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The Glass Ceiling and Challenges Which Women Posed to Have Presences in Political Leaderships in Afghanistan

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Abstract

This study evaluate the challenges posed to women's participation in Afghans' leadership, it's like a glass ceiling that prevents their presence at the top organizational level of the national entities. The aim of this research is to recognize the mentioned challenges and propose precise solutions on those regarded. The research is conducted based on disk research method and have gone through first hand highly accredited existing national and international documentaries, and the researches which are conducted by central statistics office of Afghanistan (CSO), independent human right commission of Afghanistan, Afghanistan research and evaluation unit (AREU), integrity watch of Afghanistan and other related academic articles and journals. The study concludes that, despite the efforts made in recent years, the presence of women on different hierarchical level of entities and leaderships steps are less and symbolic, and the key factors regarding to those could be cultural and educational obstacles and as well as security challenges. On this study the researchers on first steps tried to identify the obstacles and then proposed applicable realistic suggestions based on Afghanistan's social context.

Keywords: glass ceiling, Afghan's women, leadership, challenges and participations

Introduction

Since Taliban regime collapse in 2001, many efforts have been made to restore the neglected rights of women by the Afghan government, in collaboration with the international community. The goal was to build a supportive atmosphere toward gender equality in governmental organizations and bureaus. Accordingly, the international community declared its strong advocacy regarding this matter. Afghan government asserted its allegiance toward many conventions supporting women rights including Afghanistan Constitution enactment. In conformity to the country's Constitution, lots of other laws have been passed aiming to support women such as Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in May 2003, and the enactment of the 2009 Violence Against Women Act and the National Action Plan for Afghan Women (NAPWA) 2009 and 2018.

Despite the aforementioned legislations by the government and parliament of this country and the immense support of the international community for women's access to their rights, building the foundation and the enforcement of those undertakings have been facing various challenges and complications. As if governmental organizations seem like a glass ceiling to women, and they can only raise to a certain level and they still have not achieved their desired status in society. According to the statistics released by the Central Statistics Organizations of Afghanistan in 2018, women's participation at decision-making in the women-pertaining governmental organizations is 10.7%, in the private sector 9.6%, in governmental organizations' departments 10.3% and in non-governmental offices is relatively high, i.e. 20.3% (Bureau of Statistics 2018).

The relatively low presence of women in leadership in various areas of society has attracted the attention of international institutions in recent years, and lately, there have been a number of recent efforts by global institutions to empower women in the field of leadership, such as the launch of the "Promote" project which will fund rudimentary programs to empower Afghan women in the fields of leadership, governance, economics and equality of women in years 2015 to 2024. The purpose of this program is to support more than 75,000 women across Afghanistan by providing training programs and job opportunities in government, the private sector, and civil society. Moreover, foundation of Women's Leadership Network under supervision of Independent Administration Reform and Civil Services Commission in 2013, 2013' Gender Equality Strategy Plan by United Nations Development Program (UNDP), Ministry of Women's Affairs establishment in 2002, establishment of gender department in each ministry in 2004, women assignment to executive positions, and selective departments' apportionment national and provincial levels are outcomes of these efforts.

Despite such efforts, as noted previously, the role of women in government departments as managers of organization as well as political, economic and social leaders in Afghan society is still minor, and the role of the very limited number of

women at those positions have been dubbed symbolic. The authors of this research seek to address the question “What are the challenges Afghan women confront toward their presence in political leadership levels in the country?” and through investigating such challenges and the Afghan society’s situation offer practical solutions to these issues, so that they’ll contribute in improvement of women’s social and political status in leadership as well as in elimination of challenges they confront.

Research Methodology

This is a qualitative research. Extensive library studies and research have been conducted on women’s political leadership and participation, women’s contribution in peace, and their role in the security system. Hence information collection tool is the use of printed documents such as those published in the most prestigious scientific journals as well as documents related to the Central Statistics Organization of Afghanistan, the Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, the Afghanistan Watch and the Human Rights Commission of Afghanistan.

