

## WOMEN AND PEACE BUILDING IN AFGHANISTAN: UNDERSTANDING THE PROSPECTS AND CHALLENGES

ALI JUMA HAMDAD

**Abstract:** The study was interested in investigating the special roles women play in peace process, with reference to the case of Afghanistan. The study was interested in finding out the current state of the participation of women in the peace process of Afghanistan and compares it with the previous state of participation. It furthermore assessed the contribution of women in Disarmament, Demobilization, Disintegration and the plan to dissolve all illegal armed groups “DIAG” process. Finally, it measures the success levels of women’s participation in the peace process. Purposive sampling was used to selected some organizations and academic institutions for the survey. These organizations were selected based on their in-depth knowledge of the subject matter of peace. Respondents selected includes: 5 instructors, 15 Members of Peace council, 18 Member of Women Ministry and 12 Members of NGOs. These constituted the sample for the study. Results show a considerable increase in women’s participation in peace process compared to the previous years. Women played role in dialogue with insurgency groups for the peace process. Recommendations were that women’s role should further be increased in the peace process.

**Keywords:** Afghanistan, Insurgency, Peace, Peace Process, Women.

**Introduction:** The three decades of civil war in Afghanistan has affected the major aspects of civilians’ life, particularly women. This has negatively impacted on access to opportunities, participation in social and political life of the society and so many other aspects of their life.

The Government of Afghanistan, in a resolution issued by the United Nations Security Council in 2000, calls on those countries who are members of the United Nations Security Council to take strong measures to ensure the participation of women in peace processes. This means that governments should put in more effort to secure and remove all forms of violence against women.

Increasing the number of women in both national and international peace process, and to ensure equal participation of women in institutions and decision-making, and the strengthening of women’s protection within the framework of human rights law, were among the issues that noted in the Security Council resolution. Considering the statements of the international community and other issues, the role of women in peace building and stability of a country is key. This is true because women’s population in every country constitutes almost half of that country’s population, making their presence and participation key in successful peace building process. Additionally, Bala in 2016 argues from spiritual perspective of peace that by birth, women are peacemakers and leaders. They take active role in maintaining peace and harmony, which are building blocks for developing peace culture in families and societies as a whole [1].

Therefore, this paper attempts to clarify how far the Afghanistan government has been concerned with the statements of the Security Council and the

international community, placing women in various aspects such as social, political and, especially, in its peace processes. In this research effort has been made to examine the role of women in the peace process in Afghanistan at different levels of decision-making, planning, peace plan design, and other specific peace-building programs. Similarly, the role of women in the peace building and peace dialogue and the invitation of insurgencies groups to civilian life have also been assessed.

**Objective of Study:** The general objective of the study is to assess the various roles played by women in Afghanistan towards the peace building process.

- To examine the role of women in peace process in Afghanistan.

**Research Methodology:** Based on the objectives of the study, the triangulation of data collection, data generation and data analysis were used to complete the study. Interview, observation and questioner were employed to obtain the required data. Respondents selected for the interview purpose includes: 5 instructors, 15 Members of Peace council, 18 Member of Women Ministry and 12 Members of NGOs. These constituted the sample for the study; which is 50. Finally coding, categorizing and classifying the data has been analyzed and reported based on the objectives of the study. Descriptive statistics, such as bars, graphs were used for the data analysis.

**Literature Review:** Women right received a major push within the national circles of Afghanistan in the year 2001. This means that before 2001, women rights were not given much consideration at the national level. This means that, after 2001, women in Afghanistan can now social, political, and cultural positions within the society. A lot of conferences were organized to help and co-operate with Afghanistan:

such as the Bonn conference, London conferences, Tokyo Conferences and some other conferences. These conferences discussed about responsibility mechanisms for the promotion of women's rights and the creation of an enabling environment for gender equality [2].

These conferences developed a strategic and action plan for gender mainstreaming in the reconstruction of Afghanistan. This has guaranteed women's participation in the work of reconstruction and peace building. Two women participated in the Bonn conference in Afghanistan. Subsequently, Dr. Sima Samar was appointed as Minister in charge of women affairs in Afghanistan [4]. This marked a bold step towards the promotion of women in the political position in Afghanistan.

