Notes from the Policy Briefing on the Nexus of Economic Empowerment and Women, Peace and Security in Afghanistan

March 15, 2017; One UN Hotel, New York, NY

On March 15, 2017, the policy briefing on the *Nexus of Economic Empowerment and Women, Peace and Security in Afghanistan* was held at the One UN Hotel in New York in conjunction with the 61st session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women. The meeting was co-organized by the Global Network of Women Peacebuilders (GNWP), Cordaid, and the Afghan Women’s Network (AWN), in collaboration with the Permanent Missions of Finland and Australia to the UN.

The objectives of the meeting were:

- To present the current situation of Afghan women (specifically at provincial level) and the impact of economic factors on their security situation;
- To promote the effective and transparent implementation of the Afghan National Action Plan (NAP) on UNSCR 1325 through a joint platform consisting of ministerial leaders and representatives of civil society; international organizations as well as donors, and
- To generate support from the international community in formulating strategies to ensure women’s rights including their economic rights are protected in ongoing peace negotiations; and reflected in ensuing peace agreements.

Opening Remarks

Ms. Ann-Sofie Stude, Finland’s National Focal Point for Women, Peace and Security, in her opening remarks, reiterated Finland’s support for the implementation of Afghanistan’s NAP 1325. The efforts by civil society are central to progress. She called for the recognition of the work done by Afghan women in promoting peace in the country. According to her, these notable works can be enhanced through women’s economic empowerment which is key to achieving sustainable peace. However, we cannot talk about women economic empowerment without first ensuring peaceful coexistence in Afghanistan. Thus, there is need for the international community to support the efforts of women focused organizations towards promoting participation of women in society and in the implementation of the Afghanistan NAP.

Monitoring Women, Peace and Security Initiative

Following Ms. Stude’s opening remarks, Ms. Nasima Omari, Senior Programme Officer at Cordaid-Afghanistan, and a former Board member of Afghan Women’s Network (AWN) spoke about the Monitoring Women, Peace and Security Initiative (MWPS) and the use of the barometer strategy for monitoring. The MWPS enables local Afghan women to get their voices heard on public issues that affect their lives and enables them to interact with local policymakers. The barometer allows them to analyze data on WPS, as well as online databases to create advocacy strategies aimed at local stakeholders. One of the findings the MWPS is that in 15 provinces, the economic situation of the household is the second most important factor impacting on conflict and insecurity in women’s lives. Ms. Omari also noted that in 2016, during the first phase of the barometer, 41% of women mentioned that security had an effect on their psychological well-being.
Ms. Omari highlighted the following challenges in responding to women’s economic empowerment:

- Displaced people, specifically women are plagued with fear due to the deteriorating security situation;
- The understanding of correlation between economic empowerment and peace seems to be missing; and
- Weak understanding or appreciation that Afghanistan has a diverse culture where experiences of vulnerability differ from person to person and from region to region. Therefore, there cannot be a blanket solution to the security situation and the implementation of the WPS resolutions.

Ms. Omari proposed the following recommendations:

- Ensure that interventions are feasible and realistic in order to support the economic empowerment needs of women [across the country] and at all levels;
- Facilitate processes by which local women can have access to policymakers in order for them to advocate for more coherent response to insecurity and women’s lack of economic opportunities;
- Ensure a more substantive role for women during peace talks that is beyond gender issues.


**Provincial women’s network**

Mr. Mohammad Omarzad Edrees, Executive Director of EQUALITY for Peace and Democracy (EDP) - Afghanistan spoke about EDP’s work in empowering women and youth to overcome challenges of instability. EDP established 15 provincial women’s networks that have been advocating for the implementation of UNSCR 1325 at the provincial level. The provincial women’s networks are also actively involved in the Monitoring Women, Peace and Security Initiative using the barometer strategy.