Research Background

Through reviewing online libraries and databases for women’s leadership challenges in Afghanistan, the authors have not found a scholarly research article and an independent scientific resource exclusively regarding this matter; however, on the topics of women in Afghanistan and Afghan women's access to educational and political rights, some articles have been written, which can generally indicate the situation of women's leadership in Afghanistan and the challenges they face, some of which are outlined below:

During his research titled “Equal Rights, but Unequal Opportunities” at the Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, Oliver Love (2012) had emphasized that women still face many challenges in making their voices heard nationally and locally, and lots of work needed to be done so that women could really be as involved as men in the Afghan political process. He pleaded Afghans and the international community to join forces to preserve and maintain the achievements of the past ten years and to further expand it mutually. In his research “Empowering Women in Afghanistan” in 2013, Gansh blamed social and cultural environment to be the major obstacle to women's empowerment in the political arena and emphasized the removal of such barriers. Research by the AREU in 2013 indicated that while the achievements of promoting gender equality and women's rights are widely acknowledged, Afghanistan's progress in gender equality is low and the prospects on current developments in the education and public wellbeing are better than economic and social development, leadership and peace and security. Acting differently relative to others in 2015, Shayan regarded rigid traditional and religious beliefs as one of the main hindrances to women's growth and success in Afghanistan. He also suggested that variations among women form different Afghan tribes be considered as well. He believes that women’s status is not similar in everyplace; instead in some places

women can freely prosper and pursue their education, whereas in other places there exist numerous impediments before women. In order to increase women's literacy, he recommended that the government send female teachers to remote areas and thereby increase women's awareness. Unlike Shayan (2015), in her research entitled "Women and Elections, Facilitating and Deterring Factors" Orhala Nemat (2015) highlighted the issue of security and further dubbed it as the major obstacle to women's political participation in Afghanistan. She concurred with the position of Yassin Rasouli and Timur Beig in their paper published by the Afghanistan Watch in 2013, since their findings also indicated that security threats target women particularly the ones involved in economic, educational, and training affairs, and its genuine solution is to ensure women's security. Off course security and stability establishment without considering human and women rights doesn't really mean anything. One of the suitable strategies is to engage women more frequently in peace talks, which ought to be conditional on ensuring women's rights. Khaleda Mashraqi (2016) also named barriers to women's access to higher education and concluded that the problems faced by women in higher education are significant but can be resolved. She postulated women's access to financial affairs and average social status and family's support for women's economic affairs to be essential, and emphasized that if Afghan women overcome these obstacles, they can help the process of rebuilding Afghanistan as they can improve the lives of themselves, their families and the society as well, and these women may evolve into dexterous leaders in society. In 2018 following the conference "The Role of Women in Justice and Human Rights," Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission announced that even though with the advent of a new chapter and human rights activists' constant struggle, public status has changed, the achievements in this field are by no means satisfactory, and the public space is still generally confined in most parts of the country, especially in remote villages and areas, and women cannot participate in public decision-making and social and political activities in their surroundings (Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, 2018). In its publication "The Status of Men and Women in Afghanistan", the Central Statistics Organization of Afghanistan also elucidated the impacts of women's high security and women's political leadership and participation. The findings of this study revealed the low economical-social status of women in Afghanistan to be an indicator of serious challenges to human development in the country, and the panacea to such impediment is to raise women awareness and also to tackle existing challenges, particularly the security and cultural ones (Bureau of Statistics, 2018).

Theoretical Principles

One of the theories exploited in describing women's confrontation to hurdles and challenges ahead is the glass ceiling theory. The term "glass ceiling" was first employed in Wall Street Magazine in 1986 to describe the invisible barriers that hinder women on the path to career advancement. In 1990, Cutter et al. proved the presence of glass ceiling against women to imply the limited number of women and

were categorized into two main possible socioeconomic and organizational causes, and it was determined that gender discrimination in work distribution in Tanzania is mainly due to patriarchal culture, proficiency, and educational status. The data revealed the number of educated women is lower than that of men generally due to unequal employment. Moreover, by virtue of its dominant culture, women are mostly engaged in low-level or temporary jobs and in also in housewifery. On the other hand, the investigated organizational reasons mainly stem from power discrimination in women's job promotion, the most predominant of which are the existence of hierarchies and vertical relationships, and lack of organizational justice and legal requirements in employment throughout this country. The repercussion of these misogynies are psychological complications for women with apathy, mental and physical illnesses, and occupational burnout being paramount.