According to Marrillet, High Peace Council (HPC), during the Presidency of Hamid Karzai, had 9 women appointees out of the 70 appointees, representing 13 percent. Those women had previously played a useful role and had a potential to provide expertise to the core national process. The High peace council and government of Afghanistan have created different Peace Councils in different Provinces of Afghanistan. Women have been active in the Provincial committees [3].

Now women with ample knowledge are given the chance to take part in the Peace Committees throughout the country. Women participation is changing and the presence of women has increased, because the United Nations supports women's involvement in conflict resolution [3].

Women have been promoted in Afghanistan over the past ten years from the intervention of the international community, women right and the government of Afghanistan. In this case Jalal made the following comments. These are:

*"First... [there was a numerical increase of] 20 percent ... of women's participation in security service delivery over a period of 10 years ;*

*Second point,... [an annual reduction in violence against women steadily reduced within the society]... , both ...private and public... [circles].; and*

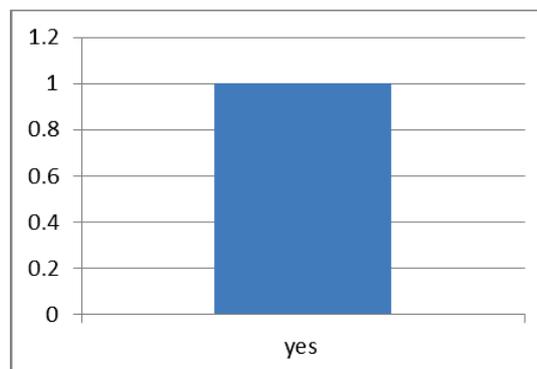
*Third, progressive increase in the number of women actively participating in peace processes and promoting peace, justice, human rights at the national and community levels" [5].*

**Analysis and Discussion: Proportion of Women's Participation in Peace Process:** Data shows the low participation of the women in peace process in Afghanistan. About 92 percent of the respondents marked the absence of women in peace process. There are a series of causes which restricts women in taking part in peace process.

Low number of the women in peace high council, absence of women in the structure of political parties, low presence of women in governmental bodies and

absence of women in insurgency groups are among the most causes of low proportion of women in peace process.

Traditional political system of Afghanistan does not allow the women to take part in political parties, particularly, high levels of authorities. Illiteracy and lower capacity of women in general is also another major cause restricting women involvement in peace process.



**Figure 5: Proportion of Women Participation in Peace Process**

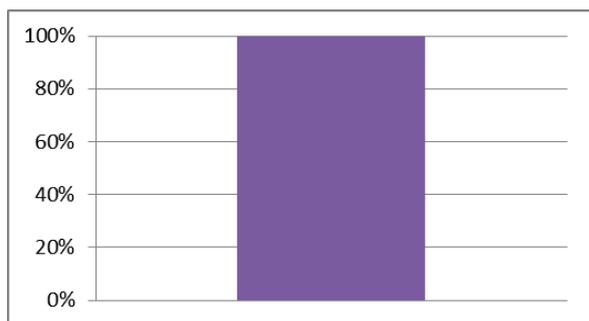
Source: field data, 2017

**Role of women in DDR & DAIAG: disarmament, Demobilization reintegration and Disarmament of Irresponsible Armed Groups:** Similarly, no data ranked the role of women in Disarmament, Demobilization & Reintegration (DDR) process taken place in Afghanistan. The DDR program was mostly to focus on the previous military parties of Afghanistan.

Exactly the DDR process in Afghanistan started in first October of 2003. At that time 62,271 people were disarmed and 7,550 joined the demobilization program, accepted the peace process and strengthened the new Afghanistan National Army. The main phase of DDR started in 2004 where 8,551 combatants were disarmed and 7,550 people admitted the demobilization and peace process. They then announced to start a new life. Similarly 2005 was the last years for the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration, as of November of 2005 the last Afghanistan National Army unite were demobilized

The disarmament of irresponsible armed groups or DAIAG program began in January 2005, with two-purposes. First, disarmament will eliminate illegal armed groups. Other forms of interaction with non-custodial armed groups through the implementation of the law interact with the community rather than helping people in general [6].

In these two major programs, there was no presence of women. Most of the previous warlords and guerrillas were men [7].

