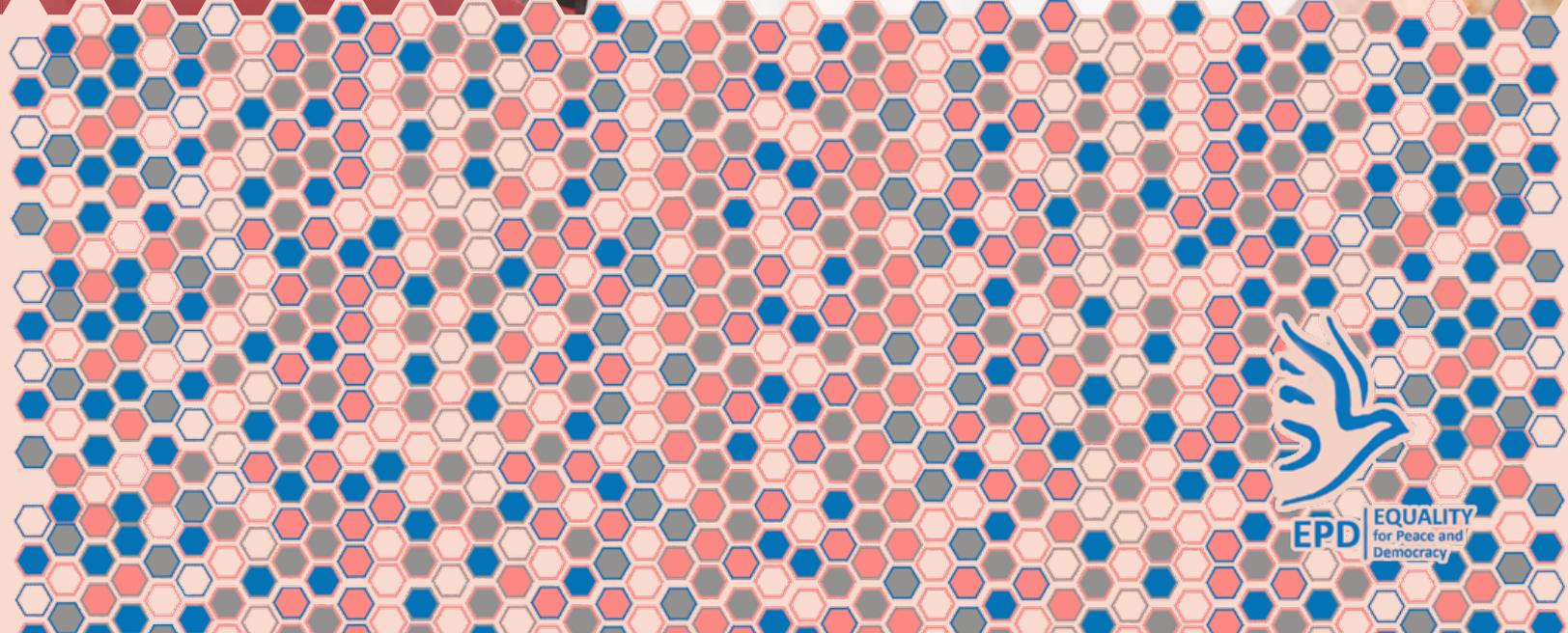




INCREASING WOMEN'S CIVIC PARTICIPATION IN AFGHANISTAN



EPD EQUALITY
for Peace and
Democracy

INCREASING WOMEN'S CIVIC PARTICIPATION IN AFGHANISTAN

AN ENDLINE ASSESSMENT

EQUALITY for Peace and Democracy, EPD 2014



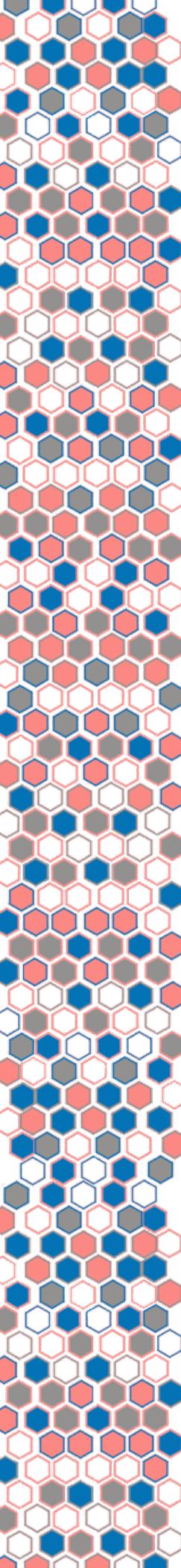


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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

“I am voting as an Afghan woman. It’s the time to show the world that in Afghanistan women want their equality and this is the right time to prove that. Women are half of a society, and if it’s about voting again we all should vote. Afghan women should know that rights never come to you—you have to take them.”

This report presents the findings and conclusions of an end of project evaluation for the Increasing Young Afghan Women’s Civic Participation project, a project funded by the United States Institute for Peace (USIP) in Afghanistan. The project under evaluation was initiated in June 2013 with the aim of increasing young Afghan women’s participation in the 2014 elections through a civic education program with a special focus on young women in the north and south regions of Afghanistan and a capstone National Conference for women from all provinces. The original project design planned activities over a period of 12 months in advance of the April 2014 Presidential Elections.

The main objective of this evaluation is to identify project outcomes and examine project effectiveness. Other objectives include: assessing the change in women’s attitudes, perceptions, and behaviors in civic participation after the regional and national dialogues; collecting the views of the participants on the conferences; assessing women’s perceptions on the elections after the project, before and after the first round of the elections; identifying factors external to the project influencing its impact to inform future project design; compiling the challenges, opportunities, perceptions, and recommendations from all project activities to measure against participants’ pre- and post-elections interviews and formulate recommendations for future projects and programs related to women’s civic awareness.

Evaluating this project is of critical importance as the 2015 Parliamentary elections approach and more projects on women’s participation in elections and civic engagement are undertaken. This evaluation serves as a tool for identifying what works, what doesn’t work, and what is still needed to promote Afghan women’s full and meaningful participation in elections.

The methodology of this evaluation has three key components: review of existing project documents and reports, post-project interviews with project participants prior to the first round of the 2014 presidential elections, and post-project interviews with project participants after the first round of the 2014 presidential elections. Considering that quantitative indicators regarding women’s participation in elections could not be conclusively tied to the project activities, a qualitative approach was taken to the evaluation.

This evaluation concluded that the project did contribute to the exceptional level of women’s participation in the 2014 elections, which constituted a 67% increase in women’s voter turnout from 2009. All of the women interviewed before and after the elections indicated that they would or had participated in the elections, and all similarly said that they would or did vote. Of the women interviewed, every single participant interviewed before the elections felt that the project would increase women’s participation in the elections, and every participant interviewed after the elections

felt that the project had a direct impact on the high turnout of women in the first round of the elections. Participants felt very confident that the conference had a tangible multiplier effect, where participants who had received information at the central level had returned to their provinces and shared what they had learned and experienced with hundreds more women. Several felt that the conference promoted an understanding of women's role, rights and responsibility in the elections, and many felt that the experience had helped them make a better decision on who to vote for in the interest of promoting and protecting women's rights.

The project succeeded at providing a forum for discussing challenges to civic and political participation for women and developing recommendations for key stakeholders. Some of the key issues identified were: security, patriarchy and gender-based discrimination, illiteracy, distance to polling centers, and a lack of trust in elections bodies and the transparency of the elections process. The participants were also very engaged and involved in not only identifying challenges and problems, but also in identifying solutions and recommendations. As an outcome of the National Conference, participants contributed to the Resolution on Women's Civic and Political Participation, which outlined the position of women regarding participation in elections and provided concrete recommendations for stakeholder groups. Nearly all of these groups were represented at the National Conference, and were able to directly engage with women and hear their concerns and recommendations in their own voices.