The predicaments that Afghan women confront in management and leadership in organizations are dubbed as the main evidence of glass ceiling. Women have scare presence in the country's top management levels. The culture and this society's perception of women have resulted in some forms of discrimination and misogyny in society which leads to women's deprivation of their rights. The aforementioned misogynies will deprive women of their rudimentary rights and even impact their personal lives. In this country, women's participation in society is prohibited and their engagement in social work activities is considered to be in contradiction to society's ethics and norms. Politics, administration, and leadership of social affairs have always been considered as a masculine profession, women have widely been left out of leadership positions. Although after Taliban regime's collapse, there have been opportunities for women to participate in political, social, and leadership affairs to some extent, still there exist numerous challenges before Afghan women toward management and leadership.

Among current challenges for Afghan women, in terms of women leadership, they can be broadly divided into cultural, security, and literacy challenges, which will be addressed in detail below.

The Cultural Challenge

Culture is a collection of society's core elements of attitude, vision, practice and belief. In cultural belief, everything that exists in society as a norm is one of the nation's cultural elements. Cultural challenge seems to be one of the major challenges Afghan women face at leadership levels in the country. In this country, the majority's perception of women is that there is no need for women to enter the realm of management. Even in case of education, pursuing education until 12th grade seems adequate and its continuation is regarded as waste of time. Based on this perception, marriage, breeding, taking care of family, and doing house chores are the mere responsibilities of women. Women may not leave the house in accordance to this belief. Research has shown that because of this belief, men pursue sexual abuse of women and women are derided during higher education (Mashraqi, 2016). Moreover,

in 2018, according to the study conducted by the Promundo Global Institute, 65% of men are of the conviction that women are not capable of leadership because they are very emotional. Respondents also disagreed that women could be police officers, judges, and religious leaders. They recommended the development of gender equality laws through awareness-raising campaigns and the identification of progressive religious elements regarding this matter and also promotion of debates concerning a more equitable definition of masculinity (<https://promundoglobal.org>). One major reason underlying such notions may be that it hasn't been long since the Taliban's dominance in the country. Throughout that period, restraining women's freedom was justified under the pretext of protecting women's infidelity and respecting their families from the moral stigma and dangers of society (Ario, 2013). When Taliban confiscated power in 1996, they enforced strict laws on women; not only were women deprived of membership to government office, but also pursuing education even in secondary and elementary school was an arduous task for them (Carlson & Mansouri, 2009). It should be acknowledged that the country has not liberated from Taliban views thoroughly and Taliban agenda still has more or less of its own proponents in government agencies.

As a result, the rigidities in society that stem from both tribal traditions and remnants of Taliban agenda have made the political arena narrower for women. Even though efforts to eradicate these prejudices and deprivations have not been completely ineffective, they have not yet managed to bridge the deep cultural and traditional gap between men and women in Afghan society (Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, 2012).

After the fall of the Taliban government in 2001, many legislations were enacted to assist women in legal matters. Drafting the Constitution has been a major accomplishment for women. The Article 22 of the Constitution explicitly states that "Afghan citizens, including women and men, have equal rights before the law". The Afghan National Development Strategy also emphasizes gender equality, declaring it a common and significant issue in all security, governmental and developmental sectors in various arenas and declares "The vision of government is to constitute a peaceful and progressive nation, where women and men possess equal security, rights and opportunities in all aspects of life. This strategy provides a framework for a comprehensive integration of all gender issues in every part, so that attention would be dedicated to women's status in society, their socioeconomic situation, and their promotion opportunities." (Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, 2012).

Nevertheless, in terms of law enforcement, women still face numerous discriminations and deprivations. Women encounter gender inequalities in government structure and collaboration in the country's social, political, and financial activities. As reported by the United Nations Human Development Report, Afghanistan is still very low on the list of countries in terms of gender development

(United Nations, 2017). According to the 2009 reports of the Central Statistics Organization of Afghanistan men constituted 80 percent of all government employees and the remaining 20 percent were women, while in 2010, 82 percent of all government employees were men and only 18 percent women (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2015). This census indicates that the presence of women in government has been declining, and the government has been crippled to eradicate gender inequalities not even at its organizations, let alone the society. Although the government is obliged to take action and coordinate pragmatic proceedings toward gender inequality elimination, according to the findings of Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, among the central and provincial government agencies, merely about 52 percent of the governmental departments possess sections created particularly to protect women rights in their structure and more than 48 percent of them lack this part (same). The current government has pledged to provide women with up to 30 percent of the top positions in decision-making, policymaking and legislation in the judicial, security, economic and service sectors by 2020 in order to promote gender equality and gender mainstreaming. (Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission 2018). However, there is a long way from promise to action. Will it really succeed in fulfilling its promises? The passage of time will provide the best judgement regarding this matter.

