament, Ministry of Women Affairs, Media, Human Rights Organizations and the donor community. The main aim was to unearth diverse expert views and opinions about women participation, intended impact, collaboration and networking for sustainable peace.

2.3.3 Focus Group Discussions

Similar purposeful sampling was done for the participants to participate in the envisaged Focus Group Discussions. The main idea was to get information that requires corroboration and consensus. The discussions were held with government entities, provincial council members, women groups, networks, community leaders, clubs at national, provincial and community level. The discussions were framed and guided by the research team around major issues of focus under the women participation theme.

2.4 Study Limitations

The field study was successfully conducted within the intended time schedule. The Research Team did not meet any describable challenges that might have affected proper data collection, except for the fact that the areas lack human rights partners, and respondents might have a big mentality of exaggerating the issues to attract sympathy. Further, the data collection tools were translated into local language thereby posing the threat or risk of losing the intended meaning of some questions.

3.0 RESEARCH FINDINGS

3.1 The Institutional Arrangements for Women Participation

Findings under this study confirmed that, at International level, the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (GIROA) has over the years demonstrated strong commitment towards women's rights, inclusion and participation. Since 2003, Afghanistan is a signatory to such international instruments/institutions as the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (UN-CEDAW)², adopted in 1979 by the United Nations (UN) General Assembly. The CEDAW is often described as an international bill of rights for women and defines what constitutes discrimination against women and sets up an agenda for national action to end such discrimination. The Convention defines discrimination against women as "...any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on a basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field" (Article 1). By acceding to the Convention, the GIROA commits herself to undertake a series of measures to end discrimination against women in all forms, including;

- to incorporate the principle of equality of men and women in the legal system, abolish all discriminatory laws and adopt appropriate ones prohibiting discrimination against women
- to establish tribunals and other public institutions to ensure the effective protection of women against discrimination
- to ensure elimination of all acts of discrimination against women by persons, organizations or enterprises

² <http://www.hawca.org/main/en/news-topmenu-19/82-history-of-cedaw-in-afghanistan.html>



Source: www.uncedaw.org

The Convention provides the basis for realizing equality between women and men through ensuring women's equal access to, and equal opportunities in, political and public life -- including the right to vote and to stand for election -- as well as education, health and employment. State parties, including the GIROA, agree to take all appropriate measures, including legislation and temporary special measures, with available resources, so that women can enjoy all their human rights and fundamental freedoms. Countries that have ratified or acceded to the Convention are legally bound to put its provisions into practice. They are also committed to submit national reports, at least every four years, on measures they have taken to comply with their treaty obligations. With this status, Afghanistan as a nation is in tandem with other nation states in efforts to promote women participation.

Within the confines of the nation statehood (at national level), the Constitution of the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan³, the reflection and commitment for women's cause is provided for under the Articles 83 and 84 of the Constitutional Loya Jirga, guaranteeing seats for women parliamentarians. And, In line with the CEDAW and indeed the Islamic Republic's Constitution, the Parliamentary Law⁴ provides for the 20% Quota for women parliamentarians.

³ The Constitution of the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan www.giroa.org.af

⁴ The Parliamentary Law of the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan www.giroa.org.af

Furthermore, the Government created a specific Ministry of Women Affairs (MOWA) to “act as lead ministry for the advancement of women’s status” (NAPWA 2008 p.5, para. 3)⁵. This is in turn a demonstration of commitment to the Bonn Conference where participation of women was deliberately emphasized. The Bonn Conference (2001)⁶, “stands as a framework to support women’s increased involvement in national development through, among others, the Ministry of Women Affairs (MOWA), and ,, participation in national peace and reconstruction processes is required both, as a means and an end to national development” (article 14).

While operationalising its own national agenda, the Afghanistan National Development Strategy (ANDS) (2008)⁷, the government created specific programme called the National Action Plan for the Women of Afghanistan (NAPWA) 2008 - 2018⁸. The NAPWA “is a central component of Afghanistan’s efforts to implement its commitment to women in an organized, systematic, coordinated and sustainable way. It aims to bring together short and long term measures that government and its partners will pursue to advance women’s status” (page 5. Para 3).

The above institutional frameworks and arrangements are a strong demonstration and commitment by the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, at both international and national levels, towards realization of women’s rights. The commitment in general then transcends to the commitment towards women rights and participation in peace processes in particular.

⁵ National Action Plan for Women of Afghanistan 2008 – 2018 www.napwa.org.af

⁶ Bonn Conference 2001 www.bonn-conference.org/event/agreements

⁷ The Afghanistan ANDS 2008 www.ands.gov.af

⁸ The Afghanistan NAPWA 2008-2018 www.napwa.gov.af

3.2 The Institutional Arrangements for Women in Peace Processes

While the above institutional arrangements are general, the research confirmed that the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (GIROA) has specific commitments towards women's cause in peace processes, given the war background of Afghanistan. As a nation, Afghanistan understands and has the experience that women are not passive agents during and after conflict i.e. women and men alike are affected in such circumstances. As such, the research confirmed that the Government has undertaken similar commitments at international and national levels along the lines of peace, reconciliation and development. At the international level, the GIROA is a party to the United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325⁹, which is based on three principles, namely;

- Women participation in peace process
- Support for women's rights
- Prevention of violence against women.

These principles were construed to emphasize the role of women in peace building processes, prevent women and children from becoming victims of war and mitigate conflict.

In line with the provisions and commitments under the UNSC 1325 Resolutions, the Government has taken a number of steps to demonstrate efforts and commitments towards sustainable peace and women participation, such as;

- the participation at the Bonn Conference in 2001¹⁰ where she became party to the Bonn Agreements
- regularly convening Loya Jirga in 2002, 2003 and 2010

3.2.1 The Consultative Peace Jirga's Resolution 1389

The Consultative Peace Jirga's Resolution 1389¹¹ is a "representation of the suffering nation of Afghanistan from all walks of life including both houses of Parliament, Provincial Councils, Religious Leaders, Tribal Leaders, Civil Society Organizations (CSO), Afghan Refugees etc. seeking ways out for the insecurity and for a lasting peace in the country" (p 1. para. 1). Within the auspices of the Resolution 1389, there is a strong call for the sustainable peace processes and inclusion of women, echoing the principles of the UNSCR 1325, including;

⁹ UNSCR 1325 www.un.org/events/res_1325

¹⁰ Bonn Agreement 2001 www.un.org/events/coference 2001

¹¹ The Afghanistan Peace Jirga Resolutions www.hpc.org.af/jirga/resolution_2010

Article 8: Afghans demand peace with justice, the rights of all citizens including women and children should be respected. For securing social justice, the Jirga insists on implementation of law on all citizens.

On the other hand, historical trends had it that even with all the necessary efforts, women participation remained low in general and not inclusive enough at different levels of the Afghan society. As such a special legislative emphasis was made under the provisions of Consultative Peace Jirga's Resolution 1389 (Article 11).

A Commission or High Peace Council should be established to implement the recommendations of the Consultative Peace Jirga and lead the peace process in the country. This institution should open and expand to provinces, districts and communities. The council should consist of individuals committed to peace – peace loving men and women, religious scholars, elders, two parliamentarians - one member of the lower and upper houses respectively-, and opposition groups who have renounced their weapons. This council should establish a special committee to get into the prisons, release prisoners and reintegrate them into normal life.

Thus, the purpose was and still remains to proceed as a nation with the reconciliation efforts between the government and the opposition and insurgent groups including the Taliban and Hizb-e-Islami, but also including all relevant stakeholders in the negotiations and peace process and providing an equal opportunity for voicing out concerns and aspirations of all interest groups.

The establishment of the Peace Councils at national, provincial, district and community levels is not only in line with the peace processes under the UNSCR 1325 and Peace Jirga 1389, but it is also in line with the provisions of UN-CEDAW, where governments are required to “to establish tribunals and other public institutions to ensure the effective protection of women against discrimination” (Article 1, para. 2). This portrays the interconnectedness among the peace and non-peace provisions.