A key success of the conference and regional activities was connecting women from all parts of Afghanistan to one another, and connecting women from the provinces with women civil society and political leaders and activists at the central level. A total of 200 participants attended the two-day National Conference on Women and Elections, of which 68 were participants who were brought from the provinces to attend. The women interviewed for the final evaluation independently identified face-to-face, personal interaction with policymakers, politicians, and women role models and activists as a key takeaway of the conference. A number of women felt that meeting other women from across Afghanistan and hearing the personal stories of women

who have been successful in politics and activism for women's rights was motivating and inspired them to pursue their own goals and achievements, particularly regarding asserting their rights and responsibility by participating in elections. Many of the participants felt that having personal interaction with presidential candidates was a highlight of the conference, and enabled them to make better decisions on who to vote for and gain an understanding of each candidate's position on and intention to promote and protect the rights of women. However, there was very little feedback on interaction with elections officials, indicating that this panel discussion had less of an impact for the participants in the conference.

For this project, the dialogue and conference format proved more effective at creating an opportunity for women to relay their priorities to actors who can influence political and social policy. In the first regional activity, the format was a training, which did not give women the opportunity to actively relay their priorities and depended too much on independent follow-up by training participants. However, the second regional activity was structured as a dialogue, which concluded with a press conference that was widely covered by seven television channels and four radio stations where participants could raise their own voices and read the statement they had prepared during the two days of dialogue outlining their priorities and concerns. At the National Conference, a number of key stakeholders participated as facilitators or panel members. Each panel discussion was followed by a question and answer session that allowed anyone participating in the conference to raise any issue or concern or ask a question directly to officials, including elections officials, government officials, presidential candidates, and representatives from the international community. The participation of high-level officials was secured to ensure that women were able to directly interact with and relay their priorities to those who had the ability to directly influence political and social policy.

The evaluation found a notable lack of trust in presidential candidates and the elections system. At the National Conference, each candidate's commitments to women was produced, and participants issued recommendations to the candidates in the Resolution.

However, despite this engagement and the positive feedback regarding direct interaction with presidential candidates, it appears that mistrust of the candidates and their willingness to follow through on their commitments to women remained low, and many women still felt that there was a significant risk that they would be forgotten by whoever won the election. Some women suggested that follow-up on the commitments was necessary to ensure that the candidates' promises had meaning.

This evaluation concludes that this project achieved results with long-term sustainability, through the information that was disseminated to women at the National Conference and then more widely distributed in their provinces that will serve as a source of knowledge and motivation for upcoming elections,

and especially through the personal connections that several participants independently built with other women from across Afghanistan. These independent networks will serve as a valuable source for support and learning for civil society activists and women working for women's rights across Afghanistan.

Evaluation Team:

The evaluation was carried out by EPD's Technical Advisor and one Research Officer. It was conducted in the period from March to July 2013.

Team Leader: Marie Huber

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INTRODUCTION

“Conducting such events like the Women and Elections conference is a way to motivate women. It really increases their self-confidence. They start believing in themselves for the future and they find themselves in a better condition. Most of them know now about their values in their family and societies, and after meeting successful women from parliament and many other places, they get more ideas how to be successful in their lives.”

Despite the constitutional quota mandating women’s participation in the Afghan parliament, women remain an underrepresented group in Afghan politics. Though women made up 40 percent of the electorate in the 2010 elections, as voters they tend to be more excluded than men due to significantly lower literacy levels, and less information about the process. Separate polling facilities attempt to ensure a minimum level of access to the political process for women, but such measures are effective only to the extent that a sufficient number of women are recruited to staff polling centers, provide security, and observe the process.

In the face of the many challenges to their participation, young Afghan women are nonetheless working creatively and courageously to open avenues of political participation for themselves. Over half of the female candidates elected to the Wolesi Jirga in 2010 were less than 40 years of age and several were less than 30 years of age. Such young female leaders perhaps better reflect the overall makeup of Afghan society, in which the majority of the population is under twenty-five years of age.

Voting is habit-forming, and education plays a central role in shaping civic engagement from an early age. Civic education relays the foundations of participation in the public life of a state, and as such gives citizens the understanding to participate constructively in political and civic life. Civic education is also an investment in future generations of women leaders. With the upcoming 2014 elections, the challenges for women are unfolding with several layers. The security situation and mobility for women and girls is a major issue that both the Afghan government and the international community are trying to tackle. In addition, the lack of capacity of female political leaders in both cabinet and parliament is presumed as a main reason preventing women from participating in the upcoming elections.

Since the date was set for the 2014 elections, national and international players began to accelerate their preparations for the upcoming elections. Namely, the National Democratic Institute (NDI), International Republican Institute (IRI), the Independent Election Commission of Afghanistan (IEC), and UN Women undertook large-scale initiatives targeting Afghan women. However, many of the efforts undertaken were focused on the technical aspects of elections such as how to manage the voting or working with candidates on arranging public sessions and meetings.

Increasing Afghan Women's Civic Participation Project

The aim of EQUALITY for Peace and Democracy's Increasing Young Afghan Women's Civic Participation project funded by the United States Institute for Peace (USIP) was to increase young Afghan women's participation in the 2014 elections through a civic education program with a special focus on young women. The project had the following main objectives:

- Conduct two regional dialogues on women's civic participation to discuss the challenges hampering women's civil and political participation, particularly in the upcoming elections, and come up with recommendations for key stakeholders to address them.
- Conduct a National Conference following the two dialogues with the aim of: (a) connecting women from the dialogues to women civil society and political leaders and activists in Kabul; (b) providing a forum for women at the regional/provincial level to relay their priorities at the central level with actors who can influence political and social policy; (c) review the candidates' commitments to women and produce recommendations for their improvement.
- Through these activities, the project would play a role alongside other stakeholders in Afghanistan working to increase women's participation in the

2014 presidential elections.

The project's target group was women from 19 provinces in the North and South of Afghanistan, with the primary target group of young women between the ages of 18 and 30. The project consisted of two main activities: (1) two regional dialogues in the North and South of Afghanistan, and (2) a two-day National Conference conducted in Kabul. The activities were carried out over a period of 9 months from June 2013 through April 2014.

Regional dialogues

The participants were selected based on the criteria prepared by EPD which essentially comprised of young women leaders from different walks of life including activists, directors of Women Affairs Departments, members of High Peace Council, women networks, teachers and lecturers. In short all those women who would or can play a vital role in the nation building and progress and enhancement of women and their rights in the future. In order to maximize the impact of dialogue, EPD invited participants who had an outstanding influence in their communities.

The first regional dialogue was conducted in Kabul city from September 1-4 2013 with 39 participants from 7 southern provinces including Kandahar, Bamyan, Herat, Uruzgan, Helmand, Nangarhar, and Logar. The conference was carried out in Kabul due to security concerns in the southern provinces. The southern



dialogue was piloted as civic education training, including a half-day focus group discussion regarding how the participants would prepare themselves for future political and decision-making processes and encourage change in their communities for women's political participation. Additional agenda topics included women's and human rights (including a review of AIHRC, Bonn Conference commitments, the Islamic declaration of human rights, CEDAW, and women's rights in Islam), government structure and laws, civil society and the role of women in civil society, and elections in Afghanistan. The elections module included principles of elections, characteristics of free and fair elections, women's participation in previous elections in Afghanistan, and the role of women in the elections process.