The Security Challenge

One of the paramount factors that serve as a glass ceiling for women toward political leadership is the lack of adequate security at national levels. The deteriorating security situation in Afghanistan has gradually led to the reduction of women's presence in government. The findings of a study by Women and Children Legal Research Foundation (2017) of women's presence in security agencies revealed that women constitute merely 2 percent of these agencies' workforce. Of the 195,000 defense forces, only 1,400 are women, and subsequently, of the 15,000,000 police forces, 3326 are women. The report further discusses sexual harassment against women, especially in security and defense institutions, which is considered a major concern of women within the government (Women and Children Legal Research Foundation, 2017). The absence of sense of security is not restricted to the government, i.e. women are more terrorized by opposition forces. These threats also occasionally lead to assassinations, kidnappings and horrific attacks. In their research in 2009, Felkins and Gall asserted that women in Afghanistan are not secured in expressing their rights freely. For instance, on March 6, 2010, Fawzia Kufi, a member of the House of Representatives, was returning from Jalalabad to Kabul, when she was attacked by gunmen in a region called "Tangi Abrisham".

The fourth issue of the Central Statistics Organization of Afghanistan, titled "The Status of Men and Women in Afghanistan", covers the economic, social and demographic situation of the country, violence against women, women's political, social and economic participation in society and women's higher education. In this

research, security hurdles have been introduced as the major challenges behind women toward their participation in social, economic, political activities and nation-wide decision-makings (Central Statistics Organizations, 2015). The Afghanistan Independent Human rights Commission published a study entitled "Violence Against Women, Its Factors and Roots", which examined the extent of women's participation in decision-making levels and the quality of their presence. The study lucidly accentuated that although the public perception of gender relations among men and women in social relations reflects exclusive respect for women, the Commission's observations and findings manifest other realities. Violence against women is practiced in various forms and it can be claimed that violence against women is a pervasive and undeniable fact in Afghan society and this class is not fully secure in the public space as well as at home. (Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, 2016).

Among the foremost problems with the lack of security for women is the high promises made by statesmen and their failure to actualize them. In 2009, for example, Hamid Karzai passed a law ending the violence against women. Although the ratification of the Convention of Elimination of Violence Against Women was progression in the right direction, the government has not displayed serious commitment to its implementation, and we still witness violence against women every now and then from the media, but no serious measurements have been taken by the government regarding this matter.

The Literacy Challenge

Scarcity of literate women in in the government body can be seen as a glass ceiling in women's leadership. Women have undergone Taliban era during which they were isolated inside houses and remotely observed social evolutions. Many years of their confinement in houses during Taliban era and their inaccessibility to school and university have resulted in a shortage of educated women. Women still face many limitations in education. Traditional misogynist culture, poverty, and insecurity have restrained their educational opportunities. Overall, despite the increase in girl students in recent years, the level of literacy among girls is still very low compared to boys, and the number of boy students is twice that of girls, and two-thirds of children who do not attend school are girls, and girls only constituted less than 18 percent of students in universities and institutions of higher education in 2010 (Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, 2012).

In terms of occupational experience women have evidently less experience relative to their male counterparts in administrative errands. What is referred to as the "work experience" in the Afghan employment system is one of the key criteria for entry into government agencies and is strongly highlighted. Taking "work experience" into account generally confines women's chances of being recruited, especially in high positions and at leadership levels.

Housewifery and family responsibilities of women and upbringing of their offspring are other issues that reduce the presence of women at leadership and management levels. Nurturing children on the one hand and participating in social activities on the other hand are two subjects that Afghan women must pursue individually and essentially. How women can handle these two pivotal responsibilities in a way that they do not harm one another is among the crucial issues worthy of precise contemplation and inspection. In this country, it has long been conventional for men to work outdoors and women to work indoors (Laugh, 2012). This social control system is designed based on the rights and obligations of the two parties, whereby men take responsibility for the household expenses and women take on the responsibility for the indoor environment.

