

Women AND Elections IN Afghanistan

challenges and opportunities for future
civic participation

WOMEN'S
PERSPECTIVES
SERIES

2

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Democracy

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methodology

This project consisted of eight consultations with 70 women from 19 provinces—Nangarhar, Logar, Bamyan, Herat, Kandahar, Helmand, Khost, Paktia, Faryab, Badakhshan, Kunduz, Takhar, Baghlan, Jawzjan, Sar-e Pul, Samangan, Balkh, Parwan and Kapisa—as well as two rounds of follow-up interviews, before and after the first round of the elections, with 38 women who attended EPD's national Women and Elections conference in February 2014. Two rounds of thematic patterned qualitative coding were undertaken by the two authors to draw out recurring ideas, causal linkages and sentiments. The data was organized into thematic areas so that the key trends important to participants emerged across the spectrum of those consulted. This paper focuses on Afghan women as voters and participants in civic processes as citizens from a grassroots perspective, and does not address the challenges and opportunities facing female candidates.

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03 executive summary

04 introduction

05 challenges for women's civic participation

05 security

06 cultural and religion-based constraints

07 timing and mobility

08 autonomy of women's votes and using women for fraud

09 corruption and a lack of trust in the electoral process

10 lack of trust in candidates

11 women's access to elections information and disunity in civil society

10 opportunities for women's civic participation

10 candidate qualities and issues of importance to women

14 rights-based discourse

14 sense of civic and collective responsibility

15 religion and engagement of religious leaders

16 reaching female voters

17 conclusion and recommendations

17 civil society

19 government and electoral bodies

20 donors and the international community

executive summary

The relationship between Afghanistan's future as a nation and women's democratic participation has been a central issue for the country's fledgling political structures. Reflecting on the lessons learned from the 2014 Presidential Elections and looking forward to the possibilities for the 2015 Parliamentary Elections, this brief examines what can be done to enhance and improve women's democratic engagement. It becomes evident that, despite strong achievements, work remains to be done to guarantee the full exercise of women's civic rights. Particularly, EQUALITY for Peace and Democracy's consultations finds that civil society must concentrate on programming which emphasizes a gender-based approach to engagement in politics rather than isolating issues relating to women. This paper outlines EPD's findings and recommends policies that seek to overcome or mitigate some of the obstacles to women's democratic practice in 2015.

introduction

The nature and importance of this period of transition for Afghanistan's future is well known. The nation will witness its first democratic transfer of presidential power and the withdrawal of foreign troops, as well as Parliamentary elections in 2015. This paper takes stock of the implications and effectiveness of activities at various levels designed to enhance women's democratic participation from the perspective of women engaged in civil society across Afghanistan. It seeks to ascertain how these activities can continue to contribute to the civic engagement of over half the country's population, and the potential avenues for enhanced contributions available to multiple stakeholders.

As such, it focuses on actionable policy recommendations for key stakeholders, including state bodies and the IEC. However, recommendations for these stakeholders, such as increasing the number of female workers at polling centers and increasing female police and searchers at checkpoints, have been thoroughly asserted in other research and policy recommendations. This brief therefore focuses on recommendations for international donors, local and

international NGOs, and civil society. Given the remit of the brief and desire to offer a unique contribution through EPD's consultations with Afghan women, there is a particular focus on mechanisms to increase not only the level but also the quality of women's civic participation in the run-up to the Parliamentary Elections.

EPD conducted consultations in three stages—consultations with 70 women from 19 provinces in late 2013 in advance of the elections, and two rounds of follow-up interviews before and after the first round of the elections with 38 women who attended EPD's national Women and Elections Conference in February 2014 which was supported by the United States Institute of Peace (USIP).

challenges for women's civic participation

In all three stages of the project, a central focus was on the challenges to women's civic participation, with particular emphasis on the barriers for female voters and issues faced in exercising their voting rights. Many of the challenges raised will not come as a surprise, echoing observations from previous elections and largely holding true to the predictions made for women's participation in the 2014 elections. The first round of the 2014 Presidential Elections took place on April 5, 2014. According to information from the Independent Election Commission of Afghanistan (IEC), 12 million people were eligible to vote, with over 3 million voter cards distributed since May 2013, of which 35% were issued to female voters.¹ Of the 20,795 polling stations set up for the 2014 elections, 8,573 were open for female voters. The Ministry of Interior recruited 13,690 female searchers, and trained 581 female police and 2,245 female searchers.² Of the 6.6 million votes cast in the first round of elections, the IEC reported that 36 percent were female voters.³ In the second round, though the turnout figures were widely contested, 9,324 of the 23,136 polling stations (40%) were for women and 36% of the votes submitted were from females.

SECURITY In the 2013 Survey of the Afghan People, a number of questions were asked about elections, particularly with attention to the 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. Security was mentioned as a key concern for women's participation in elections in

every consultation, and emerged as the number one factor preventing women's participation in elections in the pre- and post-election interviews.

Despite the Ministry of Interior's commitment to hiring female searchers and the large investment in security on Election Day across Afghanistan, some women still felt that insecurity posed a challenge to women's political participation.⁴ Several specifically mentioned the Taliban as a threatening element for women. However, women acknowledged that their participation in activities such as elections does not leave them vulnerable only to the Taliban; there are many people who do not like women participating in such activities, and this was felt to be an added vulnerability for women, particularly on Election Day.⁵ Some also recalled the murder or deaths of women in their area during previous elections, which continues to generate fear for women voting in elections.⁶

In the elections consultations, several women expressed a desire for the international community to give support to Afghanistan in providing security for elections.⁷ Many felt that the government needed to ensure their safety and security in order to allow for women's participation.⁸ Security in rural and remote areas was highlighted as a key concern. Though the cities were acknowledged as moderately safe places for women to vote, there were serious concerns that insecurity would be an insurmountable obstacle for women from rural and remote areas.⁹ While interviews suggested that women's security concerns in this regard were mostly related to Election Day and violence from armed opposition groups (AOGs), some also suggested that security concerns also

1 Abdullah Athayi, "Shaping the Future—Women's Participation in the 2014 Elections," *Heinrich Boll Stiftung Afghanistan*, 28 June 2014, <http://af.boell.org/2014/06/28/shaping-future-womens-participation-2014-elections>

2 *Ibid.*

3 *Ibid.*

4 12 post-election interviews

5 North consultation 3

6 North consultation 4

7 South consultation 1, 3, North consultation 3, 2, 4

8 South consultation 1, 2, North consultation 3

9 North consultation 1

relate to social and traditional beliefs and violence against women.¹⁰

Civic activism on behalf of women was identified as a risk factor in several consultations, with women explaining that active women often receive threats from both known and unknown people and groups.¹¹ In some instances, the risk did not stop at threats, where in some cases violence or attacks against women advocating on behalf of women's rights and civic participation have actually been carried out.¹²

Insecurity as a challenge not only for women's

Our community leaders always say that they support women's political participation, but in reality they are working against women's political participation.

– North consultation 3



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

– Pre election individual interview

participation, but all electoral activities throughout Afghanistan, is not a new observation. However, the consultations at three distinct stages of the elections process indicate that addressing security on Election Day is not necessarily enough to address the issue. A legacy of election-related violence and pervasive threats to women who become active in civic processes serves as a persistent deterrent for women's participation throughout the entire elections process and in civic participation at large. Moreover, while some practical security measures are taken, little has been done to positively counteract the perception of insecurity that emerged clearly in the consultations. This ongoing perception plays a powerful role in perpetuating a climate of fear and can provide a rationale for discouraging women to vote or engage in civic activism.