In this regard, the Consultative Peace Jirga's Resolution 1389 provides legal basis for inclusive participation of women ‘in the peace process in particular’ while the establishment of the Peace Councils provide organizational and institutional frameworks for the same. In this regard, it is the duty and responsibility every Afghan citizen to observe the fulfilment of the same.

3.3 Women Participation in Peace Processes

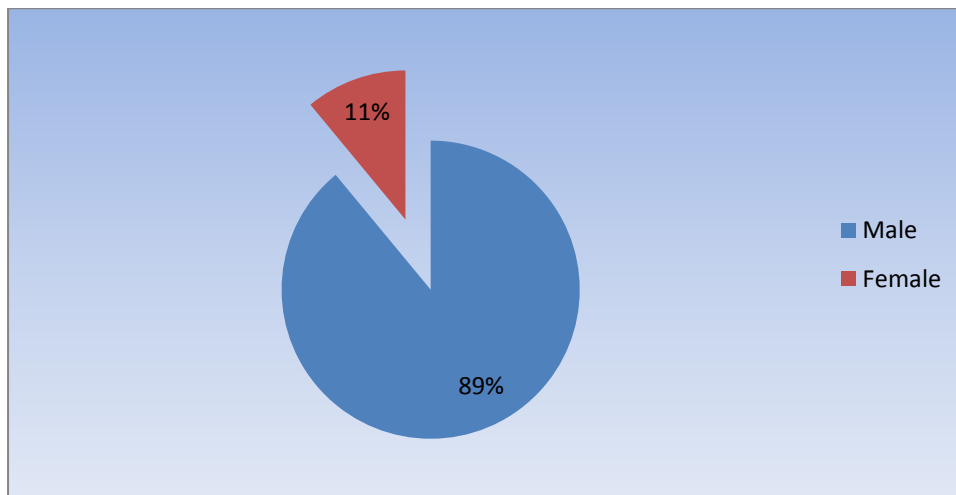
The research is a follow up on the extent of the fulfilment and actualization of the legal provisions and institutional and organizational frameworks for women participation in peace processes. Thus, first of all, it was important to find out whether organizational frameworks such as Peace Councils exist at different levels (in line with article 11), and furthermore, whether there is women participation and how effective is the women participation in the cause.

3.3.1 High Peace Council

a. Existence

The researched confirmed that the High Peace Council was established in 2010¹² soon after the enactment of the Consultative Peace Jirga's Resolutions 1389. This was the first step in operationalizing the resolutions. In order to find out about women participation in the Peace Processes, the research sought information on whether women are part and parcel of this organizational structure in the first place. The understanding is that, if it is granted that women should participate in the proceedings of such an organization, they should be part and parcel of the organization establishment in the first place. Thus, the High Peace Council composition is as follows;

Figure 1: Gender Composition of High Peace Council (HPC)



Source: Data from High Peace Council Members Interviews

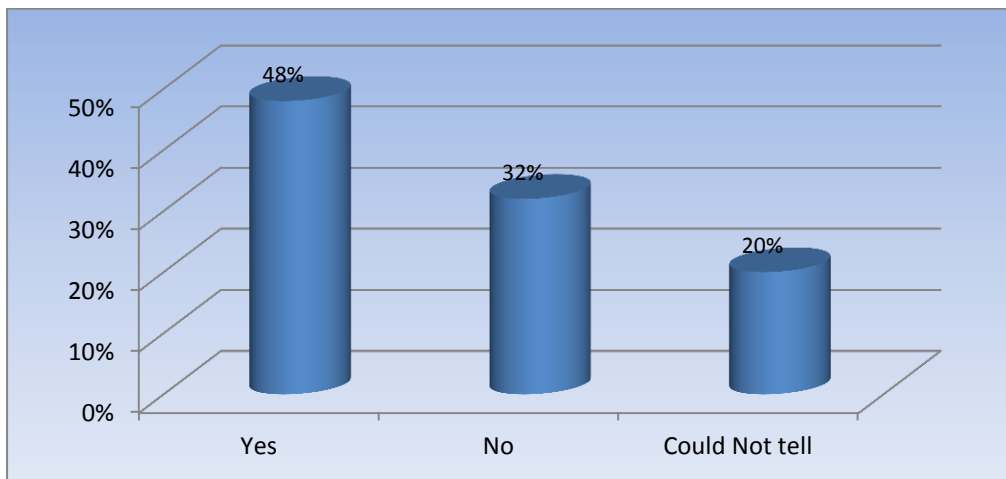
At the existence level [from the figure above], the HPC comprises 89% male and 11% females. This implies that women are part of the organization setting of an entity meant to facilitate peace process at national level. According to the Resolutions 1389 themselves, there is no deliberate 'quota provision' or 'target' for women composition in the Council. Thus, while the percentage of

¹² The Afghanistan High Peace Council, "Home Page" www.hpc.org.af

women representation is low compared to that of men, it can only be blamed as such rather than a failure to meet any anticipated target. And, in absence of any target, the increase in composition of women would only occur with the need. As the provisions stipulate women participation, the appointing authority, the Head of State, barely ensured inclusions of some women in the HPC. Since this was the beginning, it would not be squarely blamed bearing in mind the male dominance of the Afghan culture.

While the HPC exists and has 11% women composition, the research found out that the functionality and operations are not adequately institutionalized. This was gauged from the information regarding the availability of Operational Strategy or Guidelines which can demonstrate the same. The figure below depicts the findings;

Figure 2: Availability of Operational Strategy or Guidelines for HPC



From the figure above, apparently less than 50% of the respondents are aware of the operational guidelines or strategy of the Council. This means that up to 52% operate in the council in an ad hoc manner. Furthermore, out of the 48% that claimed that the Council has operational frameworks, 0% could provide a copy of it. Overall, this gives doubt on how institutionalized the operations are to guide the daily activities of the Council. With a benefit of a doubt, those who claimed to be aware of the operational frameworks were able to cite the areas of focus, as follows; (1) returning to a peaceful life (2) creating job opportunity for government oppositions, and (3) self-sufficiency of government oppositions. Finally, the research findings portray that there is no deliberate emphasis on women issues among these areas of focus, as was the case with women composition.

b. Peace Processes

The research found out that the High Peace Council is largely functional. Regarding peace processes, 100% of the respondents confirmed that the Council has conducted ‘so many’ peace processes in the

past. As there had been many peace processes that the Council engaged in since its inception, the trend has continued till the time of this research. For example, it was verified that the Council had been active in engaging with insurgents to bring peace recently, as attested below:

“in the past two years we have had different activities in provinces, where local commanders have taken off their weapons and admitted themselves to the government, women are also involved in talking and negotiation with insurgents in peace process” Hawa Alam Noristani, HPC member.

While this shows that the council is functional, there was no access to documentation to completely and objectively verify these facts. Furthermore, it is attestation that peace processes and outcomes of such processes may not be documented. This is important as point of reference give the delicacy of the issues of conflict, peace and reconciliation. However, it is basic ground-fact to conclude that the council does not merely exist but functional as well.

Deliberate efforts were made to confirm whether or not the processes being referred to [being done by the Council] are anything to do with peace. It was confirmed that key issues or points of discussion in the processes had bordered around; (1) the interference of other countries creating war in the country, (2) public awareness, (3) women suffering and war, (4) reconciling the insurgence people with government, (5) resolving disputes with insurgents, (6) peace for this entire process, (7) international relations, (8) finding job opportunities, (9) talks with Taliban and convincing them to participate in peace process and preventing them from joining back to the Taliban, (10) ending the war and attracting the Taliban/opposition/insurgencies to the public life, among others.

c. Women Participation

While the women are few in the composition of the High Peace Council (HPC), the research found out that they take part in the [decision making] process. Key informants claimed that the practice is that;

“...two (2) women from High Peace Council (HPC) present their ideas to the Director and Deputy Director of the Peace Executive Council (PEC) as contribution to the decision making process. Furthermore, the same women are involved in local and central level decision making process” Sediqa Balkhi, HPC Member.