After the first regional dialogue, the project design was revised by USIP and EPD from a training workshop approach to a more dialogue-based approach. The second regional dialogue was conducted in Mazar-e Sharif from December 7-8 2013 with 36 participants from 11 northern provinces, including Faryab, Badakhshan, Kunduz, Takhar, Baghlan, Jawzjan, Sar-e Pul, Samangan, Balkh, Parwan and Kapisa. The agenda topics included the role of civil society in the election process, role of women in the election process, women's concerns for the upcoming elections, common concerns across the region, addressing challenges, expectations of women from the candidates, preparation and a press conference, and a wrap-up of the workshop and planning for future

follow-ups.

National Conference

After the implementation of the training for women from the southern provinces and women's dialogue in north, EPD conducted a two-day National Conference on "Women and Elections," which was carried out from February 4-5 2014. A total of two hundred participants attended, including 68 provincial participants who were civil society activists, academics, and influential women leaders from all 34 provinces of Afghanistan. The provincial participants also comprised women who had previously attended the North Dialogue and the training for women from southern provinces. 20 participants from civil society and 18 from youth groups also attended the conference.

The conference agenda began with an introduction from USIP on the impact of women's participation in elections in Afghanistan, a panel with women leaders on their personal experiences, challenges, and successes in their personal and political lives and the role of women in elections followed by a question and answer session. Participants then divided into three working groups to prepare for the next day's interaction with presidential candidates and election officials, including writing their expectations of the presidential candidates, reviewing the candidates' manifestos to highlight gaps and concerns, and preparing questions and recommendations for elections stakeholders regarding women's civic participation. At the end of the



day, EPD drafted the Afghan Women's Statement on the 2014 Elections highlighting recommendations of Afghan women for different actors, namely civil society of Afghanistan, religious and community elders, youth, media, the Independent Election Commission, the Afghan government, presidential and provincial councils candidates, armed opposition groups, neighboring and Islamic countries and the international community (see Appendix #: Afghan Women's Statement on the 2014 Elections).

The second day began with a speech from Mr. Amrullah Saleh on the role of women in nation building and their participation in elections and a panel discussion with elections officials, followed by a question and answer session. In the afternoon, presidential candidates attended the conference and presented their manifestos regarding women in Afghanistan, followed by a question and answer session

Speakers and facilitators for the conference included:

- Mr. Scott Smith, Head of Afghanistan and Pakistan Program USIP
- Ms. Soraya Dalil, the Minister of Public Health
- Ms. Hosn Bano Ghazanfar, the Minister of Women's Affairs
- Ms. Amena Afzali, the Minister of Labor, Social Affairs, Martyrs & Disabled
- Ms. Seema Samar, the Head of Independent Human Rights Commission
- Ms. Fatima Gillani, the President of Afghan Red Crescent
- Mr. Amrullah Saleh, former Chief of Intelligence
- Mr. Yusuf Nooristani, Chief of Independent Elections Commission
- Mr. Salem Hasaas, Chairman of Election Security Threats Evaluation Committee
- Mr. Ján Kubiš, United Nations Secretary General's Special Representative for Afghanistan
- Presidential candidates: Qayume Karzai, Ashraf Ghani Ahmadzai, Dawood Sultanzoï, Qutbuddin Helaal, Sardar Naeem, and Safia Seddiqi (deputy of Dr. Hedayat Amin Arsalaa) and Habiba Surabi (deputy of Zulmai Rasool)

The key output of the project was the Resolution on

Women's Civic and Political Participation, which can be found in Annex B.

Evaluation

Objectives

The objectives of this evaluation included:

- To identify project outcomes and examine project effectiveness
- To assess the change in women's attitudes, perceptions, and behaviors in civic participation after the regional and national dialogues.
- To collect the views of the participants on the conferences.
- To assess women's perceptions on the elections after the project, before and after the first round of the elections
- To identify factors external to the project influencing its impact to inform the design of future projects
- To compile the challenges, opportunities, perceptions, and recommendations from all project activities to measure against participants' pre- and post-elections interviews and formulate recommendations for future projects and programs related to women's civic awareness

Methods and Limitations

This endline evaluation was carried out in two stages using a qualitative questionnaire to interview participants from the regional and National Conferences (See Annex A: Evaluation Tools). Considering that quantitative indicators regarding women's participation in elections could not be conclusively tied to the project activities, a qualitative approach was taken to the evaluation. The evaluation was carried out by EPD's Technical Advisor and one Research Officer in the period from March to July 2013.

The first round of assessment was carried out with 22

participants from 14 provinces prior to the first round of the 2014 presidential and Provincial Council elections. The second round of assessment was carried out with 16 participants from 11 provinces after the first round of the elections was completed, and prior to announcing the final results of the first round and beginning the campaign and elections phase of the second round of presidential elections. The women interviewed almost all described themselves as civil society activists working on behalf of women and advocating for women's rights. Interviewees included businesswomen, officials from provincial Departments of Women's Affairs, doctors, human rights activists, lawyers, NGO workers, and teachers.

The interviews were all conducted by phone from Kabul in Dari or Pashto. The interviews lasted from 20 to 45 minutes. In upholding the principle of 'do no harm', all participants were read a consent form and provided verbal consent, and the identity of all respondents was kept anonymous. The interviewer took detailed notes that were then translated and transcribed, then given one round of thematic coding and analyzed for this report. This evaluation also utilized public assessments and elections data regarding women's participation in the elections as a means of assessing impact. The endline data collected was contextualized against

assessments and reports from other organizations and previous election data.

This evaluation has a number of limitations. First, due to security concerns, the researcher was unable to travel to the provinces for a more thorough assessment with stakeholders at the provincial level. Therefore, the assessment relies on the information provided by participants triangulated with other reports and assessments. Second, due to the number of other initiatives carried out around elections, it is impossible to tie impacts in voter turnout and women's participation exclusively to EPD's project. Furthermore, the experiences of women leaders is likely very different from women at the grassroots level. However, by using a combination of data sources and measuring participants' accounts against data from their provinces allows for a more nuanced assessment of impact.

FINDINGS

“When I went with my mother and sisters, the line was so long, and I saw old, young, and very young girls standing in line waiting for their turn to vote. I was feeling so happy, that women know how important they are in the society.”

In the 2013 Survey of the Afghan People, a number of questions were asked about elections, particularly with attention to the upcoming elections in 2014. 20% of Afghan women said they had a lot of fear voting in a national election, and 37% that they had some fear. Security played a role in deciding whether to vote in an election for 80% of Afghan women. 54% of women felt that the Presidential election in 2014 was likely to make their life better. 15% felt it would make their lives worse, and 25% felt it would make no difference.

60% of women felt that elections in Afghanistan are free and fair. Of those who felt they were not, 16% reported corruption in the election, 21% corruption in counting votes, 14% buying of votes, 11% lack of security, 6% that warlords play a big role, and 4% stated that women were not allowed to vote.

7.3% of women got their information about elections and who to vote for from a mosque, 14% from community shuras, 61% from friends and family, 3% from bazaars, and 14% did not know. Men relied less on friends and family, with only 38% of men getting their information from this source. 62% of women felt that women should decide for themselves who to vote for. 19% believed that men should decide for women, and 18% believed that women should decide for themselves but in consultation with men. In comparison, only 43% of men believed that women should decide for themselves who to vote for.¹

In the 2009 Presidential Elections, the IEC reported a total turnout of only 4.6 million voters, of which 38.75% were women.² In the first round of the 2014 Presidential Elections, an estimated 7 million voters turned out. With 2,608,654 women casting valid ballots, women constituted 36.04% of the turnout, a great achievement for women in Afghanistan.