CULTURAL AND RELIGION-BASED CONSTRAINTS

Well in advance of the Presidential Elections, women cited tradition, harmful customs, and patriarchal family and social structures as a major challenge for women's participation in elections.¹³ In one of the consultations with women from Khost and Paktia, two women had been unable to vote in past Presidential Elections due to cultural barriers.¹⁴ In pre-election interviews, several women described patriarchy and socio-cultural constraints as prohibiting factors for women's participation, some specifically citing shame. In post-election interviews, one woman explained that some women could not get 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 also 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.¹⁵

Furthermore, while much of the assessment of the cultural barriers to women's civic participation frames the issue in terms of men's perspectives on women's participation, the issue was noted in terms of women's perspectives as well. It is not only some men who believe that women should not participate

10 North consultation 3

11 North consultation 3, 2

12 North consultation 3

13 South consultation 1, 2, 4, North consultation 4

14 South consultation 1

15 Post-election individual interview

It's a very hard job in some places to make women understand 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, [and] especially listen to their father and husband.

- Pre-election individual interview

in elections, but also some women.¹⁶ In a survey prior to the elections, 17% of male respondents and 12% of female respondents felt it was unimportant to increase the participation of women voters. The two most common reasons given were cultural barriers or that women are less informed than men, and around 15% mostly in the northeast and southwest stated that according to Islam women do not need to vote.¹⁷

Although the women largely said in the consultations that they would stand up for their rights if there was a clash with male family members and that they had never been forced to vote for someone, some said that if the situation could be damaging or disruptive in their home, they would keep quiet to preserve the peace. All women consulted said that they discuss politics at home, mostly after watching the news. However, the women who participated in EPD's consultations and elections conference were largely active in civil society or were advocates for women's rights, and some acknowledged that the freedom and acceptance they have in their home and family is not necessarily reflective of the situation of Afghan women in general.¹⁸

TIMING AND MOBILITY

Another key barrier to women's participation in elections was the timing of the polls and issues of mobility, both in terms of obtaining registration cards and actually going to vote. Polling stations were open from 7am to 4pm, a timeframe that can conflict with many women's daily schedules.¹⁹ In a 2013 survey, 83% of Afghan women classified themselves as a 'housewife,' which is a misleading term for the daily unpaid domestic labor they often undertake. Many

¹⁶ South consultation 4,

¹⁷ Free and Fair Election Forum of Afghanistan, "Afghan Perceptions on Democracy & Elections," FEFA, 2013-2014, <http://fefo.org.af/index.php/report/143-fefa-conducts-a-survey-on-election-and-good-governance>.

¹⁸ North consultation 3, 4

¹⁹ North consultation 2, 3

Afghan 'housewives' are the primary caretakers in the household, for their children and often for family elders as well. They wake up early and take care of their children, prepare meals, and perform daily chores; many also perform unpaid agricultural work or home-based income generating activities as well. With these responsibilities within the home, it can be difficult for a woman to go out of the household for a long period of time during the day for voting or to register to vote. Extending the hours of polling stations to be open later hours until dark would possibly allow women to go to vote once other household members have returned home.

Mobility and distance to polling or registration centers was another key concern, mentioned in every single consultation. In the post-elections interviews, several women explained that polling stations were too far for women to travel, especially in rural areas; some

Lack of time is the biggest challenge for women participating in elections. When the women get free from home and move out for voting, the voting centers are closed. We have this experience from the past two elections.

- North consultation 3

The voting centers are too far from residential areas. Men can arrange it but for women it is not possible. We have a traditional society and women are not allowed to travel long distances alone, and some of them don't have financial resources to spend money to go to voting centers. Faryab Women's Network had a program where we visited remote areas and encouraged women to get voting cards. They wanted to get cards and vote but the places that distribute election cards were too far from their villages, and they said they didn't have money to pay for transportation. Financial problems are also a factor for women in remote areas.

- North consultation 3

felt that this was the biggest difficulty for women who wanted to vote.²⁰

In a survey prior to the elections, 67% of respondents felt that locating polling stations close to women's homes would be an effective means of increasing the turnout of women voters in their community.²¹ Many of the women in the consultations felt that increasing the number of polling stations would help ensure their accessibility, and providing transportation to polling centers was cited as a key means of facilitating women's participation.²² The solution of mobile polling stations was also discussed,²³ though this would present its own set of challenges in terms of potential for fraud and security risks.

AUTONOMY OF WOMEN'S VOTES AND USING WOMEN FOR FRAUD

Even when women are able to overcome the insecurity and social constraints to get to the polls, it seems that often women's votes are not their own. While the high level of female participation noted in elections is encouraging, according to many of the women EPD spoke with it should not be misconstrued as free democratic choice. In a 2013 survey, 62% of women felt that women should decide for themselves whom 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 whom to vote for.²⁴ Controlling women's votes was discussed in several consultations and in the pre- and post-election individual interviews.²⁵ An international observer team who visited 13 polling stations in Kabul reported security officers attempting to influence voter behavior, particularly among women.²⁶ The phenomenon of manipulating

20 8 post-election individual interviews

21 Free and Fair Election Forum of Afghanistan, 'Afghan Perceptions on Democracy & Elections.'

22 South consultation 2, 4, North consultation 1, 2, 3, 4

23 South consultation 3, 4

24 Keith Shawe, "Afghanistan in 2013: A Survey of the Afghan People." *The Asia Foundation*, 2013, <http://asiafoundation.org/country/afghanistan/2013-poll.php>.

25 South consultation 3, North consultation 3, 1, 4, 4 pre-election individual interviews, 1 post-election individual interview

26 Srinjoy Bose, 'Afghanistan's 2014 Run-Off Election: An Observer's Account,' *The Diplomat*, 18 June 2014, <http://thediplomat.com/2014/06/afghanistans-2014-run-off-election-an-observers-account/>

and using women's votes appears to be a widespread challenge for women's meaningful civic participation.

The most commonly cited figures controlling women's votes were male family members, most commonly fathers or husbands.²⁷ Several also pointed to community elders, who they explained sometimes try to sell the votes of women living in the area under their influence.²⁸ Others discussed warlords, local commanders, elections officials, and District Governors as controlling women's votes and forcing them to vote for a particular candidate.²⁹ These issues were echoed in pre- and post-election individual interviews as well.

In a 2009 ICG report, the level of women's voter registration was identified as a cause for concern, with improbably high levels of female registration observed in some of the most insecure and conservative provinces of Afghanistan. For example, in Logar and Nuristan, twice as many cards were

The biggest challenge in front of women is the family situation in our society. The women vote for a person who is introduced by their husbands or some other family leader. They are not independent in their decision.

- North consultation 2

Community leaders misuse their position and prey upon the lack of information of the people. It is not for benefit of the people. The community leaders deal with the candidates and sell the votes of the people. They put people under pressure, saying if you don't vote for a certain candidate I will not give you a job in the next project that will come to the village. Or since people don't have information, the community leaders said in past elections that they have the ability to see who people vote for and if you vote for the wrong person I will know.