This was demonstrated when the High Peace Council (HPC) engaged five (5) representatives of the Islamic Party in Kabul, Cerena Hotel.

While at High Peace Council (HPC) level, the picture is that women participation is adequate and satisfactory, there is still discontentment with;

“Women restriction not to go to provinces and out of country without Mahram” Sediqa Balkhi, HPC Member

On the other hand, deliberate efforts are being made to coordinate women of High Peace Council with women of the Provincial Peace Council who are doing formal or informal activities on the ground. It was confirmed that it is easier because many people realise the importance of women. The council claims to have emphasized raising the awareness about women importance in peace process and during collection of signatures for the High Peace Council and Provincial Commission. There are several networks at central and provincial level which complement the activities of the HPC, such as; Dawat Committee, International Relation Committee, Investigation Committee, Women's Committee, Provincial Committee, Prisoners Committee, etc. There are apparent gains in the efforts to increase women participation.

“As people are tired of war especially women, at the time of collecting signatures women showed lots of interest and we collected 260,000 signatures and it is a big achievement” Sediqa Balkhi, HPC Member

However, there are no specific NGO or CSO solely known to champion the increased participation of women in peace processes. This is happening at a time when there are many threats around and international donors have been limited. It would only be commendable that there should be concerted effort to encourage people to go after peace by themselves and they should bring peace for Afghanistan. Number of women in peace council must be increased. And they should actively participate in this process.

d. Key Challenges

As illustrated earlier, women participation in the Peace Council is as low as 11%. Furthermore, the research found out that at this level, the understanding is that it is still hard to increase women participation in the peace process due to among other things;

- Lack of Confidence among women as the processes are still new
- Low awareness of women's rights among both men and women
- Low literacy levels among women
- High prejudices upon women
- The Culture and Traditions that do not value women (including at family level)
- High insecurity

- Low government commitment to increase women participation regardless of commitment on paper
- Extremist thinking of the Insurgents and Opposition about women, hence they demand that women should not participate in Peace Processes

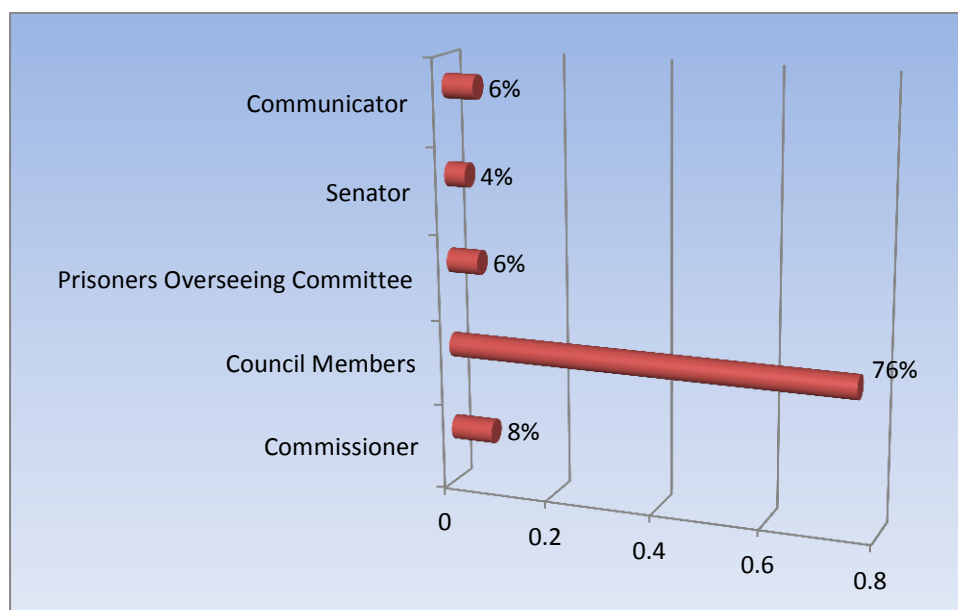
From the above challenges it is clear that more work is needed especially from the civil society organizations if women participation is to increase. The challenges border on triggering behavioural change at different levels, starting with higher levels of organized structures (e.g. opposition, governments) down to the smallest unit of living (the family).

3.3.2 The Provincial Peace Councils

a. Existence

Other than the High Peace Council (HPC) at national level, the research targeted Provincial Peace Councils (PPC) of Kabul, Helmand, Herat and Kandahar provinces. As provided for in the Resolution 1389, Article 11 (quoted earlier), the expectation is that there are Provincial Peace Councils established and functioning at provincial level similar to the national level. The research findings showed that Provincial Peace Councils (PPC) exist in each of the provinces. And consultations were made with different members of the Provincial Peace Councils (PPC) which in itself was a confirmation that councils do exist. The Figure below depicts the diverse membership consulted;

Figure 3: Dignitaries of the Councils Consulted

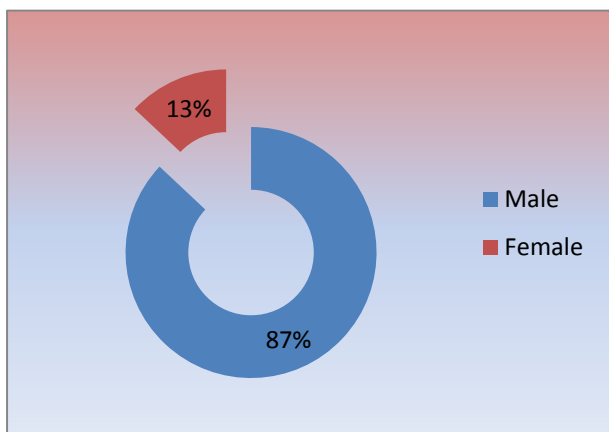


The existence of the various offices of the councils at provincial level confirms that perhaps councils are really there. Obviously many of them are mere Council Members (76%). However, the existence

of Communicators (6%), Commissioners (8%), Senators (4%) and indeed members of the Special Committee for Prisoners (6%) [as emphasized in Article 11] confirmed that the resolutions have been put to effect even at provincial level.

As was the case at the HPC, the research assumption was that women would only be deemed part and parcel of the Peace Process if they are part of the structure that leads the process. Thus, in the same line, the research sought information on whether the PPC organizational structure has women in its fold. The figure below depicts the finding;

Figure 4: Average Gender Composition of Provincial Peace Council (PPC)



From the figure above, the PPC have average membership of 87% males and 13% females. As the High Peace Council (HPC) was formed only in the year 2010, equally, all the Provincial Peace Councils (PPC) are less than five (5) years in existence and women composition is still

very low. This is a cause for concern because the same problem transcends from National Peace Council to Provincial Peace Council.

However, other than the women composition, at the provincial level the study found out that there are wide knowledge disparities about basic information regarding Provincial Peace Councils (PPC). For example, while 100% claimed to know how the Provincial Peace Councils (PPC) were created, glaring inconsistencies were on the explanation thereof. The majority (33%) indicated that the Councils were formed out of presidential order, others claimed they were created by members themselves (12%), house of elders (27%), Peace Jirga (9%) while the rest could not tell (only mentioning reasons for formulation).

As if that was not enough, on *eligibility for membership*, opinions differed even further. The main question was to find out 'who is eligible for membership of the PPC'. The question yielded divergent responses such as; (1) Elders and Ulamas, (2) Islamic Scholars, (3) all members willing, (4) influential people only, (5) The Mujahedin, (6) Women and CSO Activist etc. The same was true with the question of how 'some women' that constitute the 13% proportion were included in the PPC.