There were several initiatives with the goal of promoting women’s participation in the 2014 presidential elections, such as The Asia Foundation’s ‘Increasing Women’s Political Participation and Dialogue Opportunities in Afghanistan’ project, which provided formal and informal dialogue forums with traditional and religious scholars (*ulema*), as well as community members in various social settings such as mosques, community centers, and provincial centers, to discuss election-related issues and create public service messages on the importance of women’s political participation to be broadcast on national media. There were also regional efforts such as the seminar ‘Women’s Role in Ensuring Security for Elections’ at Bayan Shamal center for the Press in Mazar-e-Sharif and the Afghan Women’s Political Participation Committee in Herat. EQUALITY for Peace and Democracy is proud to have contributed to this effort across civil society resulting in unprecedented participation of Afghan women in the 2014 presidential elections through its ‘Increasing Young Afghan Women’s Civic Participation’ project.

¹ The Asia Foundation, ‘Survey of the Afghan People 2013’.

² NDI, ‘The 2009 Presidential and Provincial Council Elections in Afghanistan’.

Participants' Views on the Project

Format and Activities

Several women gave positive feedback on the conference format, explaining that it was a good opportunity to bring women from across Afghanistan together and allow for face-to-face interaction with candidates, elections officials, and women role models. Four women mentioned being given the opportunity to personally talk and ask questions to successful women, elections officials, and presidential candidates through the panel and following question and answer format as an important feature of the event.

Many women explained that bringing women from all across Afghanistan provided a valuable networking opportunity and a chance to build connections with women from other areas of Afghanistan that would be maintained and inform their activities in their own province and expand their support network for their activism on behalf of women. 21 interviewees discussed the interaction they had with other women as a positive experience with utility for their future work. Many explained that the chance to meet women from different places and learn about their activities and achievements was motivating. In one participant's words, "The other important point in my point of view is that, even after the conference finished women from all over Afghanistan have contacts and they communicate with each other, and are aware of other women all around. For example I met women from Badakhshan and Baghlan, and now we are in contact and share our

progress with each other."

Many also described the chance to meet and hear from successful and politically involved women was a motivating and informative experience. One explained,

Conducting such events like the Women and Elections conference is a way to motivate women. It really increases their self-confidence. They start believing in themselves for the future and they find themselves in a better condition. Most of them know now about their values in their family and societies, and after meeting successful women from parliament and many other places, they get more ideas how to be successful in their lives.

The women leaders sharing their personal stories and particularly the hard work it took to get to their positions was described as inspiring for the conference participants to work hard and achieve something in their lives. Some felt that hearing from women who had become very successful in the Afghan context was good for giving women ideas on how they could go about achieving their goals and becoming more involved in politics and elections.

The women interviewed felt that the opportunity to meet the presidential candidates in person was a particularly useful activity. Several named this as the most important takeaway from the National Conference.³ One woman explained,

³ 4 participants





I personally had a different view about election and candidates before coming to the conference, but after attending the conference and talking to the people and candidates my views changed. All was effective, and I am sure that this kind of meeting and motivation for women changes their world view and they will participate in the voting process. Besides this they will invite other women to take part in voting and the elections, and that will take our country from bad situation to a better Afghanistan in future.

Another explained, “Once you meet candidates you feel more confident about your choice. Before attending the conference I didn’t know any of the candidates, but once I meet them and talked to them, and got more information about their future plans, I changed my mind about them.” Ultimately, the presence of the candidates seemed to have an impact on women’s confidence and motivation and made them feel that the event and their mission in promoting women’s participation in elections were very important. However, assessments of the utility of the candidates’ promises to women were mixed at best. Very few participants had any trust in the candidates or belief that they would follow through on the promises they made to women at the conference. Only a couple women felt that the promises they made would serve as a useful accountability mechanism for the future leader of Afghanistan.

Though the women felt very strongly about the impact of meeting the candidates and hearing from successful women role models, there was less mention of the panel

discussion with election officials, perhaps indicating that this discussion was less effective for participants.

Several participants also mentioned the Resolution as an important takeaway from the National Conference.⁴ One woman explained,

The most important activity was making a resolution, which is very helpful for women in Afghanistan. It was not just meeting with candidates and having the opportunity for questions and answers with them. At the same time, we met very successful women as well, and got a lot of information about their careers and their achievements. That’s how it could be a way to motivate other women to accomplish great achievements in their lives.

However, some women also mentioned their hope that the Resolution would be followed up on to ensure its utility.

Reach of the Project

Of the 35 interviews conducted, 23 women felt that the conference was informative. One woman explained, “It was very effective. This helped hundreds of women to get information, and these hundreds of women can deliver this information for thousands of women. Most of them said they didn’t have any information about elections and voting yet, so I guess our talks are really useful for them.”

⁴ 5 participants

Many of the interviewees felt confident in the multiplier effect of the information and experiences participants gained at the conference and regional dialogues. 22 of the interviewees mentioned the participants encouraging or informing other women what they had learned as a positive outcome of the project. Another participant explained,

When I came back from the Women and Elections conference, I met all the women in my area, and I talked to them about the conference—about the aims and important points. I explained everything regarding the conference and promised them that whenever they have questions regarding elections and voting, I am always here to help you and explain to you.

Another stated, “Those women who were part of the conference helped hundreds of other women from their region to get voting cards and vote for the future leader of their country.”

Women’s perceptions and attitudes on civic participation after the regional dialogues and national conference

All of the women interviewed after the project was completed prior to the first round of elections indicated that they intended to participate in the elections, both through voting and actively encouraging other women in their community to vote. Several women felt that voting was important for the future of Afghanistan, and there were strong rights-based and responsibility-based elements of the interviewees’ beliefs on voting and participation in elections. Key challenges for women’s participation prior to the first round of elections were identified as security, patriarchy and socio-cultural restrictions, lack of awareness and information, and some procedural issues such as distance to polling centers. Interviewees displayed a very low level of trust in candidates prior to the first round, but seemed fairly confident in the elections process itself.

Promoting women’s participation

All 18 women interviewed prior to the first round of elections indicated that they were speaking with other women in their community about the importance of being engaged in the elections process. Almost all of the women explained that they were telling other women how important it is to vote. The second most common messages were the importance of women in elections, and that it is important to learn about the candidates and decide who will be best for Afghanistan’s future. Several also stated that they were explaining to other women that voting is their right. One woman explained:

I do talk with other women about the election process, not only in meetings, but also in the office, at the park, or at small parties. Wherever I see women talking about the election, I go there and start talking to them and if they ask me questions I give them the needed information regarding the election. I tell them to vote, because it’s the only right you have now, and through this right you can have a bright future, for your children in coming years. I tell them that we should be alert for any kind of opportunity for women, because this is the way we can get our rights and can use them in a proper way.

Only 5 interviewees mentioned talking with women about procedural aspects of participation in elections such as obtaining voting cards or the voting process. For example, “I tell them about the process itself, how to vote, how to find the exact person on the list,” and “I visited some places where I can make a group of women and give them a little information about getting voting cards and the voting process.” Only one woman said that she was explaining to other women the importance of deciding for themselves on whom to vote for:

I give women information about elections. For example, I explain to them not to vote for someone when you don’t trust and I always tell them to vote for whomever you want as the next president. Do not ever accept other people’s ideas or if someone forces you to vote for them.

Reasons to vote

Before the election, the most common reason that interviewees felt that voting was important for themselves and other women was for the future of Afghanistan, themselves, and their children.⁵ Other reasons included peace, democracy, and equality, which many participants seemed to view as intertwined concepts in relation to elections. One woman explained, “We need to think about the future of our children, and now is the time to fight for our rights. It’s the time that one cannot fight with guns, but with votes we can get what we want in the coming years and get Afghanistan to a place where there is peace and equality to bring democracy for our future.”