Discussion and Conclusion and

Of what have been discoursed in can be deduced that despite the efforts made in recent years, the presence of a glass ceiling has overshadowed Afghan women's political participation and leadership. The causes of this glass ceiling root back to three major cultural, security, and educational factors, which serve as the main obstacle against women in administrative organizations, and may lead to myriad of problems including economic and psychological complications. The findings of this research nominate cultural challenges as the most dominant reason for glass ceiling and as a deterrent for Afghan women toward leadership. Factors such as the dominance of patriarchal culture in society, people's negative attitudes towards women management, gender discrimination and misogyny, traditional rigidities of Afghan society, constraining external roles of women, are among the main cultural reasons which this study has discovered as challenges women confront toward partnership at Afghanistan leadership levels. To prevail over such predicaments, the authors suggest that international organizations and the Afghan government jointly undertake projects to change the public mindset and build self-confidence in women so that through awareness-raising campaigns, media communications, and authorities and influential leaders' engrossment, they endeavor toward changing people's notion of women's leadership and building self-confidence within women. Recruitment of qualified, experienced, and conscientious crew to implement these projects is pivotal so that its output would be a beneficial program and applicable in society.

The project that the Afghanistan government has launched to promote women's contribution in leadership in state organizations named "Women's Leadership Network" is a positive movement. The contributors in this project have declared its purpose to be not only increase of the presence of women in government departments, but also their contribution to the leadership of these agencies (promoteafghanwomen.org). The plan is to implement the project in all provinces of Afghanistan, although in most provinces and rural areas these schemes do not seem to be effectual mainly due to the stereotypical notion of women, since undertaking

governmental positions by women in rural regions is uncommon. However, it is possible that the project will be implemented in villages in accordance to the rural coverage and through taking rural culture into consideration. Therefore, this project is in fact a positive work and can be a substantial step in this direction.

Security challenge and the lack of sustainable security in the country have been cited as the second major challenge Afghan women encounter in leadership positions. Terrorism, kidnappings, terror attacks and other security threats deprive women of their motivation to participate in the country's leadership levels and hinder their path in order to decrease their presence at the country's management. To address such complication, the authors propose that the government strictly enforce laws on abductors, assassins and terrorists in order to prevent these incidents from escalating. Meanwhile, the government should implement a joint comprehensive security plan to assure the security of women leaders in Afghanistan, so that they can pursue their occupation as leaders with equanimity and serve as role models for other women to contribute in leadership levels with confidence. Increasing the number of police forces is the third positive step that the government can take regarding this matter. What has been done in recent years is a positive action, yet not enough. The government has recently announced the number of Afghan police force to be 150 thousand individuals, of which only 3326 are women. This number does not seem proportionate for a population of 30 million. (Bureau of Statistics, 2018).

Scarcity of literate and expert women is another challenge which impedes women's presence at the country's leadership levels resembling a glass fence. This implies that there are not enough proficient and qualified women in the country to participate in the process of country's construction and to occupy positions announced by the government.

As for the solution, it is better to distinguish Kabul as the capital, from other remote provinces. The capital of Kabul has achieved some relative prosperity in terms of women's education, meaning that women can access education if they desire. However, the major problem exists in remote provinces and suburbs where women confront fundamental problems in accessing education. The present study confirms Shayan's suggestion (2015) that the government should strive to promote women's literacy by sending female teachers to remote areas, but the propositions of this study will differ as they are brought later on.

Most women encounter two major impediments in secluded regions in accordance to a research by the Afghanistan Ministry of Education: attitudinal and cultural barriers (negative attitude toward schools) and socio-environmental barriers (lack of inviolability), each of which contribute to women's inclusion and relinquishment of education (Ministry of Education, 2014).

In case of the first obstacle, political volition reinforcement by eminent elites and authorities toward female literacy seems an indispensable issue. That means if the

girls education appears principal to local authorities and grandees, majority of girls' problems will be resolved concerning literacy. Thus, the government ought to be meticulous both in appointing authorities and also in contriving the selection of local grandees who strive toward this matter. In addition, establishment of public councils and magnifying the roles of scholars can assist in the resolution to some extent. Due to their traditional influence among locals, scholars hold an unprecedented status. On the other hand, the main reason underlying girls non-attendance to schools is the local scholars' lethargy. They usually encourage girls to attend traditional classes in mosques and religious schools. Hence, the foundation of a local council, which places religious scholars alongside security officials and ethnic influencers, paves the way toward encouraging girls to education. This council should firstly monitor the schools educational and training applications and secondly identify and implement the necessary measurements for social security.

Employment of tele-education system can serve as another solution to girls' education predicaments. Although it seems arduous to set up online systems in houses of people most of which living in poverty, a long-term action by provincial administrations may be applicable to tackle such problem.

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