The PWN has also organized discussions with elders in Mirzaka and Seyed Karam districts on the impact of excessive dowries on families and communities. [Excessive dowries have resulted into family and community tensions as well as violence against women.] As a result, a Jirga (a traditional gathering of elders) was held with participation of some PWN members. The Jirga members came up with a written agreement to ban high dowry. The agreement also stipulates that those who violate it would be fined. The price of dowry is now much lower in comparison to previous years. Local people welcomed this change.

Women’s economic empowerment equates to women’s personal security and enhances their decision-making capacity. The Afghan government as well as the UN and other multilateral institutions and the private sector should work together to create a secure environment that ensures productive employment and livelihood opportunities for women.

Mr. Edrees underlined the following challenges that EDP has encountered in its work at the provincial level:
Discriminatory customs and traditional laws and practices create difficulties for women to thrive economically. Many are sold as brides. Although some elders have undergone awareness-raising programs about the consequences of dowries this issue persists; and

High levels of poverty and low priority in investing in women’s initiatives and programs that lead to economic gaps.

Mr. Edrees presented the following recommendations:

- Support vocational training for women;
- Invest in infrastructure to reduce poverty and increase women’s access to technology and information related to business and economic empowerment;
- Promote and support gender equality in commercial organizations, government and private sectors; and
- Conduct awareness raising on UNSCR 1325 in schools and universities specifically targeted to the youth.

The full presentation from Mr. Edrees is available here: http://gnwp.org/wp-content/uploads/Mohammad-Omarzad-Edrees-Presentation.pdf

Insights on policies on women’s rights and women’s economic empowerment and the implementation of the NAP on UNSCR 1325

Mr. Ahmad Shaheer Anil, Executive Director of Afghanistan Public Policy Research Organization presented the following statistics that illustrate the lack of economic opportunities among women:

- 36.8% - Percentage of women in employment across the country
- 45.5% - Percentage of women in employment in urban areas where there is greater mobility and some degree of security for women

Mr. Anil explained that policy objectives on gender equality and women’s rights in Afghanistan have not achieved their desired outcomes. This is largely because of ineffective governance and the weakness of women’s institutions that sometimes only play a symbolic role.

Mr. Anil explained the following challenges in implementing policies on women’s rights and women’s economic empowerment and the NAP on UNSCR 1325 in Afghanistan:

- Women’s participation is still very symbolic and not localized, as these roles and positions are set up at the national level and have very little influence at the local level; and
- There is very little participation by women and the WPS agenda is not fully implemented due to the high number of women becoming pregnant at a very young age or dropping out of school due to child marriage.

He put forward the following recommendations:

- Ensure effective and meaningful participation of women through structural and institutional mechanisms in policy reforms and development of new economic policies;
- Establish an inter-ministerial steering committee with civil society representation for effective implementation of NAP and other legislative policies, protecting women’s rights;
• Involve men in every women related interventions; and
• Mainstream NAP in Citizen’s Charter as a localization strategy.

Conclusions

Ms. Mavic Cabrera Balleza, GNWP’s CEO and International Coordinator thanked the Afghan civil society representatives for sharing their work in advocating for women’s economic empowerment and the implementation of the NAP on UNSCR 1325. She reiterated the need to involve men in discussions of the above issues; and in the implementation of the NAP and related policies on women’s rights, gender equality and peace and security. She stressed the importance of establishing a task force or steering committee on the NAP with strong civil society representation. She also underscored the importance of earmarked funding for implementation of the NAP.

Ms. Mavic Cabrera Balleza also shared GNWP’s Localization of UNSCR 1325 and 1820 program as bottom up strategy that could be used to implement the Afghan NAP effectively. The main strategy behind the localization program is the direct engagement with local authorities, traditional leaders, local women leaders, youth leaders, school teachers, IDPs and other vulnerable groups in the implementation of UNSCR 1325 and 1820 in local communities. Local ownership and participation are the underlining principles of the Localization program.

Notes prepared by the Global network of Women Peacebuilders