There was also a strong rights-based rhetoric to respondents’ explanations of why they planned to be involved in the elections. The women interviewed were very aware that voting was their right, and most seemed very comfortable asserting it.⁶ Statements such as, “Yes I will vote, because it’s my right to vote,” and “I am a woman and I am voting to prove that I have full rights,” and “This is my right, and by using my right I want to vote for a person who really work on women right, and women problems in Afghanistan,” were common among interviewees. Six women also described voting as a means or responsibility for protecting women’s rights into the future, mostly by selecting the right candidate who would act in the best interests of women and promote women’s rights in Afghanistan.

Along with the rights-based theme, several also asserted that voting was a responsibility. The view of voting as a responsibility seemed to fall into three main categories: (1) civic responsibility, (2) the responsibility to motivate other women and promote women’s participation and rights, and (3) a responsibility to reinforce the rights of women. For example, one woman explained, “I vote to participate for the construction of my country, and through voting I will be responsible for the future of my country,” and another, “I participated in the last election and in this coming election I will participate as well,

⁵ 16 interviewees mentioned the future 31 times as a reason for voting prior to the first round of elections

⁶ 13 interviewees mentioned rights as a reason to vote prior to the first round of elections

because I am a woman, and I think I am responsible for this to participate for the future of Afghanistan.” Others felt that their participation could play a role in asserting women’s rights and encouraging other women to do the same:

I vote because I am an educated woman, and I know how to use my right as woman, and playing my role is very important in our society. If I don’t participate, then what can we expect from other women who didn’t even have the chance to educate themselves? It’s important to motivate other women as well to participate in the elections, and vote for the future leader of their country.

Several also referenced the role of Afghan women and showing that women have and are using their rights as a motivation for voting. One woman explained;

I am voting as an Afghan woman. As you may know, Afghan women are suffering a lot and they don’t have any rights in their society. The most important thing is that it’s not the time for women to stay at home. It’s the time to show the world that in Afghanistan women want their equality and this is the right time to prove that. Women are half of a society, and if it’s about voting again we all should vote. Afghan women should know that rights never come to you—you have to take them.

Challenges for women’s participation

Prior to the first round of the election, every single interviewee named security as one of the primary challenges for women’s participation. Several explained that many people, especially women, were afraid of voting. One woman explained, “In my province people are talking about elections, and most of them are saying that it’s better not to vote if we have to pay them back with our lives.” Four women particularly mentioned threats from the Taliban as a security issue for women: “Because the Taliban are still warning people not to go and vote, especially women and youth,” and “We can say that security is the most important problem these days. We see that in the capital city of Kabul the Taliban are killing people, so what we can say about

those places where there is no security at all?”

11 interviewees felt that women’s lack of information would be a challenge for potential women voters, and 8 felt that low awareness of rights and roles would be a challenge. 9 explained that women’s lack of education and high illiteracy rates would affect their ability to participate in elections. One interviewee anticipated that procedural issues would be an obstacle for women’s participation explaining, “I can say that it’s very hard for uneducated people to get the idea of election and the process itself, and I don’t see any help from government to make programs or seminars to make people aware of election process.” Three interviewees also described long distances to polling centers as a potentially inhibiting factor for women, and two mentioned that weather could be prohibitive. One also explained that due to security restrictions, women were unable to get voting cards before the election. Seven of the women described family as a potential challenge for Afghan women’s participation in elections. One woman explained, “It’s a very hard job in some places to make woman understand about their rights. Most of them ignore us and don’t pay attention to what we are telling them. They do what their family tells them, especially their father and husband.” Four interviewees also explained that other people, such as their husband, father, or local religious leaders, tell women who to vote for. Several interviewees also mentioned patriarchy and socio-cultural constraints as prohibiting factors for women’s participation.⁷ One woman explained:

It’s a big issue. Most families don’t send their women to the voting place because it’s a shame for them, and this is very common in some parts of the country. In some areas people think that the voting process is against Islam, and that’s why they will never participate in the election,

And another:

Even though it’s the 21st century, Afghan women are living in the 19th century. Most women can’t participate because in their culture it’s bad for

⁷ 7 women discussed patriarchy as a prohibiting factor, and 9 mentioned sociocultural restrictions

a woman to get involved in the voting process. They have the concept of shame. If they vote that means they are disobeying their culture.

Trust in the candidates and the elections process

None of the women interviewed prior to the first round felt that corruption was a challenge for women’s participation, or that their vote wouldn’t matter. However, only five women said that they had been monitoring the commitments to women from the candidates’ political manifestos, mostly through newspapers and media or based on the information they had from the National Conference. However, none of the participants said that the promises were affecting their decision on who to vote for, and 14 of the interviewees had no trust in the candidates or that they would follow up on the promises they made to women in the National Conference. Women’s explanations made it very clear that the histories of certain candidates extended back to civil war and conflict in Afghanistan in addition to previous experiences with elections had led them to feel that they should not completely trust either the candidates or the elections process. One woman explained:

As far as I know, they have promised a lot of good things for woman, but the thing is that it’s really hard to believe them. Karzai did the same, and now we can see that nothing has changed for women in Afghanistan. We see that women are beaten by their husbands; women are burned by their in-laws; girls have been raped. There is no one to stop all this violence. That is why it’s hard to accept what they are saying about their future plans.

And another:

For me it’s very interesting the way they are making plans and promises to people about their plans for the future, and about themselves. I don’t feel happy hearing about their plans, because we have seen lots of promises about the future of Afghanistan, but we never saw any progress in this system. It is the same this time—they may have a lot of plans, but once they get the position, they will forget about it.

Women's participation, perceptions and experiences in the first round of the 2014 Presidential Elections

All of the women interviewed after the project was completed after the first round of the 2014 Presidential Elections indicated that they had voted. They also unanimously felt that other women in their community valued the importance of voting and taking part in the election.

Women's participation

All of the women interviewed after the first round of elections reported that they had personally voted and that other women in their area had participated in the election. Eight of the women specified that the turnout of women in this election was higher than in the last election, and four women even explained that when they went to vote, there were more women than men. One woman said:

Yes a lot of people participated, but women were very much comparing last election. I was surprised when I saw that many women in the voting place. Even all of the men were shocked, and they were looking at the women very strangely.

All of the women interviewed also felt that women in their community felt that being engaged in the election process and taking part in the election was important.

One woman explained, "For Afghan women it's a very big thing to use their rights in a proper way, and I am sure most other women think this the same as I do." And another:

For me it was very important. For other women, in my point of view yes, it was important. If it wasn't important why would they have come from such a long way, in bad weather conditions, traveling with animals since they don't have cars or buses to carry them to the center of the city. So, I can say it was important for them, and I am sure they voted to bring change.

However, another woman explained that the enthusiasm of women was mixed:

There were different people. Some were very happy but some were like they were forced to vote. The smart ones were talking about the future among themselves and were evaluating the candidates and their plans and stuff, and some of them were there just there to vote without any reason.

Reasons to vote

Again, the future was a prime reason asserted by women as a reason for voting. Many felt that their own futures and the future of women, the country, and their children were tied to their decision to vote. However, in the post-election interviews, the future of the country was more prominent for women than their own



futures or the future of their families. One interviewee explained, “We were all happy. Everyone was thinking that we are going to build Afghanistan’s future, and right now is the time to vote for someone who will help Afghanistan and build this country,” and another, “I left all the problems and went to vote for the future of my children and my brother and sisters to live in a good, secure, and peaceful community.”

Half of the women interviewed after the first round of elections named change as a reason for voting, whereas no women named this as a motivating factor prior to the elections. One woman stated, “I really wanted to be part of the changes that will come soon, and this was the only chance to take part for change in Afghanistan’s government,” and another, “Especially for Afghan women, it’s a big chance to participate in elections, to show to people that women are ready for change.” Peace was also a very common reason for voting in interviews after the first round of elections, where nine women discussed peace as a motivating factor compared to only one in the interviews prior to elections.