Responses were varying from; (1) introduced by Women Directorate, (2) by members themselves, (3) by high order commands, (4) by governor, (5) considered on nation base, (6) special process only, (7) by Haj Aouaf, (8) by organizations working in the area, (9) by President, (10) women with influence etc. This is an indication that the following basic fundamentals of such important institutions are not clear;

1. How councils should be formed
2. Eligibility of the member and
3. How women could be intrinsically part and parcel of the organizational structure of these leading entities (in peace processes).

Having noted the above incoherence, the study sought information on the functionality, apparently with a view that the confusion above may easily lead to harp hazard functionality as well. The research focused again on the institutionalization of the functionality and operations. In the findings thereof, 41% admitted that they were operating without any documented strategy or guideline. While 59% claimed to have operational guide, only 10% could show the said documentation. On whether the guide/strategy has something specific for women, 53% claimed to be aware of specific guides on women issues, but none of them could explain exactly what it says. And, only 5% were able to explain institutional arrangements to operationalize the PPC.

Overall, this gives doubt on how institutionalized the operations are to guide the daily activities of the Council at provincial level. Furthermore, those who claimed to be aware of the operational strategy, only 10% were able to cite the areas of focus, as follows; (1) returning to a peaceful life (2) creating job opportunity for government oppositions, and (3) self-sufficiency of government oppositions. One positive development areas of focus cited hereunder are consistent with those cited at national level. **However, the knowledge-base is too narrow to effect consistent operationalization of the organizational structure.** Again, at provincial level the research findings portray that there is no deliberate emphasis on women issues among these areas of focus, as was the case with women composition.

Conclusively, the inconsistencies and discrepancies in knowledge of the basics of the Provincial Peace Councils is cause for concern. It depicts inconstancies in procedures followed in the establishment process and this would be transcendental to the inconsistencies in delivering the women participation and sustainable peace at the provincial level, where it is very crucial.

b. Peace Processes

The research took cognizance that peace is needed more at provincial level than at the national level. As such, provincial peace processes need to be clear, elaborate and more compound to cater for the demanding insurgents thereat. As is expected, there were many peace related activities (formal and informal) taking place at provincial level. The activities, from the research findings, did not really have clear titles, but all claimed to be towards peace building. A few specific ones were identified such as; WADAN, Unity, AFYAR, Students Awareness, General Public Awareness of Women, Adras Kan (where even Taliban attended), Koshk Robot Sange, Pashton Zarghon, among others. Furthermore, the research established that **there were no clear cut procedures or uniform procedures in pursuing the same**. For example;

Table 1: Procedures for Peace Process

| Province | Procedure for Peace Process |
|----------|---|
| Kabul | <p><i>“We have a specific committee, named Daawat. When we want to talk with oppositions, we invite them through that committee for meeting, and they invite their people to the peace process. This committee exists in Districts and Kabul centre”</i> Hawa Alam Noristani – Commissioner.</p> |
| Herat | <p><i>“PPC tries to convince oppositions for peace. Firstly when the negotiations begin, the PPC gives the guaranties then directly the talks begin”</i> Shamail Azizi – Member of PPC</p> <p><i>“Firstly people and their elders are making move towards peace talks with Taliban and opposition, then PPC goes to the real and formal negotiations with the Taliban and then the oppositions directly can attend peace talks and reconciliation process. Firstly we pave the way for the talks between community elders, the insurgents and oppositions, if the results are good then PPC members go for more talks and inviting them to peace process”</i> Nek Mohamad Bariz, Mohamad Ebrahim Kshki, Ahmad Ali – PPC Members</p> <p><i>“PPC has its policy and administrative procedures which is applicable for all peace process activities and we all just follow that”</i> Abdul Wahed Qtali – Member of PPC</p> |
| Kandahar | <p><i>“First we contact their families and then invite them for peace process. Raise</i></p> |

| | |
|---------|---|
| | <i>awareness about the process of peace and inviting them to peace. A large number of people participate in this process, to reconcile the insurgence people with government” Shahida hussian, Jamaal yusfi, Zarghona balos, Roqia, PPC Members.</i> |
| Helmand | <p><i>“Invite the insurgence and their brothers for peace talks and make the opportunity for their job” Fawzia Ulomi – PPC Communicator</i></p> <p><i>“The PPC office bearers make the decisions and then we take the part to bring peace” Haji Mohammad Naeem, Haji Mir Ahmad khan – PPC Members</i></p> |

From the table above, it shows three different procedures; (1) where the PPC wholly takes the process as their own mandate and carries out everything (2) the PPC starts the process and then links up with the community leadership (3) the community leadership and elders start the process and seeks PPC official intervention. However, discrepancies are noticeable even within one province, showing that there are many things happening in an ad hoc manner.

From the findings above it can be concluded that such practices can easily be abused and misconstrued for peace processes while they are for something else. As such, they cannot easily attract the disadvantaged groups, particularly women. **The more organized and consistent the activities would be, the more they would attract those under oppression.**

It was also established that Key Issues during deliberations include: interference of other countries, role of media, public awareness, role of women, reconciliation with insurgencies, job opportunities, amongst others. Looking at the issues cited here-under, they are consistent with what was cited at HPC showing that somehow the HPC and the PPC are pursuing similar agenda. The research established that at provincial level, there are specific issues regarding women that are part of the discussion processes, most highlighted being; education, livelihoods, women access to employment, violence against women, women acceptance about peace talks, women participation, early marriages, women fleeing homes, women discrimination, amongst others. These are indeed very important issues for peace and women participation. **Procedures allowing, they could be categorized into thematic areas and delivered in phases of a certain peace process thereby building awareness, trust and increasing participation of marginalised groups, including women.**

c. Women Participation

While the situation was rosy at the HPC, it was far less at the PPC. The research findings confirmed that there is relatively higher participation in the deliberations of the peace process while lower

participation in the decision making process at PPC. On whether women participate in the deliberations and then decision making, the figures below show the differentiated findings;

Figure 5: Participation in the Process

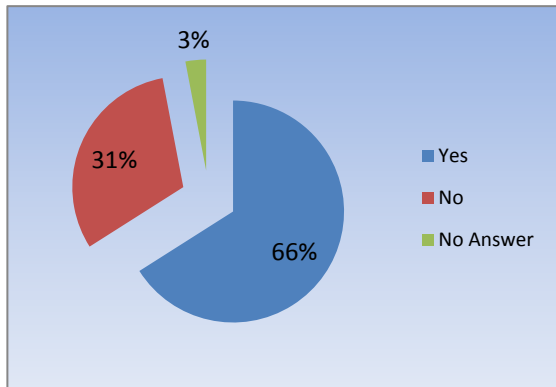
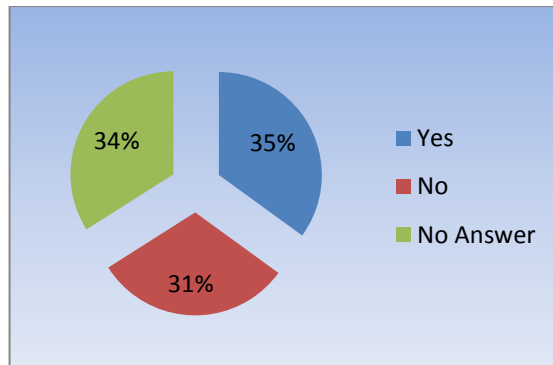


Figure 6: Participation in Decision Making



The figures above indicate that about 66% confirmed women participation in the deliberations, of which only 35% participate in decision making process. And, 31% confirmed that NO WOMEN are allowed to take part in decision making. In the same regard, further information was sought on what specific roles women take in the Peace Process. The findings confirmed that women’s role in the deliberations was restricted to; voting, making awareness and commenting on women related issues. On the other hand, on decision making they are only called in to vote and in rare circumstances take stances on women specific elements, but largely they could not explain what roles women take during decision making. There is an element of ‘reservation’ from women to take part in decision making, as attested below;

“As we tried to bring women to participate in decision making with us, but till now they didn’t do anything during decision making. So, NO, there is no need to involve them either”