- South consultation 3

27 North consultation 1, 3, 4

28 North consultation 3, 1, 4, South consultation 1

29 North consultation 4,

issued to women as men.³⁰ An AIHRC and UNAMA report pointed to this issue in Paktia and Khost in 2009:

[In] the deeply conservative provinces of Paktia and Khost, new female voter registration was almost double that of men. In Paktia, 77,537 women were recorded as registering compared to 39,276 men. In some districts, women's registration numbers were four times that of men. In Khost, allegedly 72,938 women registered compared to 38,222 men. In one of the most volatile districts, Terazai, only 51 men registered compared to 2,494 women.³¹

Men can obtain voter cards on women's behalf, without providing fingerprints, making them easy to obtain and trade.³² Women's voter cards are not required to have their photos on their cards under the rationale of cultural sensitivity. However, this makes women's voter cards particularly valuable in getting around the issue of one vote per person.

The prevalence of 'proxy voting,' where men vote for the women in their family, is cause for great concern as efforts to increase women's participation have the potential to become a tool for large-scale fraud and further injustice to women under the guise of women's civic rights. In a report on lessons learned regarding women's participation in the 2009 election, the IEC reported widespread proxy voting by male relatives using women's voter cards and the use of women's voter cards in ballot stuffing, noted particularly in Paktia, Paktika, and Ghazni provinces.³³ In the first round of the 2014 elections, one journalist in Wardak observed a ghost polling station where the director claimed 104 women had voted. However, female elections workers revealed that two men had shown up in the morning with bags full of completed ballots

30 International Crisis Group, "Afghanistan's Election Challenges: Asia Report no. 171," *ICG*, 24 June 2009, [http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/asia/south-asia/afghanistan/171_afghanistan_s_election_challenges.pdf](http://www.crisisgroup.org/~/media/Files/asia/south-asia/afghanistan/171_afghanistan_s_election_challenges.pdf)

31 AIHRC-UNAMA, "Joint Monitoring of Political Rights, Presidential and Provincial Council Elections in Afghanistan, Second Report," *AIHRC-UNAMA*, 16 June – 1 August 2009, http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2009_2014/documents/droi/dv/droi_20090910_45/droi_20090910_45en.pdf

32 Reuters, "Votes sell for about \$5 in Afghanistan as presidential race begins," *The Express Tribune*, 15 October 2013, <http://tribune.com.pk/story/618445/votes-sell-for-about-5-in-afghanistan-as-presidential-race-begins/>

33 IEC & UNIFEM, "One Step Forward, Two Steps Back? Lessons Learnt on Women's Participation in the 2009 Elections," *IEC*, 2009, http://www.iec.org.af/pdf/wsfactsheets/one_step_forward_two_steps_back.pdf

and filled the boxes.³⁴ Initial figures from the 2014 elections indicate similar irregularities to 2009 in the provinces that have been previously highlighted as at risk, and echo the observations of past elections where women's votes have been used as tools for fraud and corruption rather than for women's empowerment and promoting women's civic rights.

CORRUPTION AND A LACK OF TRUST IN THE ELECTORAL PROCESS

Another challenge for women's political participation was a somewhat common lack of trust in both the candidates and the electoral process, largely based on previous experience. In a pre-election survey, only 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. Furthermore, only 60% of women felt that elections in Afghanistan are free and fair. Of those who felt they were not, respondents reported corruption in the election (16%), corruption in counting votes (21%), buying of votes (14%), lack of security (11%), that warlords play a big role (6%) and that women were not allowed to vote (4%).³⁵

Issues with electoral processes were mentioned

We may not vote if we know that our votes are going into trash bags. If they are not counted, then not voting could spare us some time and energy.

- South consultation 2

Our people don't trust the government or the elections process and everything. If you ask a farmer, he will tell you that our future President is confirmed already, so there is no need for elections. Our educated people don't believe in the election process, so how we can be hopeful that the other people take part in election?

- South consultation 3

Harper's Magazine, 7 April 2014, <http://harpers.org/blog/2014/04/the-ghost-polls-of-afghanistan/>.

35 Keith Shawe, "Afghanistan in 2013: A Survey of the Afghan People."

The IEC pays a very high salary to its staff, so they should work hard but they don't. The staff of the election commission that must work in villages are hired in the center of the provinces and they never travel to the villages. They are only at home and getting their salary. We are not happy with the work of the election commission.

- North consultation 3

As we are well aware today, all candidates promise to serve us and society. But they didn't from our past experience, so we are not allowing ourselves to vote for them again. Especially me, I want to vote for a candidate who really wants to serve our people. We want honest candidates, not liars as they are now.

- South consultation 2

in every consultation. Many women discussed the importance of strictly monitoring elections and the need for assurances that the elections would be transparent.³⁶ Several were afraid their votes would never be counted.³⁷ Others felt that due to selling votes and ballot stuffing, their votes wouldn't matter.³⁸

There was also some lack of trust in elections bodies such as the IEC.³⁹ Some participants in consultations and pre- and post-election interviews felt that elections staff were corrupt, did not behave properly, or interrupted or prevented voters from voting.⁴⁰ Lack of trust in electoral institutions in conjunction with a relatively high belief in the potential for fraud and corruption likely cast into doubt the efficacy of women's votes and could serve as a potential deterrent to women's civic participation, especially in consideration of the physical and social risks women must take to vote. Given the situation regarding allegations of corruption and fraud in the second round of the 2014 elections, the magnitude of the challenge of encouraging women to participate and of convincing them that their vote matters is likely to be greater in future elections.

LACK OF TRUST IN CANDIDATES

Besides not trusting the elections process, many women expressed that they had little to no trust in the candidates or their promises.⁴¹ In the pre-election individual interviews, well over half of the interviewees did not believe that the candidates would follow up on the promises they had made in their campaigns.⁴² Some also felt that

36 South consultation 4, 1, 2, 3, North consultation 3, 1, 2, 4

37 South consultation 1, 1 post-election individual interview

38 South consultation 3, 1, North consultation 3

39 North consultation 3

40 2 Post-election individual interview, North consultation 4

41 South consultation 1, 2, North consultation 3

42 14 pre-election individual interviews

As far as I know, they have promised a lot of good things for women, 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.

- Pre-election individual interview

candidates should be banned from running for public office if they have criminal histories or are affiliated with a foreign country.⁴³ Women's explanations made it very clear that the histories of certain candidates that 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 any of the candidates or the elections process.

WOMEN'S ACCESS TO ELECTIONS INFORMATION AND DISUNITY IN CIVIL SOCIETY

Women's limited access to information generally fell into three categories: (1) law and elections processes; (2) rights; (3) candidates and platforms. In pre-election interviews, over half of the interviewees named women's lack of information as a challenge for potential female voters, and just under half discussed women's low awareness of their rights as an issue. A similar level also discussed women's lack of education and high illiteracy rates

43 North consultation 3

as an impediment to their participation. In a 2013 survey on public perceptions of elections and civic education, 28% of women stated that in previous elections they had received no information at all regarding elections.⁴⁴

