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د افغانستان د آزاد او عادلانه ټولټاکنو موسسه
موسسه انتخابات آزاد و عادلانه افغانستان
Free & Fair Election Forum of Afghanistan organization

Conference Report: Women and Political Participation

January 6, 2016

Kabul-Afghanistan





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Introduction:

The Women & Youth Outreach Department of Free & Fair Election Forum of Afghanistan (FEFA) held a conference under the title of Women and Political participation to release its findings from 8 provincial focus groups and 6 consultation meetings on women and political participation. The Women & Youth Outreach Department of FEFA held the conference on January 16, 2016 in Safi Landmark Hotel where more than 100 persons from Parliament, Human Rights Commission, Electoral Commissions, and Political parties, CSOs, Presidential Palace, Chief Executive Office, Ministry of Women Affairs, Ministry of Interior Affairs and Ministry of Hajj & Religious Affairs attended.

The panelists of this conference were: Mr. Naim Asghari (FEFA's program manager), Mrs. Parasto Yari (The secretary of adviser of chief executive office), Mrs. Adela Bahram (Head of Republicans Party and advisor of president), Mrs. Mariam Arween (Women & Youth Outreach Officer of FEFA) and Mr. Aqil Azad (head of FEFA Research Department).

Objective:

Women political participation is very important in political processes. People participation in political processes guaranty the legitimacy of government. Women role in decision making and state administration are very important issues. The paternalistic societies where the role of women is ignored, women political participation can have determinant role and change the situation of women. Women active participation in the past several elections and their relative presence in elective and management posts indicate that women understand the importance of their vote and participation. Afghanistan is a paternalistic traditional society where women are marginalized from political discourses but Afghan women have been making attempts to stand against the traditions and misogynist views and take part in political activities. This conference aim to review the condition of women political participation in past elections and assess the challenges ahead of women participation in upcoming parliamentary and district council elections. Similarly, the Women and Political Participation report review the quantitative and qualitative participation of women in elective, selective, management and political posts in capital and provinces and identify the barriers in this regard. FEFA held consultation meetings and focus groups in 8 zones of the country (Kabul, Balkh, Herat, Kandahar, Nangarhar, Paktia, Bamyán and Badakhshan) and the participants of these programs reviewed the problems ahead of women political participation and recommended solutions for them. Hope this report and its findings help solve the problems ahead of women in upcoming election and increase women presence in elective/management posts.



Contents:

At the beginning of the conference, Mr. Naim Asghari, programs manager of FEFA welcomed the participants and presented information on FEFA's proceedings toward electoral reform and public trust building on electoral reform. He said, "The 2014 electoral challenges negatively impacted women."

"Prior to commencement of work of Special Electoral Reform Commission, FEFA held successive meetings with political parties, CSOs, media and experts and came up with the declaration of substantive principles of electoral reform. The declaration was subsequently presented to government and electoral commissions. Likewise, FEFA's Women & Youth Outreach Department has developed specific proposals about increasing women participation in political processes and presented to government. Similarly, FEFA held consultation meetings in 8 zones and focus groups in 6 zones to identify barriers before women participation



in political processes and come up with specific proposals in this regard. The participants of these consultation meetings and focus groups were the representatives of Women Departments, CSOs, university professors and members of political parties. The report of findings of these consultation meetings and focus groups are now presented to you in this conference."

Then, Mrs. Parasto Yari (The secretary of advisor of chief executive office) explained the objectives of conference and said, "Women participation in political processes in very important." She said that Afghanistan is a democratic state but women are marginalized from leadership of the country. She said, "We need to identify the barriers before women participation in political processes and their role in macro-political decision making." Then, she pointed out the efforts for increasing women role in political processes." She added that participants of FEFA's consultation meetings & focus groups have identified the challenges before women political participation and recommended solutions for them.



Subsequently, Mr. Masouda Karoukhi, member of Wolesi Jirga, talked on findings of report of Women and Political Participation and said, “The political leadership of the country is elected through election. Each citizen takes part in political fate of the country by casting his/her vote. If the democratic states do not have the support of people they are more fragile than dictator states.” She said that the findings of this report indicate women challenges across the country.” She said according the report the major problems insecurity challenges. However, the security situation is relatively good in cities but in remote areas women can’t take part in election and cast their vote which paves the ground for proxy voting by men. Based on FEFA’s findings, Women in 8 zones of the country urged for spreading the public awareness programs on women rights and roles to remote areas.



“Women in 8 zones of the country urged for consideration of meritocracy ability of women. Unfortunately, the ability and capacity of women are not consider while they are appointed as ministers, governors or managers. Women political participation is less than their population and Ministry of Interior Affairs has to employ female police for female polling stations in election. Most of males do not let the female members of their family to work out therefore, Ministry of Interior Affairs must employ female police from the same region. Likewise, the government has to prepare the voters list.”