Similar to the interviews conducted prior to the first round of elections, rights-based rhetoric was asserted regarding why women chose to vote, though to a lesser degree than in the pre-election interviews.⁸ Three women specifically mentioned democracy as a reason for voting, either as asserting their democratic rights or voting as a means of encouraging democracy. Some women also mentioned voting as a responsibility, with one woman explaining, “Women understood this time that they are responsible for the future of their country. That’s why most of them took part in the elections.”

Some women felt that certain factors such as activities through media and by organizations helped women to participate more. Others felt that women were able to vote because they were more informed,⁹ and others because of raised awareness on elections and women’s rights. One stated, “Compared to past elections, this time people were much more aware of the situation. Everyone knew why they were voting and who they should vote for. I can say that it was very important for those who were there to vote.”

⁸ 4 women discussed voting as a right in post-election interviews
⁹ 2 participants felt that women were more informed

Pride, excitement, and hope were also common themes of the post-election interviews. Nearly all of the women interviewed noted a sense of happiness or unity resulting from their own and other women’s participation in the election. One woman said, “All of us were happy. I myself was thinking that it’s something very special for me. I was as happy as if someone had given me the world,” and another:

When I went with my mother and sisters, the line was so long, and I saw old, young, and very young girls standing in line waiting for their turn to vote. I was feeling so happy, that women know how important they are in the society.

Challenges for women’s participation

Security was again the number one factor identified as a challenge for women’s participation in the elections. Twelve women felt that security had made women’s participation in the first round of elections difficult. Five specifically mentioned the Taliban as a threatening element for women. One explained, “The second biggest problem was security. In some places because of the warnings that people got from Taliban they couldn’t participate. There were cases from last election where the Taliban cut some people’s fingers off because they voted in the parliamentary election.”

In the post-elections interviews, some women cited procedural issues as challenges for women’s participation. Eight women explained that polling centers were too far for women to travel to, particularly in rural areas, and several of felt that this was the biggest difficulty for women who wanted to vote. Others explained that there was a shortage of ballots at polling centers, or that women were unable to procure voting cards prior to the election. Only three women mentioned that women did not have adequate information to vote or had a low level of awareness regarding their rights.

Family, patriarchy, and socio-cultural restrictions were again mentioned as restricting factors, though less prominently than in the pre-election interviews.¹⁰ One woman explained that some women could not get

¹⁰ Only 2 women mentioned family, 2 patriarchy, and 3 sociocultural restrictions as restricting factors in the post-election interviews

voting cards because their husbands would not let them, and that because women are uneducated they rely on their family members to tell them what to do. Others again asserted that some felt it was wrong for women to go places where men are or that a woman voting is against culture or religion. Additionally, one woman explained that some women do not get to decide for themselves regarding whom to vote for:

Well, in a place like my region, women don't have the right to choose someone for president. In most families women are told to vote for the person that their family is voting for. So, it's hard to say that yes women are voting because they have the full right to vote.

Trust in the candidates and the elections process

Though women seemed very confident in the process prior to the first round of elections, some were more skeptical about corruption and fraud after experiencing voting in the first round. One woman explained, "There were not enough voting papers and most of people didn't have the paper to vote. The people who were responsible for guiding people in the voting place were not behaving properly." Another felt that people believed their votes didn't matter or that foreigners would interfere in the elections process:

There are some questions that people didn't get an answer to from government. For example, most of the people think that their vote will not bring any changes, or they have doubts and think that foreigners have their hand in the political sphere in Afghanistan. These thoughts sometimes make people not participate.

And another:

People are concerned about who will be the next president, but most people think that their vote will not be counted, or the elections are corrupt in some areas. But still we do our part to help the situation get better.

In the post-election interviews, some women felt that the candidates' promises regarding women had affected voting decisions, however many still expressed low levels of trust in candidates to follow through on these commitments. Six women felt that the promises they made affected voting decisions, but only for the women who were personally involved in the conference. Three felt that their promises had effect on the decisions of all women, particularly through the women who attended the conference communicating their promises and commitments to other women.

One participant felt that people did not listen to the promises or commitments of candidates, particularly once they had decided for whom they would vote:

Each candidate had campaigns during the election process, and they made many promises, but still I cannot say whether people heard of them or not. I think that many people did not listen to their talks except of those they are interested in. I have been in conversation with some of my group mates, friends, and colleagues regarding to this question too, whether people vote and choose their presidents according to what each candidate promises. I heard the same that many people don't even listen to it.

However, five women felt that while it had influenced decisions to some extent, skepticism over their genuineness prevailed and seven expressed that they had no trust in the candidates' willingness to follow through on their promises at all. One woman explained, "There are a lot of promises—all of the candidates had some promises for people. In order to get votes from people they say lots of things," yet another:

It has its effect. Even though I don't believe that they will do all the promises, still it makes me feel that there is something good behind the promises that they made. There might be a possibility that they will do all the promises that they made during the conference. So it is hopeful and those who promised that they would do things to help women in future years, of course I will think about that person, and it may change my mind as to whom I should vote for.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

“It was very effective. This helped hundreds of women to get information, and these hundreds of women can deliver this information to thousands of women.”

Project Impact: Assessing Findings Against Project Goals and Objectives

Objective 1: To discuss the challenges hampering women’s civic and political participation, particularly in the upcoming elections, and come up with recommendations for key stakeholders to address them

In both the regional dialogues and the National Conference, women were very active and engaged in discussing the potential challenges for women’s civil and political participation, especially in the context of the 2014 Presidential Elections. Some of the key issues identified were: security, patriarchy and gender-based discrimination, illiteracy, distance to polling centers, and a lack of trust in elections bodies and the transparency of the elections process. The participants were also very engaged and involved in not only identifying challenges and problems, but also in identifying solutions and recommendations. As an outcome of the National Conference, participants contributed to the Resolution on Women’s Civic and Political Participation, which outlined the position of women regarding participation in elections and provided concrete recommendations for the following groups: religious and community leaders, youth

activist and leaders, print, audio and visual media, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), the Independent Election Commission (IEC), Afghan government actors (including the Afghan National Security Forces) at the national, provincial and district levels, presidential and Provincial Council candidates, other Islamic countries, and the international community. With the exception of other Islamic countries, all of these groups were represented at the National Conference, and were able to directly engage with women and hear their concerns and recommendations in their own voices.

Objective 2: To connect women from the dialogues to women civil society and political leaders and activists in Kabul

A total of 200 participants attended the two-day National Conference on Women and Elections, of which 68 were participants who were brought from the provinces to attend. The women interviewed for the final evaluation independently identified face-to-face, personal interaction with policymakers, politicians, and women role models and activists as a key takeaway of the conference. A number of women felt that meeting other women from across Afghanistan and hearing the personal stories of women leaders who have been successful in politics and activism for women’s rights

was motivating and inspired them to pursue their own goals and achievements. Some also felt it gave them the courage and motivation to go back to their communities and try to be a role model and source of information for other women, particularly regarding asserting their rights and responsibility by participating in elections. Many of the participants felt that having personal interaction with presidential candidates was a highlight of the conference, and enabled them to make better decisions on whom to vote for and gain an understanding of each candidate's position on and intention to promote and protect the rights of women. However, there was very little feedback on interaction with elections officials, indicating that this panel discussion had less of an impact for the participants in the conference.