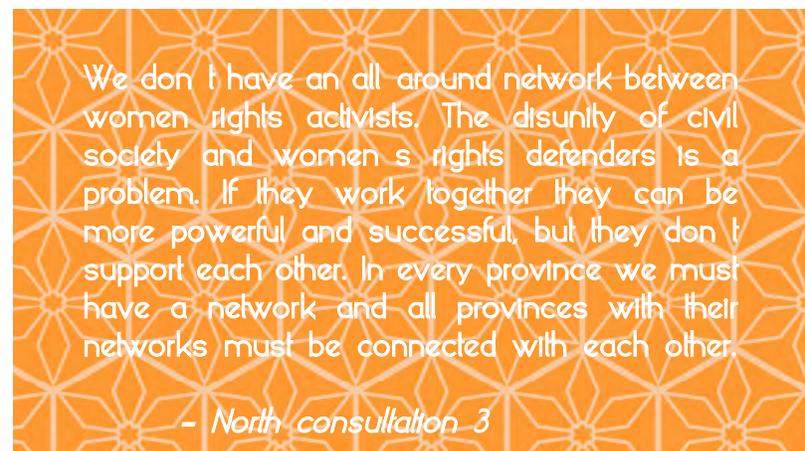
Lack of awareness of legal rights was cited in two consultations.⁴⁵ One woman explained that the number of women who are aware of the rules and the law are few, and most women are unaware of their rights and don't know about the constitution, law, and rules in Afghanistan.⁴⁶ In a pre-election survey, only around 30% of women knew that the IEC is primarily responsible for organizing elections, and only around 35% knew that the IECC handles grievances and fraud.⁴⁷ Anecdotal accounts revealed that some women were confused by the ballot and were unsure of how to cast their vote. In some instances, women had to ask polling station officials to point out which candidate was which so they could vote since they could not read the names and did not recognize from the photos which was the candidate they wanted to vote for.⁴⁸

In a 2013 survey, 79% of women had never attended school, compared to 45% of men, indicating a high level of illiteracy among Afghan women,⁴⁹ which would make any written medium such as newspapers, brochures, or billboards inaccessible for potential female voters. Though many political candidates campaign via rallies and speeches, these public, male-dominated forums are often not an option for women to attend and get firsthand information about the candidates. In a 2013 survey, only 26% of women had attended a community or village event about elections in the past three years.⁵⁰ In the 2014 elections, televised debates were widely acknowledged as providing voters with information. However, only 52% of Afghans have access to TV. Internet and social media were also cited as playing a large role in campaigning, but access to these

platforms, while promising, is even less at only 1% access to computers and 1% access to internet for Afghan women.⁵¹ Taken together, these factors point to extremely low access to information about elections, including both elections processes and candidates, for women. The only promising medium that emerges is radio, to which 76% of Afghan women have access, which will be revisited in the next section.

In a 2013 survey, 61% of Afghan women reported that they got their information about elections and who to vote for from friends and family. 7% got their information from a mosque, 14% from community shuras, 3% from bazaars, and 14% did not know or refused to answer.⁵² Considering that family and patriarchal institutions such as elders and government officials have been cited as a major concern for controlling if and how women use their right to vote, the strong reliance on secondhand information through these channels is deeply concerning for women's meaningful civic participation.

Though not a pervasive observation, some participants in consultations felt that a lack of unity in civil society or a lack of support for women from other women was an obstacle for women's civic participation.⁵³ One woman noted the lack of sustainability of initiatives as a challenge for those attempting to promote women's civic participation, explaining that although a national network had been established a few years ago, it only lasted for a few months.⁵⁴ Many women reported that they had received information on elections through civil society, but also felt that further trainings, conferences, and platforms are needed to inform, unify, and build the capacity of women in civil society.⁵⁵



We don't have an all around network between women rights activists. The disunity of civil society and women's rights defenders is a problem. If they work together they can be more powerful and successful, but they don't support each other. In every province we must have a network and all provinces with their networks must be connected with each other.

- North consultation 3

44 Democracy International, "A Survey of Public Perception on Elections and Civic Education – Afghanistan," *DI*, April 2013, http://180.222.140.37/videoplayer/ECE%20Survey%20Report.pdf?ich_u_r_i=145a96b31b121418447b8a7d6ca84b76&ich_s_t_a_r_t=0&ich_e_n_d=0&ich_k_e_y=1445088906750663332455&ich_t_y_p_e=1&ich_d_i_s_k_i_d=7&ich_u_n_i_t=1

45 North consultation 3, South consultation 2

46 North consultation 3

47 Free and Fair Election Forum of Afghanistan, "Afghan Perceptions on Democracy & Elections."

48 Personal observation, EPD staff on Election Day

49 Keith Shawe, "Afghanistan in 2013: A Survey of the Afghan People."

50 Democracy International, "A Survey of Public Perception on Elections and Civic Education – Afghanistan."

51 Keith Shawe, "Afghanistan in 2013: A Survey of the Afghan People."

52 *Ibid.*

53 South consultation 4, North consultation 1

54 North consultation 1

55 North consultation 4, 2, 1, South consultation 3, 2, 1, 4

opportunities for women's civic participation

CANDIDATE QUALITIES AND ISSUES OF IMPORTANCE TO WOMEN

In EPD's consultations and elections events prior to the 2014 elections, women were very vocal on the qualities they value in a candidate and the issues that are important to them. These provide a valuable entry point for political candidates and officials to consider the perspectives of women in their policies and campaigns.

The two most important qualities in a candidate identified by women were that candidates should be knowledgeable and educated,⁵⁶ and should have a good background both in terms of experience and particularly in terms of not having any sort of criminal history or past or present association with warlords.⁵⁷ Several felt it was important for presidential candidates to have experience in politics or government,⁵⁸ though the women in one consultation felt that previous experience in politics was a negative quality, particularly having served as an MP.⁵⁹

Also of great importance was a candidate's honesty,⁶⁰ which tied in with women's lack of faith in candidates following through on their promises and their perceptions of corruption in government and elections processes. In conjunction, women also valued candidates who are not corrupt.⁶¹ Similarly, the independence of candidates was discussed, and those consulted felt it was important for candidates to

not have strong connections to those already in power and to not work in the interest of powerful people.⁶² Women from the north also viewed discriminatory or ethnocentric rhetoric and beliefs as a negative quality in a candidate.⁶³

Several women also felt it is important that a candidate is Afghan, patriotic,⁶⁴ and cares about the people.⁶⁵ Other qualities discussed included being open-minded,⁶⁶ a good speaker,⁶⁷ accessible,⁶⁸ positive,⁶⁹ and selecting similarly qualified deputies.⁷⁰ Participants felt that deputies are selected primarily for the financial or personal resources and the votes they can bring to the campaign, rather than for their merits and background.⁷¹ In one discussion, women also mentioned the desire to see more young candidates, who they felt would be better positioned to bring change and would be less entrenched in existing corrupt and patriarchal systems.⁷²

Women wanted to see a candidate with concrete plans,⁷³ and several mentioned the specific importance of plans for women and protecting and promoting women's rights.⁷⁴ In one discussion, participants also discussed the importance of candidates coming to communities to consult about challenges and needs, citing a general disconnect from the people and