Subsequently, Mr. Aqil Azad (Head of Research Department of FEFA) presented information on number of consultation meetings and focus group’s participants and said, “Totally, 233 person attended FEFA’s consultation meetings where 70% of participants were females.” He added that FEFA has been able to find out the figures of women presence in key government posts. Based on the statistics, 2% of Afghan diplomats are women, 27% of members of parliament are women. Mr. Azad said that no woman is working as mayor. Women do not take part in political processes due to the following reasons:

- Electoral Fraud;
- Families’ unawareness;
- Shortage of female police;
- Remoteness of polling stations;
- Lack of employing female staff;
- Economical dependency of women;



- Security threats in the country;

Subsequently, Mrs. Adella Bahram (Head of Republicans Party of Afghanistan and advisor to the president) presented recommendations of the report. "FEFA and the Women Political Rights Advocacy Group held 8 consultation meetings and 6 focus groups in the centers of 8 zones of Afghanistan and made the following recommendations based on its findings from the meetings and focus groups. Now the recommendations are presented to government and electoral commissions of Afghanistan. FEFA believe consideration of these recommendations can help solving the problems and increase women participation in political processes."



1. Women presence in top government posts in very low. Therefore, the government leaders must increase women presence in government posts based on women population. The leadership of government is recommended to consider the gender balance in government structure. The leaders of National Unity Government must implement the commitments they made to women during electoral campaign.
2. Ministry of Interior Affairs is responsible for maintaining the security of citizens. The national police is responsible for maintaining the security of polling centers during election but the female polling center require female police therefore, Ministry of Interior Affairs must increase the number of female police in female polling centers. Ministry of Interior Affairs can hold campaign across the country and encourage women to join police forces.
3. The 2014 elections showed that lack of female staff at the female polling stations was a serious problem. Given the Afghan traditions and culture, women do not go to the polling centers where male staff has. Therefore, the Independent Election Commission must employ female staff and appoint them at the polling centers on Election Day. The Independent Election Commission can employ female staff in cooperation with Women Rights Institutions, Ministry of Education and local officials.
4. Given the law, all Afghan citizens have the right to have access to polling center to cast his/her vote. Therefore, the Independent Election Commission must undertake the necessary measures to make sure every citizen have easily access to polling centers. The remoteness of polling center negatively impact the level of women participation in election because women are more



vulnerable in Afghanistan hence the Independent Election Commission must increase the number of polling centers across the country to make sure women have access the polling centers.

5. Whereas, female candidates have economical dependency and it creates problems for them during the campaign period. Therefore, the participants of consultation meetings recommended easement of candidacy criteria for females. Due to this problem, women are not much eager to take part in election. Therefore, the conditions of candidacy (supportive cards and deposit money) must be simplified for female candidates. These simplification can encourage women to take part in election as candidates.
6. Given the 2014 electoral reports, the security situation of many provinces is deteriorating. The insecurity can have negative impacts including affecting the level of women participation in political process. The participants of consultation meetings said that a major factor of women low participation in political processes is insecurity. However, insecurity is an inclusive problems but its effects are more on women hence Ministry of Interior Affairs is recommended to undertake special measures for maintaining the security of female candidates or the women who are engaged in civic activities.
7. Awareness is a substantive component for political participation. The participants of consultation meetings also discussed this issue and recommended the Independent Election Commission to hold public awareness programs on women rights through Ministry of Hajj, mullahs, newspapers, and TVs to make people aware of women rights in remote areas.
8. The electoral commissions are recommended to maintain their independency and make proper decisions. Likewise, the commissions must pay attention to women presence in their leaderships and in their provincial offices.
9. Technology is used in every process. The usage of technology has increased in electoral processes too to get the desired results, accelerate the works and decrease the expenditures. E-making of electoral process can solve the current electoral problems of Afghanistan and decrease the electoral expenditures. It will also prevent delay in announcement of final results of election hence the electoral commissions are recommended to use update electoral technology. Likewise, the government is recommended to commence the process of issuing E-ID cards as soon as possible.
10. The rejection of a female candidate of membership at Supreme Court by Wolesi Jirga was not expectable. Thus, the government is recommended to pave the ground for political participation of women through their influence. Government's support and decisiveness can positively affect women political participation.
11. Women appreciate first lady's active role in key issues. She is recommended to expand her activities to provinces of Afghanistan and pave the ground for women presence in policy making of government.
12. The international community must leave Afghan women alone. The United Nations and other donors must continue their assistance to Afghan women to help them actively take part in political & democratic processes and good governance. The donors are recommended to assist the government, CSOs and other institutions (which are working for women) given the effectiveness of those institutions programs



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At the end of this conference, the participants discussed the findings of report and shared their views on with each other. The participants also asked their questions regarding the report and the members of panel answered their questions.