Objective 3: To provide a forum for women at the regional/provincial level to relay their priorities at the central level with actors who can influence political and social policy

In the first regional activity, the format was a training, which did not give women the opportunity to actively relay their priorities and depended too much on independent follow-up by training participants. However, the second regional activity was structured as a dialogue, which concluded with a press conference that was widely covered by seven television channels and four radio stations including Tolo, Ariana, Khurshid, Rah-e-Farda, Arzo, Saba, Metra, Radio Killid, BBC, Azadi, and ART. The press conference gave the participants an opportunity to raise their own voices and read the statement they had prepared during the two days of dialogue outlining their priorities and concerns.

At the National Conference, a number of key stakeholders participated as facilitators or panel members. Each panel discussion was followed by a question and answer session that allowed anyone participating in the conference to raise any issue or concern or ask a question directly to officials, including elections officials, government officials, presidential candidates, and representatives from the international community. The representatives were upper-level, influential policymakers, including Ministers, the director of AIHRC, the former Chief of Intelligence, the Chief of

Independent Elections Commission, the Chairman of Election Security Threats Evaluation Committee, and the UN Secretary-General's Special Representative for Afghanistan. The participation of high-level officials was secured to ensure that women were able to directly interact with and relay their priorities to those who had the ability to directly influence political and social policy. As previously stated, feedback from several participants indicated that participants found the face-to-face interaction to be a key feature of the conference.

Objective 4: To review the candidates' commitments to women and produce recommendations for their improvement

At the National Conference, each candidate's commitments to women was produced, and participants issued the following recommendations to the candidates in the Resolution:

- To present their comprehensive political manifestos for women empowerment including civic participation
- To include competent and dedicated women in their campaign groups
- To present their programs to women through different platforms such as this conference and engage with other public debates on women's issues
- To play their part to ensure fair and transparent elections by adhering to the IEC code of conduct
- To avoid using proxy voting cards especially of women
- To avoid the use of militias and force at the local level and intimidating voters
- To campaign based on a political vision of Afghanistan and not use ethnic, religious or sectarian narratives and campaigning
- To not disrupt security and public order not campaign in government buildings, educational institutions and religious sites
- To be accountable for their expenses during the election campaign

- To respect the independence of international and national election observers and freedom of media
- To accept the results of the elections and avoid electoral violence

However, despite this engagement and the positive feedback regarding direct interaction with presidential candidates, it appears that mistrust of the candidates and their willingness to follow through on their commitments to women remained low, and many women still felt that there was a significant risk that they would be forgotten by whoever won the election. Some women suggested that follow-up on the commitments was necessary to ensure that the candidates' promises had meaning.

Project Goal: Increasing Afghan women's participation in the 2014 elections

Overall, women's participation in the 2014 elections as indicated by the turnout in the first round was exceptional, constituting a 67% increase in women's voter turnout from 2009. Though these results cannot be exclusively tied to EPD's programming, it is reasonable to conclude that based on this evaluation the regional dialogues and National Conferences contributed to the larger efforts across civil society and in Afghanistan to promote the participation of women in the 2014 elections.

All of the women interviewed before and after the elections indicated that they would or had participated in the elections, and all similarly said that they would or did vote. Of the women interviewed, every single participant interviewed before the elections felt that the project would increase women's participation in the elections, and every participant interviewed after the elections felt that the project had a direct impact on the high turnout of women in the first round of the elections. Participants felt very confident that the conference had a tangible multiplier effect, where participants who had received information at the central level had returned to their provinces and shared what they had learned and experienced with hundreds more women. Several felt that the conference promoted an understanding of women's role, rights and responsibility in the elections, and many felt that the experience had helped them

make a better decision on who to vote for in the interest of promoting and protecting women's rights.

Lessons Learned and Recommendations for Future Programming

- Conference participants gave very positive feedback about the conference format, and requested similar events comprising panel discussions and opportunities for direct interaction, question and answer sessions, and discussion with key policymakers and other women in future projects.
- Having face-to-face interaction and creating a forum that enabled women to directly ask their questions and raise their concerns and suggestions was very beneficial for participants. Several explained that it was motivating and increased their confidence, and many felt that it made the work they were doing seem more important and purposeful.
- Several women suggested that similar provincial-level conferences would be beneficial for reaching more women.
- The National Conference served as a valuable tool for enabling women to make their own connections and build networks with other women across Afghanistan without an organization or funded program sponsoring or facilitating it. This ensures sustainability of networks that are built on personal connections, rather than tied to a specific project or funding that will cease to exist beyond the life of the project. Several women explained that they were still communicating with other women they had met at the conference independently, several months after the conference.
- Some women seemed to feel that their experience at the conference meant they should go back to their provinces and inform women for whom they

should vote based on their opinion of who was best for women. In future events, a session specifically on how women can encourage other women to participate in elections would be beneficial to ensure that women do not become another source in addition to male family members or other influential members of the community telling women for whom they should vote.

- Several participants said that the only way they felt they had information about candidates was meeting them in person. However, this is not possible for all women of Afghanistan, and though the women also felt the multiplier effect of the conference was very strong, means of replicating this experience for women at the local level should be further explored, such as radio interviews on candidates' promises to women or mobile screenings of short introductory videos, or regional/provincial conferences and events with candidates' key staff.

- A lack of trust in candidates was notable among all participants. A few women requested follow-up programming to hold the new president accountable to the promises he made to women. In the future a pre-established accountability mechanism should be established, or trainings should be conducted with women to establish their own monitoring mechanism to ensure that outcomes of these events are actionable and followed up on.

- Many women seem very aware of their civic rights and responsibilities, and all of the women interviewed were very committed to disseminating this message to other women. However, fewer women reported that they were giving other women information on important procedural aspects of the elections process. Future programs should place special emphasis on giving women this information and providing them with tools for passing this information on to other women.

ANNEX A: ASSESSMENT TOOLS

1. Pre-Election Questionnaire

Q1: Do you plan to or have you already been participating in the election process?

If yes, how?

If no, why not?

Q2: Please explain the ways in which you are active and engaged in your community.

Q3: Have you spoken to other women about the importance of being engaged in the election process?

If yes, what have you talked to them about?

If no, why not?

Q4: Have you been monitoring the political manifestos of the political candidates?

If yes how, and do you think they are trying to fulfill the promises they made during the National Conference organized by Equality For Peace and Democracy held in Kabul on February 4 and 5, 2014?

If no, why not?

Q5: What was one key takeaway from the National Conference on Women and Elections, or from the regional training/consultation?

Q6: Do you think that the trainings and the National Conference on Women and Elections will increase young Afghan women's participation in the 2014 elections?

If yes, how?

If no, why not?

Q7: Do you feel that the National Conference on Women and Elections had any other important outcomes?

If yes, what?

If no, why not?

Q8: Are there other factors that may affect women's participation in the elections, such as security, literacy, or mobility? How do you think this will affect the outcomes of the Women and Elections conference, both for participants and for all Afghan women?

Q9: Are there any other comments or ideas you would like to share about the program on women and elections by EQUALITY for Peace and Democracy that you participated in?

2. Post-Election Questionnaire

Q1: Did you participate in the election?

If yes, how?

If no, why not?

Q2: Did other women in your area participate in the election?

If yes, how, and how many?

If no, why not?

Q3: Do you feel that other women in your community felt that being engaged in the election process and taking part in the election was important?

If yes, how?

If no, why not?

Q4: Are there other factors that you think affected women's participation in the election, such as security, literacy, or mobility?

Q5: How do you feel that the political candidates' presidential campaigns reflected the promises they made during the National Conference organized by Equality For Peace and Democracy held in Kabul on February 4 and 5, 2014?

Q6: Do you feel that these promises the political candidates made to women affected people's decisions on who to vote for? For men? For women?

If yes, how?

If no, why not?

Q7: Now that the elections have occurred, what was one key takeaway from the National Conference on Women and Elections or from the regional training/consultation that you feel had an impact on the election in your area?