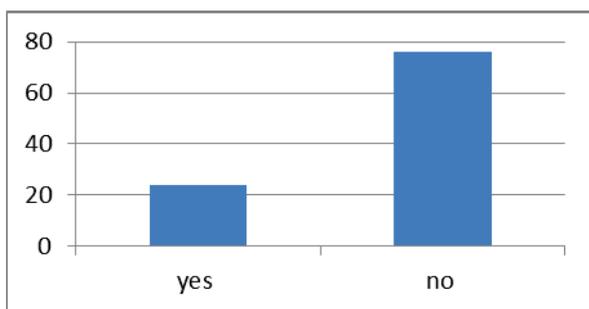


**Figure 6: Role of women in DDR & DAIAG**

Source: field data, 2017

**Successfulness of women in Peace Process:**

According to the previous data shows a very low rate of women participation in the relevant process. There is no doubt about the lower success and achievements of women in this regard. Presence of women brings effectiveness and success. Data report only 24 percent of the respondents supports success of women in peace process, which seems to be really close to the reality of peace scenario in Afghanistan.



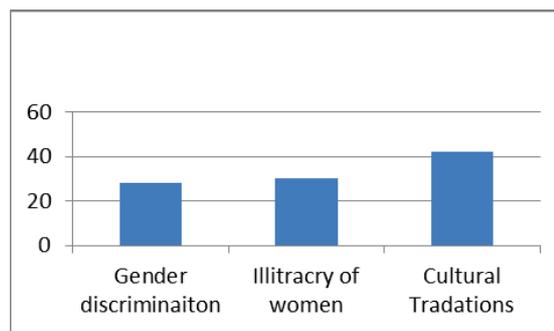
**Figure 7: Successfulness of women in Peace Process**

Source: field data, 2017

**Reasons of less participation of women in Peace Process:**

As has already been stated, there are major reasons to count as restriction against women in participating in the peace process. Almost the equivalence of gender discrimination, illiteracy of women and traditional culture were ranked as the major reasons for less participation of women. These factors were considered as major reason. However, other prominent reasons, such as absence of women in political parties, insurgency groups and organizational absence of women: which are among the most important reasons restricting women.

In all parts of Afghanistan’s socio-political and cultural structures, women have no equal presence: According to Oxfam case study *“the existing tribal, cultural and ethnic enmities are compounded by discrimination against women”*[8]



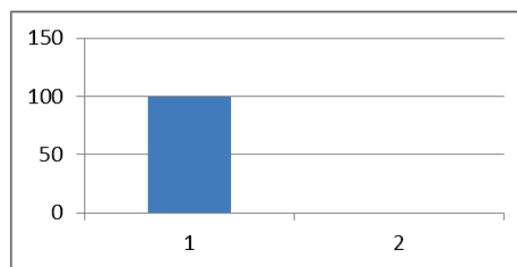
**Figure 8: Reasons of Less Participation Of Women in Peace Process**

Source: field data, 2017

**Equal Opportunities for M/W in Peace Building and Peace Process:**

Recently the opportunities for women involvement in socio-political life of Afghanistan have increased. There are more opportunities for women, but historically Afghan women were ignored to take part in political life. As an example, 25 % of the total parliamentary seats have been reserved for women. Political parties are encouraging women to take membership in their parties but still there is a long way for women to access equal opportunities.

Actually there are reasons for less participation which provides better opportunities for men to be involved in political processes than women. Women due to illiteracy, traditional culture, gender discrimination and absence to the political bodies are contributory factors for unequal opportunities. The Figure 9 clearly shows the absence of equal opportunities for women due to reasons listed in figure 8.



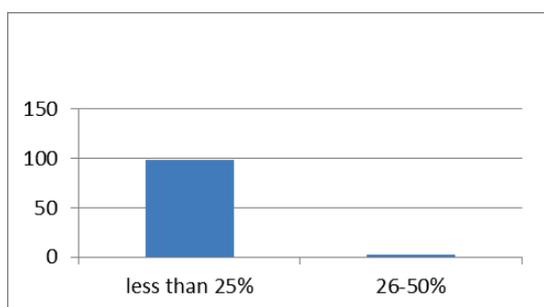
**Figure 9: Equal Opportunities of M/W in Peace Building and Peace Process**

Source: field data, 2017

**Women’s presence in Peace Process :**

Peace council data, according to the data presented by the High Peace Council of Afghanistan, women represents only 21 percent of all peace council membership in Kabul, which is a really low rate. Similarly the data also represents less than 25 percent of women’s presence in peace process. In most authorities and bodies, women symbolically are present and peace council is not excluded. It seems that due to pressure of international community and women activists, the peace council included 21