Naimatullah Shir Daily, PPC Member, Kandahar

This is the very negation of the true meaning of ‘participation in decision making’.

d. Key Challenges

As stated earlier, women participation in decision making meet a lot of challenges. The findings entail that there are specific ‘Women Restrictions’ in the provinces that in turn scare away the women from public life. For example;

- insurgencies demand that women should not work with government,
- women not allowed move freely in districts [but cities],
- women not allowed to go out of the country without Mahram,

- general insecurity, PPC does not give enough chance,
- culture and customs,
- women are not valued

Thus looking at the above, the same restrictive practices take their toll on peace deliberations and decision making processes. Thus, repeating the above quote;

“ ...NO, there is no need to involve them either” Naimatullah Shir Daily, PPC Member,
Kandahar

This is an indication that still there exists even within and among the PPC members the notion that women should not be involved in peace process and decision making. It is therefore cognisant that there are internal as well external forces suppressing meaningful women participation. Furthermore, the findings summarised that;

- Advise through mosques, usually do not give powers to women (and very little is said about women’s rights)
- Women’s low confidence and hesitation to exercise their rights
- Low income levels and economic power makes women feel as second-grade human beings
- Low literacy levels make women usually not realize what they can or should do
- High insecurity and women can't play their real role during peace negotiations as they can be easy targets
- Prejudices through Afghan social and cultural practices (which usually favour males) as “many sections of the people do not agree with the women participation in peace process here in Herat” – PPC Members
- The PPC concept is still new, so we have to wait for more time to break resistance and increase PPC female members
- Low government commitment to increase women participation

3.3.3 The Women Groups in Peace Processes

a. Existence

The research findings confirmed that there are women groups at national as well as provincial level. Examples of women groups that exist include;

1. Productive Association of Women of Hirat province
2. Youth Association of Afghanistan

3. Jami Women Crafts Union
4. Hirat Charity foundation of Imam Fakhre Razi
5. Advocacy for women
6. Human Rights Network
7. Women Department of the Independent Commission of Human Rights
8. Women Network Group
9. Afghan Women Network
10. Canadian Women for Women in Afghanistan
11. Social Association of Women Justice Seekers
12. Natural Resources Monitoring Network (NRMN)

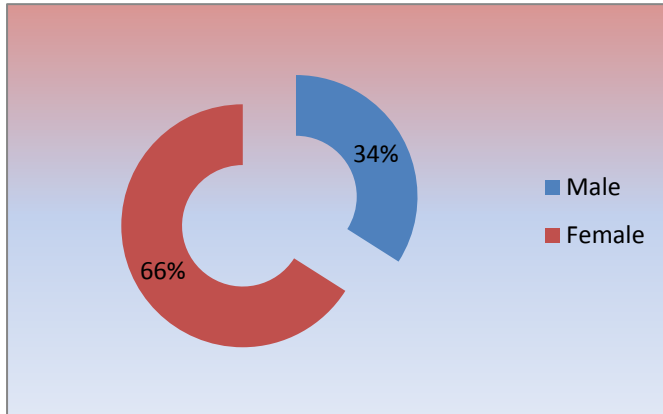
From the list above (even from the names themselves), it can be concluded that there are very few groups if any, that directly focus on peace and security issues. At the same time, there are very few elements of cultural issues. However, it is good that many of them are focusing on women's rights, especially economic rights as well as civil rights (even though leaving out social and cultural rights). This implies that there is a long way to go to tackle issues of culture and traditions that are key deterrents to women participation. Key areas of focus, even though much without documentation border around;

1. Working, industrial and business issues
2. Education and advocacy issues
3. Life skills and literacy programs
4. Violence against women, capacity building and giving awareness
5. Monitoring women rights
6. Institutionalization of human rights, justice and equality
7. Research, development and support
8. Women affairs, legal issues and war effects
9. Women and children rights protection
10. All cases causes human rights violations
11. Political participation of women, education, peace and reconciliation process
12. Focus on women education and health and advocacy
13. War Survivors and war Victims who are tortured
14. Socio-economic empowerment of women and gender based activities

As was the case with other groups, the research sought information about the group gender composition even though they are inherently women groups. This was done to ascertain whether

such groups are indeed for women and advance the interests of women. The findings were depicted as follows;

Figure 7: Gender Composition of Women Groups



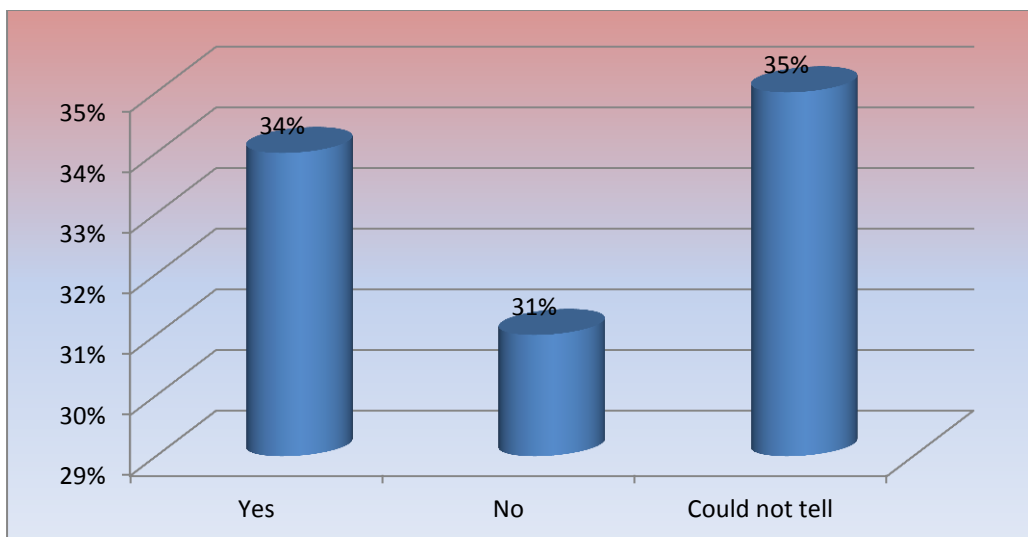
What is interesting is that, while they are women groups or networks, the composition showed an average composition of 34% males and 66% females.

The common criteria for entry to the groups are found to be fair; female, free entry, the member should be above 18 years, patriotic and dutiful in the focus

areas. However, the significant inclusion of men in the group might denote the inherent lack of confidence in women operating on their own. On the other hand, it can be interpreted as a demonstration of male domineering in that they would still want to control women and not give them the independence to operate.

Furthermore, information was sought on how focused they are and extent of institutionalization of their operations. It was largely discovered that the groups are also operating in an ad hoc manner, as shown in the figure below;

Figure 8: Availability of Operational Strategy or Guidelines for Women Groups



Findings denote that only 34% of the groups are formal in their operations, or at least their members are aware of the formal operations thereof. **This being the case it would be very difficult to engage**

them in peace processes as it would be hard to gauge and ascertain the interests of such groups so that issues of peace and security are not abused.

On a positive note though, 48% indicated that they link up with government entities, 89% link their activities with Civil Society Organizations (CSO) and 39% link up with committees at community level. Since the linkages are in line with their areas of focus, this can help possibly to ascertain their interest and assess whether it is ethical to engage them in peace processes at large.

b. Peace Processes

There are a number of peace processes and activities taking place in the different provinces as already alluded to in the earlier findings. Similarly, 58% of the Women Groups are basically aware of the Peace Processes in different provinces, but 36% of them could not tell exactly what the peace processes are/were. The research confirmed that only 21% members of the women groups are part of the peace process while others only follow through the media.