Q8: Do you think that the trainings and the National Conference on Women and Elections increased young Afghan women's participation in the 2014 elections?

If yes, how?

If no, why not?

Q9: Now that the elections have occurred, do you feel that the National Conference on Women and Elections had any other important outcomes?

If yes, what?
If no, why not?

Q10: Are there any other comments or ideas you would like to share about the program on women and elections by EQUALITY for Peace and Democracy that you participated in?

3. Interviews

	Round of interviews	Province	Role/Organization
1	Pre-election	Badakhshan	Civil Society Network
2	Pre-election	Badakhshan	CSO
3	Pre-election	Badghis	Women's Council
4	Pre-election	Balkh	WAW Organization
5	Pre-election	Balkh	ADWBO
6	Pre-election	Bamyan	Women's Advocacy Commission
7	Pre-election	Bamyan	Civil society
8	Pre-election	Daykundi	Department of Women's Affairs
9	Pre-election	Daykundi	CSO
10	Pre-election	Ghor	NSP
11	Pre-election	Ghor	NSP
12	Pre-election	Herat	Provincial Women's Network
13	Pre-election	Kandahar	Women's Social Office
14	Pre-election	Kandahar	Media
15	Pre-election	Khost	Civil society
16	Pre-election	Maidan Wardak	ZEPS
17	Pre-election	Nangarhar	Provincial Women's Network
18	Pre-election	Nangarhar	CSO
19	Pre-election	Nuristan	Civil society
20	Pre-election	Paktia	TLO
21	Pre-election	Paktia	Civil society
22	Pre-election	Parwan	Khaharan Movement
23	Post-election	Badakhshan	Civil Society Network
24	Post-election	Balkh	WAW Organization
25	Post-election	Balkh	ADWBO
26	Post-election	Bamyan	Women's Advocacy Commission
27	Post-election	Ghor	NSP
28	Post-election	Herat	Provincial Women's Network
29	Post-election	Kandahar	Women's Social Office
30	Post-election	Khost	Civil society
31	Post-election	Khost	Civil society
32	Post-election	Maidan Wardak	ZEPS
33	Post-election	Nangarhar	Provincial Women's Network
34	Post-election	Paktia	TLO
35	Post-election	Paktia	Civil society
36	Post-election	Parwan	Khaharan Movement
37	Post-election	Ghor	NSP
38	Post-election	Nuristan	Civil society

ANNEX B: RESOLUTION ON WOMEN'S CIVIC AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

We 220 Afghan women from different walks of life from 34 provinces of Afghanistan came together in two days National Conference to interact with women leaders, policy makers and presidential candidates about the upcoming elections presenting our concerns and recommendations for enhancing women's participation in the upcoming elections.

We would like to emphasize the importance of credible elections for the future of a united and peaceful Afghanistan and reaffirm our support by not only voting but also by actively raising public awareness, encouraging our communities for voting and monitoring the process to maximize the credibility of upcoming elections.

We believe that every vote regardless of gender counts and therefore women's participation in the elections will enable us all to elect the right president for our country. Regardless of the challenges of insecurity, potential electoral violence, lack of voter awareness, high probability of fraud and having only two woman among all the 33 presidential and vice presidential candidates, we as responsible citizens of this country will join forces with men and will actively participate in the elections and call upon all groups and institutions to support women participation in elections.

We, the women of Afghanistan call upon different groups of society including, civil society organizations, religious and community elders, youth, media, Independent Election Commission, Afghan government, presidential and provincial councils candidates, armed opposition groups, neighboring and Islamic countries and international community to play their part of responsibly in making upcoming elections a success which will be the first peaceful transition of power in the history of Afghanistan. We are committed to supporting the elections by active participation and call upon all groups and institutions to encourage and support women's participation by implementing the following recommendations:

Religious and community leaders

- To encourage women to vote and counter prejudice and misconceptions about the right of women to vote through references to Islamic texts.
- To campaign on the importance of women participation in elections
- To remind about the unacceptability of fraud under Islamic principles and honor in customary law.
- To remind of the importance of national unity during elections and the danger to ignite ethnic, tribal, religious and other forms of division in society that could lead to violence.

Youth activists and leaders

- To realize their connecting role to inform and influence their families for allowing women to participate.
- To embrace social networking for participation of women in elections and counter traditional misconceptions about women rights.

All print, audio and visual media

- To responsibly use their influence on women opinion by providing background information about all candidates and their teams female members, especially their views on the future of Afghan women.
- To encourage debates on women's issues between candidates so that Afghan women can make an informed vote.

Civil Society Organizations

- To support all groups with awareness raising, information, and documents.
- To realize their ability to connect the different elements of society to join efforts.
- To build capacity and mobilize religious and community leaders, as well as youth for public campaigns encouraging and supporting women's participation in elections
- To coordinate election monitoring efforts

Independent Election Commission

- To increase access to voter registration sites in remote areas, especially for women
- To transparently report the number of voter registrations per province
- To minimize electoral fraud
- To adequately monitor and safeguard the implementation of the Code of Conduct for Candidates, Media and Election Monitors
- Allow civil society to monitor every aspect of the electoral process, especially the vote counting
- To provide greater support to elections, including:
 - Boosting female employees in pooling sites to facilitate women's voting
 - Sufficient electoral monitors (particularly at potentially problematic locations in remote areas)
 - Ensuring sufficient technical support to hard-to-access regions
 - Ensuring sufficient ballot slips
 - Ensuring long enough opening-hours in polling sites with large voter populations

Afghan Government Actors (including Afghan National Security Forces) at national, provincial and district levels

- To not interfere in the democratic process
- To not allow the use of government resources and influence to support specific candidates or teams
- To keep corruption to minimum level possible by
- Minimizing meddling from local strongmen and electoral officials
- Monitoring candidates' use of political influence and violence to manipulate elections
- To ensure adequate security at all election events/polling sites so that vulnerable groups especially women do not feel intimidated while voting
- To avoid ties to and favouring specific candidates

- To ensure own staff and militias do not engage in intimidation

Presidential and provincial council candidates to

- To present their comprehensive political manifestos for women empowerment including civic participation
- To include competent and dedicated women in their campaign groups
- To present their programs to women through different platforms such as this conference and engage with other public debates on women's issues
- To play their part to ensure fair and transparent elections by adhering to the IEC code of conduct
- To avoid using proxy voting cards especially of women
- To avoid the use of militias and force at the local level and intimidating voters
- To campaign based on a political vision of Afghanistan and not use ethnic, religious or sectarian narratives and campaigning
- To not disrupt security and public order not campaign in government buildings, educational institutions and religious sites
- To be accountable for their expenses during the election campaign
- To respect the independence of international and national election observers and freedom of media
- To accept the results of the elections and avoid electoral violence

Islamic Countries

- To publicly announce their support for success of upcoming elections in Afghanistan by not interfering in Afghanistan elections and highlighting the importance of participation of women from Islam religion perspective,
- To support the process of a credible election
- To encourage armed opposition not disturb the elections and especially not intimidating women
- To encouraging and the candidates to accept result of election and form a national unified group around the new elected president inclusive of competent Afghan men and women for continuation of Afghanistan development

International Community

- To support the process of a credible election and not to support any particular candidate
- To provide assistance for civil society and media for raising public awareness on importance of participation of women in election and also independent monitoring of the process
- To institute strong coordination between government entities, civil society organizations, and international organizations regarding women's active participation in upcoming elections.
- To distinguish between observation and interference, prioritizing provision of neutral observers for the upcoming elections.
- Provide conditional assistance to IEC that incentives the recruitment of competent and capable female staff through an open and merit-based process, resulting in a minimum of 30% women on IEC staff, including in leadership positions.



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