56 North consultation 1, 2, 3, 4, South consultation 1, 2, 3, 4

57 North consultation 1, 2, 3, 4, South consultation 1, 3, 4

58 South consultation 4, 1, 3, North consultation 1

59 South consultation 2

60 North consultation 2, 3, 4, South consultation 2, 3, 4

61 North consultation 2, 3, South consultation 3

62 North consultation 3, South consultation 3

63 North consultation 3, 1, 4

64 North consultation 1, 2, 3, South consultation 2, 4

65 North consultation 1, 3, 4, South consultation 1, 2, 4

66 South consultation 4, 1

67 North consultation 1

68 North consultation 3

69 North consultation 1

70 North consultation 3

71 North consultation 3

72 South consultation 4

73 North consultation 1, 3, 4, South consultation 1, 2, 3, 4

74 North consultation 1, 4, South consultation 1, 3

candidates acting primarily in their own self-interest.⁷⁵ Women's issues were the most frequently discussed item of importance to women that candidates should address, mentioned in every consultation. Issues related to women encompassed a broad spectrum of sectors, including women's rights,⁷⁶ employment opportunities for women,⁷⁷ girls' and women's access to primary and higher education,⁷⁸ healthcare for women and particularly maternity care,⁷⁹ elimination of violence against women and girls,⁸⁰ equal rights to divorce for women,⁸¹ and strengthening legal protection against the sexual exploitation of women.⁸² Equality and elimination of discrimination against women were also issues for candidates to address.⁸³ Women also wanted to see a candidate who would address the issue of women's political participation, providing them with opportunities in politics and giving women more positions in the ministries.⁸⁴

The second most important issue was the economy and jobs creation, particularly for women but also in all society.⁸⁵ Improving access to education and healthcare were also identified as critical issues.⁸⁶ Peace was also a recurring theme in these discussions. Women wanted to see candidates who would seriously address the issue of peace and ensure security in Afghanistan.⁸⁷ Women also wanted to see a candidate who would address issues of racism and discrimination in Afghanistan, particularly in making their appointments in the government.⁸⁸ Upholding and enforcing the laws as well as creating a fair system for punishing criminals was another important issue emerging across several consultations.⁸⁹ Other issues discussed included combating corruption,⁹⁰ freedom of expression,⁹¹ independence and freedom of media,⁹² construction and development,⁹³ foreign

affairs,⁹⁴ ending poverty,⁹⁵ and creating a positive future for youth.⁹⁶

The women consulted felt it was important to have female candidates, and unanimously stated that they would vote for a woman. However, some qualified that they would not vote for a female candidate just because she is female. They reiterated the importance

First of all, we must study about all the candidates' personalities, agendas, and their future plans for bringing peace, construction, capacity building, security, and job opportunities for our country. Then we will decide to vote for the right person who really deserves it.

- North consultation 4



They never come to the community to ask about the problems and challenges that we are facing in our community. Our demands from new candidates are that they come to the community and see the problems of the people and especially women. We want to inform them of some issues that need urgent action. We could not find them because most of them are not inside the country, and they never go outside to work for the people or country. They have their own business.

- North consultation 3

75 North consultation 3
 76 South consultation 4, 1, 2, 3, North consultation 1, 4
 77 South consultation 4, 1, 2, 3, North consultation 4,
 78 South consultation 4, 2, 3, North consultation 1
 79 South consultation 3, North consultation 1
 80 South consultation 1, 3, North consultation 1
 81 South consultation 1
 82 South consultation 1
 83 South consultation 1, 3
 84 South consultation 2, North consultation 3, 4
 85 South consultation 4, 1, 2, 3, North consultation 3, 4
 86 South consultation 4, 1, 2, North consultation 1
 87 South consultation 4, 2, 1, North consultation 3, 2, 4,
 88 South consultation 1, North consultation 2, 4
 89 South consultation 4, 2, 3, North consultation 3, 2
 90 South consultation 3, 1
 91 South consultation 3
 92 South consultation 3
 93 South consultation 1, North consultation 2, 3, 4

94 South consultation 1, North consultation 3
 95 North consultation 1
 96 North consultation 2, 4

Protect the rights that we already have. Our constitution and other laws of our country are very good and support women, but there is no one to implement them or ask why these rules aren't being followed in our country.

- North consultation 3

of weighing a female candidate against other candidates in terms of their policies, experience, and potential, and voting for the candidate who can be trusted to deliver on their promises.⁹⁷ Some stated they would prefer female candidates because they feel they are more honest, understand women's issues more, or are less corrupt.⁹⁸

RIGHTS-BASED DISCOURSE

In all stages of the consultations, a strong rights-based rhetoric emerged. Participants demonstrated awareness of their civic rights as women and Afghan citizens as well as of the need to promote and protect them. Justifications were strongly based on a rights-based discourse, citing women's rights and political rights

If a candidate proposed that women should not have a public role in peace and security, we would never support them and it is obvious that they would be impinging on our fundamental right to vote. In other words, if they said that women would not be allowed to have a public role, then it would mean that a woman could neither be a parliamentarian or the President. It is discrimination on the basis of gender, which is a violation of our constitution and international human rights conventions. Men and women are created equal and have equal rights.

- South consultation 1

Voting is as political right for me and for every woman, and if a woman does not use this right for herself, then how can she exercise her other rights?

- South consultation 4

extensively as legitimate and necessary principles of Afghan society. They were using the language of rights with ownership, creating a self-designated rights-oriented cultural frame reorienting a universal discourse to fit their particular needs and context. Women's rights in their parlance became local and specific as well as powerful and universal.

This strong rights ownership discourse highlights the importance of the formation of rights-based social capital, and the importance and potential impact of knowledge sharing and networking to build support, confidence and inspire sustained participation. Multiple women asserted that rights are not given, they must be taken, and it is all Afghan women's responsibility to demand and protect their rights.⁹⁹

SENSE OF CIVIC AND COLLECTIVE RESPONSIBILITY

There was also a strong theme of responsibility, indicating that the women consulted felt that civic participation is a two-way street involving not only rights but also responsibilities. 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.

Participants repeatedly recognized the potential influence of women on the promotion of voting rights among other women. Particularly in discussing the Women and Elections conference, women's peer-based influence was asserted as a powerful tool for extending the benefits of promoting civic participation to women at all levels. The success stories of other women and demonstrating an assertion of rights were cited as motivation for other women. Voting was viewed as necessary, not only in terms of the election, but also as a responsibility to show Afghanistan as well as the rest of the world that Afghan women value and are prepared to defend their rights.¹⁰⁰ Furthermore, as the women involved in interviews and consultations were mostly active in civil society and thus empowered, active women with exceptional mobility and freedom, many felt that they had a responsibility to vote to show less empowered

97 South consultation 1, 3

98 South consultation 2, North consultation 3, 1, 2, 4

99 North consultation 4, 1 pre-election individual interview

100 South consultation 4, 1, 5 pre-election individual interview

I participated in the last election and in this coming election I will participate as well, because I am a woman, and I think I am responsible to participate for the future of Afghanistan.

- Pre-election individual interview

We are about 50 percent of the society and our vote can be destiny making for our country. By voting we must show our power to the other 50 percent [men] of the society so that they cannot ignore us in any decision making.

- North consultation 3

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.

- South consultation 1

As women we want to have changes in our lives, so we must vote. The ideas of women are different from men, and the view of a woman also must have effect in social and political decision-making in a society because women are also living in that society.