Generally, it can be concluded that the women groups participation in peace processes is low, even by the members individually. Actually, only 64% of those that knew exactly about the processes, they are involved in a number of activities themselves, such as; defend women rights to become member of the peace process, keeping contact with peace council, efforts towards peace stabilization, participating in gatherings, conducting workshops, speaking of advantages of peace, conducting public awareness sessions and workshops, deploying representatives to different areas, linkage with relevant organizations, protection of women rights and advocacy, educational training for school teachers, establishment of libraries etc. It was further found out that there are diverse issues prominent and pertinent to women in particular, such as; women rights, institutionalization of women rights, workshops for women and men equality, women's public awareness, women studying right, trying to convince men to let women go to school, compulsory marriages and exchange marriage, women political participation, education and participation in peace process, peace related issues in school curricula, and violence against women.

These findings show that at least a few women are aware of the peace processes and the issues under discussion. However, the numbers are too low.

c. Women Participation and the Challenges

Random interviews yielded 74% satisfaction with women membership in women groups. The groups have attracted a satisfactory women representation at different levels which portrays the right picture to the common women. On the other hand, only 37% expressed a certain satisfaction level of participation. Extending to the peace processes, women participation from these women

groups is rated as follows; low (59%), medium (32%) and could not tell (9%). It is deemed that even though some women groups are involved in the peace processes or their members individually, their meaningful contribution is minimal. Reasons are as follows;

1. Afghan Culture and Traditions
2. Literacy levels
3. Lack of Political will
4. Women Fear
5. Male prejudices

These are summarised in the table below;

Table 2: Challenges to Women Groups to Participate in Peace Processes

| | |
|--|-----|
| 1. Afghan Culture: most active and employed women can participate, only if the men of the society provide them this opportunity. Many times their existence is just symbolic and they are speaking on behalf of men. As it is an imposed culture on Afghans which don't allow women to in public affairs | 32% |
| 2. Lack of information, illiteracy | 20% |
| 3. Government has not valued women/ government doesn't provide opportunities for women | 20% |
| 4. Women are embroidered in fear and insecurity | 12% |
| 5. Women are considered as low layer of our society in compare with men | 8% |
| 6. Women's participation in peace committee is low and they are not giving encouragement to other women | 4% |
| 7. Could not tell | 4% |

From the table above, the research confirms the existence of 'Restrictions' to women participation in public life, including decision making. It is an indication that many men and parents usually do not want women and girls to be on the fore, including working. In the end, women and girls are not exposed to the required knowledge. There also seems to be negative portrait against women who are active in society. Women are then embroidered in restrictively culture. In other cases women reveal instances of 'receiving warnings' regarding their participation. There is also lack of confidence in the government structures in protecting women as many lament that 'the government will not be committed to cooperation with women'.

“the custom and tradition of our society has dominated all legal frameworks, as law for violence against women is also unable to protect women from traditional limitations. Still general Patriarchal belief in Hirat province doesn’t allow women to appear comfortable in society. And those who are active at the time being, face many challenges and accusations. because of all these limitation which patriarchy has created in Hirat province, women can't appear in social aspects”

As it is a generally thought that in Afghan society, women are only for home chores, women are limited in adventure and end up in poverty, dependency and insecurity.

3.3.4 The Local Community Peace Committees

a. Existence

Peace and insecurity have far-reaching effects at community level where poor masses live. It is therefore in good spirit that peace processes trickle down to the communities through Local Peace Committees. The research confirmed that such committees exist at community level. However, in the target areas, only 23% are aware of Local Peace Committees. Furthermore, findings show that inherently, women community members do not very much participate in committees, not only the Peace Committees. The picture is depicted below;

Figure 9: Community Membership to Any Kind of Group or Committee

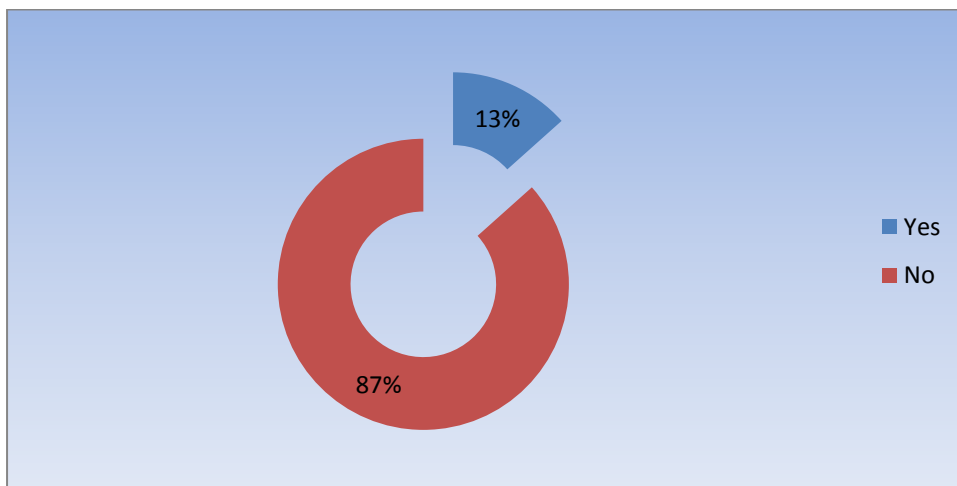
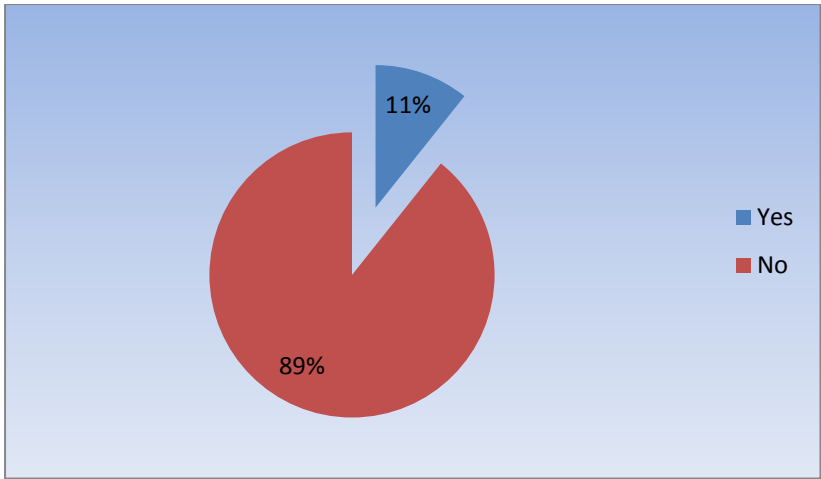


Figure 10: Community Women Knowledge of Any other Group even if Not a Member

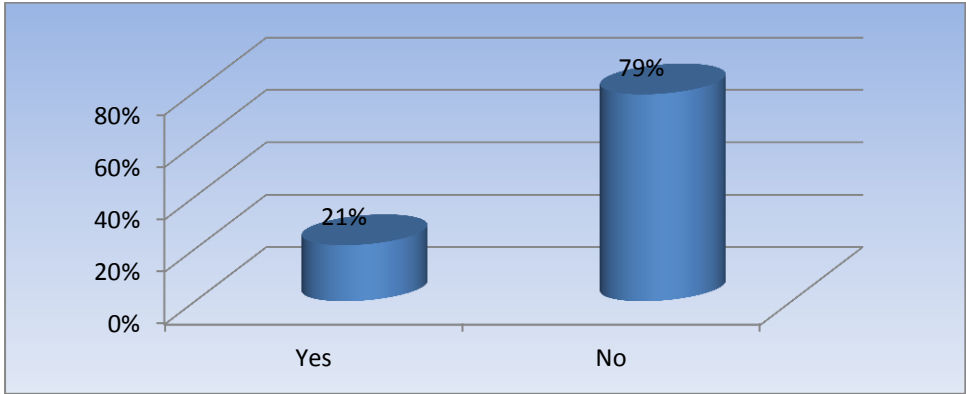


As shown in figure 9, only 13% of the community members are members of any committee, let alone the Local Peace Committee. In addition to that there is a general phobia to talk about groups among community women. For example, out of the 89% that are not members of any group, only 11% indicated that they know the existence of groups in the community. Thus, there is a combined effect of low knowledge about the existence of the groups as well as low participation in the groups.