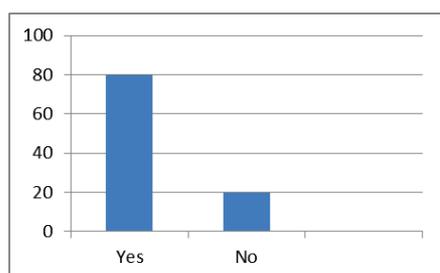
percent of women in their administrative and policy levels. Several opportunities are there to encourage women to participate actively and contribute to the debates. The international community, including Canada, should consult Afghanistan women and should use appropriate incentives, including conditional aid, to ensure that women's rights is granted in all peace negotiation. Critical mass of reprehensive in women should be included in all peace and policy process. And also the international community supporting National Action Plan of women, peace and security should be integrated in the national policies to ensure the full implementation of UNSCR 1325 and 1889. Afghanistan: pathways to peace.



**Figure 10: Women presence in Peace Process**  
Source: field data, 2017

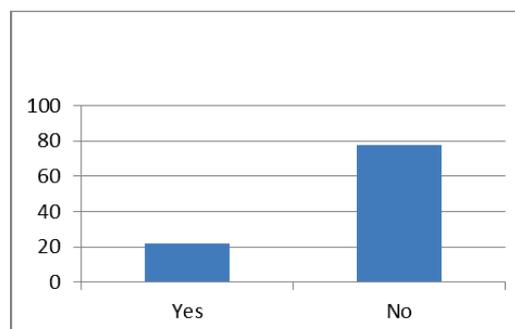
**Role of women in Peace Building:** There was a question developed to address the overall role of women in Peace Building. This question further was categorized in three sub questions including role of women in planning level, role of women at consulting level and their role in dialogue level.

Most of the respondents highlighted role of women mostly in consultation. It means that women are mostly involved in consultation level where major plans and dialogues takes place by men. This also shows the symbolic and complementary role of women in peace process. Since the planning and dialogue makes the major levels and involvement of women. However, the presence of women is low at such levels.



**Figure 10: Role of Women in Peace Consultation**  
Source: field data, 2017

The final question: was the role of women to be late for peace reasons? Most respondents stated that women did not play a very prominent role in the peace building lately. But I had an interview with Dr. Habiba Sarabi head of the peace Strategy committee in High Peace council. She stated that I was present and I played an active role in the peace agreement between government and Gulbuddin Hekmatyar.



**Figure 11: Recent Role of Women in Peace Building**  
Source: field data, 2017

**Conclusions:** Promotion of women's right begun actively in the year 2001 in Afghanistan. From this time, women's right has been supported by both international bodies and the government of Afghanistan. All these efforts are to promote the active participation of women in various area, however, this has not yielded much impact in terms of women participation in the peace process. This study seeks to assess the state of women's participation in peace process in Afghanistan. To date, the national peace council has only eleven female members out of 50.

As a result, women's role in the peace process in Afghanistan, in all provinces, has not been uniform. In some provinces, women were actively involved in provincial committees, while this is not so in other Provinces. For example, in Kabul, Bamiyan, Mazar-Sahrief, Herat provinces women participations are active. But in many provinces of Afghanistan, women do not play a role in the peace process. Similarly, data ranked the role of women in Disarmament; Demobilization and Reintegration have not been active. Because at the one hand, Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration program mostly focused on the previous military parties of Afghanistan.

When asked the question, "why is the presence of women low in the peace process?". Respondents said that women's participation in the peace process has been low for the following reasons: Almost all parts of Afghanistan's socio-political and cultural structures, women have no equal presence: According to Oxfam's case study, the existing tribal, cultural and ethnic enmities are compounded by discrimination

against women. In the latest, the peace agreement signed between the government and the Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, the head of peace strategy committee of the High Peace Council Dr. Habiba Sarabi on behalf of the Afghan women and High Peace Council, was present at the signing of the agreement. Recently, opportunities for women's participation in political and social area have increased, and there are more opportunities for women. As an example, there are 25% reserved parliament seats for women now and political parties are encouraging women to take membership in their parties. However, results have not been encouraging.

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Ali Juma Hamdad is Phd Student,  
Department Of Sociology, Veer Narmad South Gujarat University, Um Road,  
395007, Surat, Gujarat State, India