- South consultation 4

women the importance and possibility of taking part in political processes and voting.¹⁰¹ Women felt they had a responsibility to train other women regarding democracy and the importance of elections, raise public awareness about elections, encourage other women to vote and provide election information, help other women learn about the candidates, and work together with local and religious leaders to promote women's participation.¹⁰²

Many of the participants referenced a responsibility

101 South consultation 4, 1, North consultation 1, 4, 2, 5 pre-election interview

102 South consultation 1, 4, 3, North consultation 3, 1, 4

to safeguard Afghanistan's future, and particularly women's role in that future.¹⁰³ Overall, while the past is sometimes a source of sadness or frustration, the women demonstrated a keen awareness of the potential of the future of the nation and a desire to contribute towards shaping it for the better. Several participants felt it was their responsibility to learn about the candidates and choose the best candidate for Afghanistan's future.¹⁰⁴

There also emerged a sense that the condition of women is one of a certain degree of struggle nationwide and this creates a sense of national identity among participants, particularly regarding the struggle to promote and protect women's rights. It is understood that there are variations by province and an urban-rural divide. However, there was a pervasive desire to meet and connect with women from all over the country and an inherent element of identification or aspiration to identify with the experience of Afghan women nationally.¹⁰⁵

RELIGION AND ENGAGEMENT OF RELIGIOUS LEADERS

Though Islam is often viewed as a barrier to women's rights, the consultations clarified the powerful potential of promoting women's civic participation through Islam and religious leaders.¹⁰⁶ Several women said that they had received information on elections from their local religious leaders and mosques.¹⁰⁷

There were a number of programs and initiatives in advance of the elections promoting women's civic participation through an Islamic lens. For example, The Asia Foundation's 'Increasing Women's Political Participation and Dialogue Opportunities in Afghanistan' project 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 elections-related issues and create public service messages on the importance of women's political participation to

103 North consultation 1, 2, 3, 4, South consultation 1, 2, 3, 4, 16 pre-election individual interviews, 10 post-election individual interviews

104 South consultation 1, 3, North consultation 3, 1, 2,

105 South consultation 4, North consultation 1, 21 pre- and post-election individual interviews

106 South consultation 1, 2, 3, North consultation 3, 2, 4

107 South consultation 2, 4,

be broadcast on national media.

EPD's Kabul Women's Network undertook an advocacy initiative for registering women to vote in Bagrami district of Kabul province. An influential male community member gathered mullahs from 25 mosques in the area and asked for their help in raising awareness of women's civic rights, using justifications from the Qur'an, Hadith, and Sharia Law. After securing their commitment to the project, a meeting was arranged with the 30 women of the Kabul Women's Network to promote the lectures and discuss activities. Each mullah delivered a sermon promoting women's right to vote via the mosque loudspeaker and asked the men of the village to send their female family members to the mosque, where EPD staff and other supporters were waiting with vehicles to provide transportation to women to obtain voting cards. Through this initiative, 450 women were registered to vote.

Indeed, previous EPD research has found that religious leaders are considered to be "agents of change",¹⁰⁸ and therefore programming targeted at them would correspond to Afghan women's

perception of progressive action and would have a good chance of successes with the right approaches and partners.

REACHING FEMALE VOTERS

While the consultations highlighted a lack of access to information for many potential female voters, a number of positive potential avenues were identified. The media was mentioned in several consultations as a valuable source of information,¹⁰⁹ and was cited as the best means of reaching women in multiple discussions.¹¹⁰ However, in one discussion it was stated that, although media has been the dominant means of communicating information, people don't pay attention to media and its effectiveness is less in villages.¹¹¹ With 76% of Afghan women having access to radio, this medium is particularly promising for promoting women's civic participation and providing practical information about elections and candidates.

Several women discussed receiving information through civil society initiatives or trainings.¹¹² Many women felt civil society can be a valuable form of support for women's political participation through having trainings and conferences, providing information on candidates, or establishing and supporting platforms for promoting women's civic participation.¹¹³ Some felt that civil society plays an important role in monitoring elections and ensuring that women's votes are respected.¹¹⁴

The potential positive influence of tribal, community and religious leaders was noted throughout consultations as well,¹¹⁵ though this should be taken in consideration with the prevalence of reports of control over women's votes through these forums. A number of sites of influence mentioned were identified for positive campaigning, including schools and universities, local community meetings and councils, and mosques. Some women also discussed the possibility of reaching other women through social events like family parties¹¹⁶ or going door to door to talk to women individually.¹¹⁷

109 South consultation 1, 2, 3, North consultation 3, 1, 4

110 South consultation 1, 3

111 North consultation 3

112 South consultation 4, 1, 2, North consultation 2

113 South consultation 4, 1, 2, 3, North consultation 3, 1, 2, 4

114 South consultation 3,

115 South consultation 1, 3, North consultation 1

116 South consultation 2

117 South consultation 3

Working together with the tribal leaders and Mullahs can do wonders.

- South consultation 1

We can talk to the village Mullahs and persuade them to encourage women and the elderly to vote in the elections. The Mullahs can do that in Friday sermons.

- South consultation 3

Village councils have good relations with every organization and media so they can reach women. The media and civil society organizations do not have access to villages that are far away, but the village council can do this.

- South consultation 4

108 EQUALITY for Peace and D, Women's Regional Network et al. "Surviving War and Transition: Perspectives from Afghan Women," *Women's Regional Network*, 2013, http://www.womensregionalnetwork.org/images/uploads/CC_Afghanistan.pdf.

conclusion and recommendations

While challenges to women's civic participation are often discussed as isolated conditions limiting the full exercise of their potential, in reality there is a large degree of fluidity between all of the challenges identified, illustrating a deeply complex situation to address in fostering effective women's civic participation. Addressing any one of these challenges in isolation is unlikely to create sustainable solutions. Furthermore, simply getting women to the polls, while a necessary and worthwhile goal, is not enough in itself.

CIVIL SOCIETY

Civil society plays a key role in promoting civic participation in Afghanistan. While the government is required to take formal steps regarding security and elections procedures to help ensure women's civic participation, it is often NGOs and CSOs that are active in campaigns to mobilize female voters and build civic and rights awareness among women. Based on this project, EPD issues the following recommendations to civil society, particularly for consideration in advance of the upcoming 2015 parliamentary elections:

1. Promote access to information about candidates

62% of women felt that women should decide for themselves whom to vote for. This indicates that for every 10 women who were registered to vote, 4 were merely a duplication of a male vote, most likely a male family member, religious leader, or local elder. Getting women to the polls is not the endgame in terms of empowering them to exercise their civic rights. Access to information, particularly for women living in remote areas and illiterate women, remains a huge barrier to women's meaningful civic

participation, and should be a central component of any civic participation programming.

2. Create gender-sensitive forums for women to interact with candidates

From EPD's experience in the 2014 Presidential Elections, providing women with platforms to directly interact with candidates is a highly effective approach, as it allows them to ask their own questions and make their own assessment of the candidates based on first-hand information. More efforts should be made to give women first-hand access to candidates in consideration of their relative exclusion from forums such as rallies and campaign speeches in male-dominated public forums.

3. Promote safe, local-level forums for women to talk about issues surrounding the elections

Civil society should think of creative ways to bring women together in forums that are both culturally sensitive and safe, allowing them to receive information and discuss elections-related issues. While training active women to promote women's civic engagement can be a positive means of disseminating information, it is necessary to also establish forums that allow women to discuss issues related to elections in their own communities.

4. Engage religious leaders

It is important to identify and engage powerful and supportive "norm entrepreneurs." In the constructivist paradigm social and cultural norms can be changed with consistent advocacy on the part of influential "norm entrepreneurs" and when norms are framed in such a way as to be complementary to pre-existing

normative categories.¹ Of particular note through these consultations, engaging religious leaders and framing women's rights as complementing rather than contradicting Islamic values can be a powerful tool for promoting cultural shifts that support more active women's participation.

¹ Martha Finnemore and Katherine Sikkink "International Norm Dynamics and Political Change," *International Organization* 52, no. 4 (1996): 887-91.