On the other hand, the research findings confirmed that there are committees such as Liberal Youth Group that are 'working on community peace, working against traitors, and criminals that are now in power'. This being a gender insensitive group, the composition averages 81% men and 19% women. On another note, there are also local women peace groups such as Women Union that focus on 'family-based violence, peace and resolve the women disputes'. Composition of such groups is around 78% women and 22% men.

For the Local Peace Committees in particular, very few women at community level know about their existence. The figure below illustrates;

Figure 11: Out of the Committees you Know, Are you Aware of Local Peace Committees



In principle, the Local Peace Committees at community level cannot really be distinguished. Only 21% of the people that know local committees could isolate the Local Peace Committees. Furthermore, only 19% of those that knew about the Local Peace Committees are aware and could tell exactly what their mandate is. It was little known that the committees have the duty to;

- Bring peace between government and insurgent groups
- Raising awareness about peace in rural areas where people are mostly illiterate
- Working for permanent peace
- Construction of roads and schools

The inability to know the committees, and in any case where the committees are known but the knowledge about their mandate is a cause for concern. From the above, even the few community members that know about Local Peace Committees expect the committee to ‘construct roads and schools’. This is an indication that not much has been done to make committees and their mandate known at local level.

The findings also show that 98% do not even know how they execute the peace processes at community level. **This brings into question earlier findings where PPC and HPC claimed high participation of women during peace processes at community level.**

At the same time, they are not very formal and strong, with **unbalanced composition (that fuels segregation)** as already stated. The research findings show that they have no formal institutional guides to provide them with functional direction. They conduct ad hoc meetings and running of affairs is usually issued-based and reliant on personalities.

“I am not a member because the committee is in the centre of the village and those who are closely related to the influential have its membership”

As such, the committees cannot easily attract popularity among women and other marginalized groups to take part.

b. Peace Processes

As stated above that the community at large including members of the Local Committees themselves are only informally aware of what such institutions are doing, only a few of them could be specific about the Peace Processes. All respondents indicated that “they are negotiating for peace with government and the insurgencies”. Further analysis revealed the following on-going processes;

- Working with Insurgences and inviting them to gather with government and make a base for their jobs
- Girl Child Rescue mission: there was a girl whose family gave her to the BAAD, the peace council investigated the issue and resolve and her family was arrested
- Bring peace between villages and among the people

This implies the same circumstance where there are no specific themes for peace processes, let alone procedural aspect so that it systematically filters down the institutional hierarchy. Consequently, only 23% of those involved expressed knowledge of how peace processes are conducted, but could not, in turn, articulate how it is done.

c. Women Participation

While women and the people at large could not specify the peace processes being dealt with, findings confirmed that there is a lot being done towards women welfare. For example, job creation for women, voice for poor women to provincial authorities, rescue for girl children, assistance to divorced and physically/mentally challenged women, family negotiations/gender based violence, provide motivation to women for socio-economic advancement.

Women Participation in the above activities and even decision making processes remains tricky. Regardless of women presence and issues being dealt with concern women, findings show that decision making process follows other prescription. A few examples of decision making process summaries were captured as below;

- When an issue is raised they will send it to attorney and then solve that issue there
- Under the customs, they resolve the problems themselves
- The head of the council will pass this issue to province and the council for its solution
- From the local council to Peace council, then District court, then province then to elder or Mullah where they solve the disputes
- Whichever, but I believe it is with good and transparency
- I didn't know about the process but their thoughts are always justifiable

Looking at the above commonly followed decision making procedures, there is little room for inclusion of women. On the other hand, women have highly willingness to participate and feel that they "SHOULD PARTICIPATE". Findings show that 100% of the women feel that way because; women would also want to help bring national peace and development, it is their right, they form the majority of the country and they are the ones suffering a lot.

d. Challenges

While there is general acceptance and acknowledgement of the right and responsibility for women to participate in peace processes, women realize the 'restrictions' and challenges posed by the Afghan setting. Among the challenges most cited by local women include;

1. Woman is always the obliged follower of a man
2. Security problems (from insurgencies)
3. Limited education
4. lack of empowerment
5. poverty and dependency
6. not accorded rights and freedoms
7. tradition and family prescriptions

The challenges above are in line with the very challenges cited at provincial and national level. This is a conclusion that these need to be addressed in one way or the other.

3.3.5 The University Students Peace Processes

a. Existence

The Universities remain important institutions of higher learning where young professionals nurture their professional and leadership skills. The research sought information about such nurturing taking place in relation to peace processes. In a nutshell, peace processes groups exist in the University, albeit very few (8%) directly tackling issues of peace and reconciliation. As is the case with others, they are largely male dominant, averaging 65% male and 35% female. Even though operating at a small scale, 81% of them are connected to entities outside the University, mostly the Civil Society organizations.

b. Peace Processes

The findings indicate that a few peace processes take place in the University, though, they are mainly in closed door. This is understandable as Universities are not really niches for conflict. In summary, it was found out that the following processes take place;

- Publish some peace related articles in magazines
- Conduct different and periodic seminars about peace
- Celebrate international peace day in the University Campus
- Preaching peace and solidarity in the University Campus

c. Women Participation

It was encouraging to engage with future leaders (women). On the other hand, findings show that despite current modernity, there are fewer students being involved in groups (only 33%). There is a significant 26% of the student who are quite aware of the various groups and networks, but they would not want to participate. Most cited reasons being;

- Lack of time due to studies (50%)
- Do not believe in groups/No interested (25%)
- The groups did not engage the youngsters for participation (16%)
- They are only for men and fearing parents (8%)

4.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 Conclusion

The study depicts the extent to which women participate and meaningfully contribute in the peace processes in line with the Consultative Peace Jirga Resolution 1389 and the High Peace Council (HPC) as well as other supporting human rights frameworks. The findings also unveil the socio-political dynamics that hinder effective participation of women in peace processes and become basis for pragmatic recommendations and way forward to improve the situation. In conclusion;

- The study is a valid undertaking in that in Afghanistan issues and challenges of peace and insecurity are still high. Along the same lines, women participation is still a new phenomenon in the Afghanistan cultural setting. As stated in the ANDS, peace and security are fundamentals to achieving sustainable development in Afghanistan [hence it is among the pillars of National Priority Programmes]
- Improving Policy and Legal environment: The Government of the Republic of Afghanistan has taken necessary steps to improve legal and policy environment for women participation in Afghanistan. The Constitution of the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, as Supreme Law of the Land, makes specific provisions for increased participation of women in all endeavours for development, including the political dispensations. The policy and legal environment also allows for the CSOs practice where there is a growing community of organizations including consortiums working in the areas of peace, reconciliation and women participation. However, it is the level and degree of engage that still remains and runs at a slow pace.
- Space for political (democratic) participation of women: The research findings analysed both citizenship and their local leadership, but also attitudes and culture that govern the domain of the legal, policy and practice ethics in Afghanistan. While the space is provided for in the policy and legal environment, the local leadership, cultural setting including family and traditions largely constrain the extent to which women can participate in public affairs [such as peace processes]. This is confirmed in that among the constraints to women participation, 'cultural setting' scores highest.
- Resolutions and Legal Frameworks: The research deployed a para-discourse analysis on the relevant resolutions and legal frameworks that promote women participation, level of

implementation and supporting institutions to reflect a true space for women participation in peace processes. The government has taken necessary steps in the past decades. Starting with being party to the Bonn Agreement in 2001, the UNSCR 1325 and then CEDAW in 2003, there has been a national drive through Loya Girga's Resolutions 2001, 2003 and 2010, the latest of which stands out as the Consultative Loya Jirga's Resolution 1389. The Resolution 1389 is the main legal framework for women participation in peace processes, as it gives legal basis for the formation of Peace Councils at National, Provincial and Local levels. Thus, for fear of confusion, the Resolutions and Legal Frameworks for women participation in peace processes are in place for a start and point of reference. Other than Peace Processes, there is a national road-map called the National Action Plan for the Women of Afghanistan (NAPWA) which guides the integration of women and development across the Afghanistan development framework.