5. Disseminate practical knowledge of voting procedures

Civic education campaigns need to be targeted and focused on the mechanics of the voting process, such as the format of the ballot, how to mark your selection, and which candidate is which, rather than just discussing the importance of voting and registering to vote. They should draw upon positive examples and images of women's civic participation to counteract the negative rhetoric and fear-based associations between female activism and threat.

6. Provide civic education as an ongoing activity

Civic education should be undertaken year round, not only during the voting cycle. Civic education should extend beyond 'get out the vote' style campaigns, and include a renewed focus on fundamental constitutional rights, electoral laws, and elections processes and procedures.

7. Jointly assess impact beyond the number of women at the polls

All stakeholders should devise a system of impact assessment that is results-based and easily made publically accessible and understandable to facilitate information-sharing and project improvement. The positive implications of democratic engagement and election-related programming and activities can then be demonstrated as well as lessons learned for the future. Furthermore, results-based impact assessments could help to identify interventions to support women's meaningful and autonomous civic participation, rather than just counting the number of women at the polls and asserting success.

8. Create needs-based response mechanisms

Civil society should create space for needs-based response mechanisms, allowing communities and community leaders to express concerns that may have arisen during the Presidential Elections. Civil society should continue to create space for dialogue and consultations with individual candidates and civil activists and seek to bring women's rights activists and community leaders into agreement on the best ways to encourage women to vote, emphasizing the benefits of women's suffrage for (especially rural) society as well as for politics and democracy.

9. Streamline messaging

Though the positive benefits of media coverage of elections and communicating information through mediums such as print media and televised debates have been recognized, the limitations of such approaches should be acknowledged, and used in conjunction with more widely accessible mediums and platforms. Every attempt should be made to streamline and unify the central message of this campaign allowing it to be a neutral, unbiased and broad-spectrum tool for the promotion of civic participation. This campaign should also be used to emphasize social cohesion and the multiplicity of Afghan life with imagery of diversity and a symbolic message based on a positive picture of the nation's future.

10. Identify ways of working within community structures to promote women's civic participation and increase the autonomy of women's votes

Though programming in Afghanistan often seeks to work through local and traditional structures such as elders and community leaders, these structures are often highly patriarchal and the women consulted revealed that they can sometimes serve as a means of disenfranchising women. It was also clear that family and community are highly valued, and approaches are more likely to be successful when approached through these mechanisms. As such, civil society should revisit approaches to civic education and civic awareness programming to ensure that these

potential supporters are meaningfully supporting and promoting rather than selling or controlling women's votes.

11. Establish and support public monitoring mechanisms

Civil society should focus on the establishment of public monitoring mechanisms for elections. Information Communication Technologies (ICTs) harness the collective capacity, experiences, and access of citizens to identify and address the patterns, types, and location of corrupt and fraudulent acts. For example, the "I Paid a Bribe" project in India includes a website for reporting corruption as well as mobile apps and SMS services to allow citizens to report corruption. The Indian capital's government has also launched a corruption reporting hotline that allows citizens to call and report incidents of corruption and counsels citizens on what to do when they encounter corrupt officials. Paiwandgah launched an ICT initiative in the first round of Afghanistan's 2014 elections, receiving 568 responses from 34 provinces, and from 27 provinces in the second round.¹ Considering that 80 percent of Afghans have access to cell phones in rural and urban areas,² an SMS service and hotline mechanism available leading up to elections and on Election Day could be a valuable tool for empowering citizens and civil society to publicly monitor elections and elections officials.

¹The National, "Voices on Afghanistan: social media grows as Afghans come online," The National, 28 June 2014, <http://www.thenational.ae/world/voices-on-afghanistan/20140628/voices-on-afghanistan--social-media-grows-as-afghans-come-online>.

²*Ibid.*

12. Encourage social media as a means of promoting civic participation

With rapid urbanization and expansion of access to 3G networks,¹ social media is becoming a tool of rapidly increasing potential for promoting civic participation. In the 2014 elections, all Presidential campaigns had Facebook pages and invested in Facebook advertising.² Particularly regarding targeting youth and creating safe spaces for women to exchange ideas and information regarding

¹The National, "Voices on Afghanistan: social media grows as Afghans come online," The National, 28 June 2014, <http://www.thenational.ae/world/voices-on-afghanistan/20140628/voices-on-afghanistan--social-media-grows-as-afghans-come-online>.

²*Ibid.*

elections and candidates, social media will continue to be an area for developing innovative initiatives for promoting civic participation. Civil society should focus on supporting the development of this approach through social media trainings and creating online platforms for promoting civic participation.

GOVERNMENT AND ELECTORAL BODIES

In the past decade, several reports on elections have issued recommendations to the Afghan government for promoting women's participation. It is clear that while the numbers would indicate that Afghan women are increasingly able to participate in elections, a number of obstacles remain that should be addressed through formal and informal policy solutions. Additionally, as the IEC and IECC are within the framework of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and are vetted by key government officials and ultimately appointed by the President, the Afghan government has an obligation to review and address issues with elections bodies and procedures that have allowed for three elections crises in 5 years.

1. Focus on restoring faith in the process

Even before the second round of elections, some women consulted identified a low level of faith in electoral institutions and processes as an obstacle to encouraging women to vote. Particularly after the experience in the second round of the 2014 Presidential Elections, the Afghan government has a lot of ground to cover to assure Afghan citizens of the efficacy of their votes and ensure participation in future elections. The Afghan government should immediately begin to take steps to review and reassess electoral procedures to minimize the risk of fraud, and these steps should be publicly promoted to help restore faith in the process. There should be strict policies for punishing those who commit fraud, and they should be publicly promoted and enforced. The IEC should be reformed and strict measures put in place to ensure fair and transparent recruitment processes to prevent nepotism in appointments or stacking workers to support a particular candidate. The government should also take measures to address the nepotism in recruitment and appointments that

has been noted regarding the IEC.¹

1 Sahel Mangal, "Irregularities alleged in IEC recruitment," Pajhwok Afghan News, 22 January 2014, "<http://www.pajhwok.com/en/2014/01/22/irregularities-alleged-iec-recruitment>."

2. Review and reassess policies and procedures for women's registration and voting

It is evident that the policies and procedures put in place to "protect" women have actually put them at extreme risk of having their rights co-opted and abused for fraud or asserting influence on elections outcomes. In particular, allowing women to not have their photograph or fingerprint on voter identification increases this risk, while the continued practice of proxy voting denies women their agency and autonomous right to cast their vote. These procedures should be reviewed and alternative culturally sensitive approaches identified that both reduce the risk of subjecting women's rights to abuse while still respecting cultural norms. Feasible mitigation measures should be identified to prevent proxy voting with serious consequences for offending elections officials. For example, one organization reviewed satellite images of an elections day to assess the practicality of the number of votes returned by polling stations. Creative, innovative, cost-efficient solutions such as this could help to ensure that women's votes are respected and that there are consequences for those who participate in violating their rights.

3. Accelerate the countrywide distribution of the *e-Tazkera* national identity cards as a feasible, culturally appropriate voter identification system

The prevention of fraud and particularly the misuse of women's votes could be more easily prevented with a revised voter identification system. The present system of voter registration has proven inadequate at preventing fraud and protecting voter integrity. The government should accelerate the countrywide distribution of the *e-Tazkera* to all Afghans—male and female—and use this electronic national identity card for voter documentation.