- The real practice of Women Engagement in Peace Processes: The study looked at both the national and sub-national peace processes; and how this has contributed (or not) towards influencing the integration of women. The study concludes that the frameworks have allowed for an open field for civic engagement. For example, various Civil Society Organizations (CSO) [such as Afghanistan Women Network are campaigning for increased women participation in the peace process. However, there is not much change in that the women composition in the Peace Councils at different levels has not yet been reviewed. Women participation is low. Many structures such as women groups and peace committees remain informal and composition of women rarely reaches 20%. Peace processes are not thematised, the procedures for peace processes are not clear and the processes of decision making is highly centralized. The insecurity itself, for which peace processes are being initiated, is embedded in issues of culture and tribal conflicts, yet the social-cultural tissue entails restrictions to women participation. The implication and reality is that women cannot start participating in peace processes while they are still entangled in a culture of restrictions. Women cannot take part in decision making amidst a cultural cobweb of restrictions. The one who brings the women to the fore will be easily hated together with the woman, thereby stalling the reconciliation processes. It has to start with a strong movement towards cultural change and traditional freedoms before issues of popular participation would be guaranteed.

- The situation (outlook) of women discrimination in Afghanistan: The research concludes that while Afghanistan as a nation is a signatory to the United Nations Convention for the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Afghan culture of 'women restriction' is still intact. Looking at all 'organizational structures' that operate on different thematic areas, whether peace or anything, the issue of women restriction features highly [as an impediment]. The impact of such set up is that women remain dormant, increases dependency and retards development in line with ANDS and NAPWA targets. However, what is missing in the strategies is what exactly can be done to the cultural setting so that interventions bear fruit. Possibly, the resolutions have to reviewed to reflect removal of cultural barriers, starting even at the family level.
- Current Civil Society Organizations (CSO) Practice: The Civil Society is mushrooming, with a lot of organizations operating at different levels towards women cause. One key opportunity for the CSO is that the government has opened up the playing field for advocacy. And on the other hand the donor community may still be soft with the resources. However, the CSO capacity needs improvement and the organizations are young. In fact, only 23% of the sampled organizations are more than 10 years in operation. Even among these older organizations, a number of them do not up to date Operational Strategy. This weakness needs immediate attention so that there is more organized action where visions, missions and core values could be explicit and for the basis of coordination. At the moment, the can hardly display true organizational cultures in undertaking work in the area of women's rights and good governance (popular women participation) in Afghanistan, and be widely trusted. There is need to move towards improving institutional efficiency to deliver viable and sustainable interventions; but also sustainability of the institutions themselves.
- The Networks: Information shows that women networks are as young as the CSO, with a lot of capacity gaps, knowledge gaps and without Operational Strategies where they can articulate their true culture and values which can then be used as basis for coalition. Within the HRAAC family, an assessment needs to be done to analyse if the consortium itself is a true coalition and whether the members are operating based on interrelationships among their organizational cultures. In the University, it is an untapped opportunity as there are few students working in clubs and are still young. Many of them require civic education to untie them from cultural and traditional restrictions that still entangle them.

- Other Minorities: So far the findings conclude that there is no deliberate efforts or deliberate provision for inclusion and/or representation of vulnerable groups such as the physically challenges, internally displaced persons and others.
- Opportunities: HRRAC is a consortium and is Afghan led. It has the opportunity to engage different stakeholders in the peace process without suspicions. HRRAC should utilize the link with CSO working at grassroot level to use them as vehicles to tackling culture injustices. As a consortium, HRRAC should multi-level donors and convince them from different angles in line with the existing members. The Resoution 1389 is still new and there is a lot of work to be done.

4.2 Recommendation

4.2.1 Recommendation for Advocacy

The Research Findings are a testimony that there is a lot that need to be done to increase women participation in peace process in Afghanistan. In view of HRRAC, it is recommended that;

- Expand the project beyond the current research itself. HRRAC is a consortium and is one of the rightful entities to tackle the issue at hand. The issue of increasing women participation in peace processes is bigger than envisaged as it stems from culture and traditions that are embedded nationwide. The issue already requires coordinated action, and HRRAC is already a coordinated entity, which puts it in a strategic position to mobilize both stakeholders and resources.
- To begin with, there is need to design Advocacy Project Activities aimed at Organizational Strengthening of Consortium members for effective service delivery. Herein, the strategy should be to advocate for conducting internal organizational capacity assessments for the consortium members, facilitate Organizational Development (OD) processes so that the members realize where they are and define their true destiny. The second stage is to facilitate organizational strengthening process where HRRAC can assist in developing and updating/improving the Strategic Plans or Operational Frameworks of its members and those in the area of women's rights. This will help improve efficiency in delivery of service. At the very end, there should be a deliberate policy change and prescription that every consortium member should have updated operational strategies in order to be recognized as a member.
- Advocacy for Integration of Resolutions 1389 into the Operational Frameworks of Local Civil Society and Community Development Committees (CDC). There is a glaring missing link between Development Agenda and Peace process in terms of approach to peace processes at local level. The principles of Resolution 1389 are not reflected in the local leadership and local development processes. The strategy should therefore, advocate for integration of;
 - Local Leadership
 - Community Development Committees
 - Community Development Organizations
 - Simplified Version of the Resolution 1389
 - Standards and Guidelines for Peace Processes Execution

- There is need to advocate for the development of the National Peace Strategy and Action Plan in line with Resolution 15 of the Consultative Peace Jirga 1389. The Peace Strategy will act as a road map as well as provide guidance on peace process at different level. The guidance will then be simplified for use at HPC, PPC and Local Peace Committees as simple guidelines. In turn the National Action Plan will entail implementation framework in terms of actions, responsibilities and timelines for each peace process identified. This will ensure coherence of activities at different levels. Currently, absence of this is shown by the absence of operational strategy at all levels.

4.2.2 General Recommendation

Other than what has been recommended above for advocacy action, there were many other recommendations for increased women participation in peace process, as outlined below:

- Quota on Women composition in Peace Council. As more CSO suggested “We recommend the Peace Council to increase women participation in peace process by giving specific place to women. Not only the women who are leaders and those recommended by the president, but also the women who are interested and are active in society
- Peace proceedings are not being documented. This is important as point of reference given the delicacy of the issues of conflict, peace and reconciliation
- Number of women in peace council must be increased. It would be commendable that there should be concerted effort to encourage people to go after peace by themselves and they should bring peace for Afghanistan.
- And, in absence of any target, the increase in composition of women would only occur with the need. At national level, there should be specific definition of roles and responsibilities for both men and women in the peace process. As suggested by other CSO, Government can give part of the peace process to women and let them solve their problems by themselves. A national stakeholder’s workshop is needed where there should be agreement on this and then women participation should aim at achieving the target.
- Special emphasis should be placed on women empowerment along information, education and economic empowerment (e.g. job creation for women).

- Civic education for the change in the socio-cultural setting so that women are valued in their own right and recognize their worth in society. Currently there is strong resistance starting from the family level
- As a matter of fact, Government must take all necessary steps for an improved security environment which would allow popular participation.
- Creation of cooperation or platforms among women and creation of different groups by women for improving their rights and participation in public life. These could be in form of Committees or other forms, made by women in cities and rural areas and with women who live in war area.
- Peace Councils (PC) must strengthen their availability (offices) at district and community levels, and increase awareness in communities regarding women's rights, their roles and responsibilities in peace process and their participation as well

5.0 REFERENCES

(...to be finalised and formatted when producing Final Version)

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