4. Increase and improve civic education promoting women's participation in elections

Several women consulted reported that they had heard information regarding elections from the IEC. However, a low level of awareness of elections policies and procedures remains prevalent among women. The IEC should work across the government to develop and implement a long-term program of voter education and awareness in coordination with civil society actors. The campaign should not focus exclusively on women's right to vote and the importance of their participation, but also on the practical aspects of voter registration, access to candidate information, autonomy of women's votes, and voting procedures such as location of polling stations and how to fill out the ballot. Civic education should not focus on only informing women of their rights, but also promoting awareness and respect of the policies and procedures regarding women's registration and voting among men.

5. Ensure that polling stations are accessible with special consideration to gender-specific needs

In Afghanistan, the daily routines and mobility of men and women entail vastly different opportunities and needs for participating in elections. Mobility and timing were once again identified as a key obstacle to women's participation in elections, particularly in rural and remote areas. Increasing the number of polling stations and exploring transportation options remain viable solutions. The idea of mobile polling stations has also been put forward, but with regards to issues regarding fraud and security, this seems to be an impractical solution at this stage. However, the use of mobile stations for registration is also a feasible measure for increasing both men and women's access to elections.

6. Provide transportation

The provision of transportation should be considered within a gender-analytic context assessment. In particular, if travel to the polls is not feasible due to financial, practical or security concerns, every effort should be made to provide transportation on voting

day. Given that women may find it particularly difficult to travel to vote, emphasis should be placed on female transportation. However, these transportation mechanisms should not exclude men. A system of incentivized transport, allowing male persons to receive transport to and from polling stations provided if they are accompanied by a female voter, could simultaneously help to increase male support for women's vote and address practical concerns around allowing females to travel unaccompanied.

7. Guarantee security is addressed through a gender-sensitive lens

The need for female poll workers and searchers has been reiterated in several elections. The IEC should continue to focus on effective solutions for recruiting female poll workers, and the Ministry of Interior should similarly work on proactive and ongoing efforts to recruit and train female police and searchers. Cross-institutional outreach could further help with this effort, liaising with other ministries and departments to identify possible candidates or employ qualified temporary staff for Election Day.

8. Appoint new staff and commissioners to the IEC and IECC

The latest Electoral Law created a new mechanism for appointing members to the IEC and IECC. However, civil society has not been included in the process as envisaged by the new mechanism, and there is a perception that the current Commissioners are not impartial.¹ An improved, transparent process that includes civil society should be implemented and new Commissioners appointed. Additionally, IEC and IECC staff should be reviewed and new staff recruited to ensure impartiality and gender equity among staff.

¹ Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, "Roundtable Discussion on 'Afghanistan's Electoral Experiences,'" AREU, 7 May 2014, <http://areu.org.af/Uploads/EditionPdfs/Proceeding%20of%20a%20roundtable%20discussion%20on%20Afghanistan's%20electoral%20Experiences.pdf>.

9. Appoint more competent female Commissioners

Of the eight IEC Commissioners and five IECC Commissioners, only three are women. There is a need to appoint more qualified female

Commissioners to these commissions. Promoting women's participation in elections should start with ensuring gender equitable representation in Afghanistan's electoral bodies.

10. Review the Electoral Law

With 3 major elections crises in 5 years, the government of Afghanistan should realize that part of problem stems from the electoral laws. The government should therefore review the Electoral Law and revise and strengthen its provisions to ensure free and fair elections, including a review of the structure, duties and authorities of the IEC and IECC. Though the Electoral Law is prohibited from being changed by Parliament within one year of Parliamentary Elections, this should be a top priority for Parliament after the 2015 Parliamentary Elections.

11. Explore alternatives to the Single Non-Transferable Vote (SNTV) system

The Single Non-Transferable Vote system has proven to be divisive and largely vulnerable to corruption. A rank voting system where voters rank candidates on an ordinal scale is a viable alternative option that would both encourage more national unity through a less divisive system and reduce the feasibility of wide-scale corruption. It could furthermore help to increase the autonomy of women's votes, as it would be much more difficult for others to control their entire ranking scheme.

12. Explore alternative voting mechanisms such as electronic voting and ICTs

A number of countries offer a mobile voting option, which could be an increasingly viable means of voting as Afghanistan's mobile coverage and ownership rapidly expands. In India, an Electronic Voting System (EVS) has been implemented featuring briefcase-sized portable voting machines, each of which cost only around 175 USD.¹ To purchase an EVS for each of the 23,136 polling stations that were open in the second round of the 2014 elections would cost approximately 4.1 million USD, less than half of what was spent in the audit of the second round

¹ Ghanizada, "Mobile Phones: Solution for fraud in Afghan elections," Khaama Press, 2 July 2014, <http://www.khaama.com/mobile-phones-solution-for-fraud-in-afghan-elections-2694>.

results in 2014, which came in at a total expense of around 10 million USD.² An EVS or mobile voting option combined with an e-tazkera registration would minimize the risk of fraud, increase the speed of results, and provide greater autonomy to female voters, who would have to be present and verify their own votes.

²Reuters News Agency, "Ghani named Afghan president-elect after deal to end election dispute," Reuters, 22 September 2014, <http://af.reuters.com/article/worldNews/idAFKBN0HG03820140922>.

DONORS AND THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

1. Identify an appropriate middle ground while still observing elections

Several women consulted felt that the international community has an important role to play in observing elections and ensuring transparency of the process. Some also noted that Afghans feel that the international community exerts influence over elections outcomes. A sensitive balance must be struck between these two considerations to ensure that the elections are viewed as legitimate and sovereign, while also ensuring there is adequate oversight from external observers to help prevent issues such as those experienced in the 2014 Presidential Elections. While Afghan organizations such as TEFA and FEFA deployed a high number of observers around Afghanistan, it seems that international observers are perceived as more impartial and less likely to be connected to networks that may try to corrupt or assert influence in the monitoring process. Both Afghan and international observers should have a role in observing elections.

2. Support media efforts to promote civic participation and education

Donors and experienced partners should fund or facilitate media efforts to promote civic participation and education. Though trainings for journalists and media actors producing non-partisan election coverage could help improve the way these issues are represented and portrayed, there has been much previous work done in the area of journalism training

to notably mixed effect. They should fund radio and TV programs that discuss the candidates, matching local candidates to local coverage to increase knowledge and recognition of appropriate candidates. Every effort should be made to ensure that the promotion of positive participation and democratic debate are the primary focus of elections-related programming.

3. Make funding conditional, with the right conditions

Funding should be made conditional within realistic parameters of the current context. Aid threats such as making funding conditional on successful elections or threatening to withdraw aid in response to the escalation of the dispute in the second round of elections are neither useful nor encouraging to electoral processes. Financial support to the Afghan government should not be conditional on the "successful" outcome of elections, but rather on process and procedural reform and taking effective steps to make elections more inclusive, transparent, and fair.

4. Explore the possibility of a performance-based funding system for elections officials

A system of providing funding based on performance in terms of planning, budgeting, civic education and disseminating elections information, low number of audits, and low level of complaints could help improve performance of elections officials at the provincial level and preventing fraud. The Performance Based Government Fund (PBGf) has had success in incentivizing good performance through evaluating and ranking provincial officials, and a similar model could produce similar results regarding planning, budgeting, promoting civic awareness and preventing fraud in elections.

5. Don't use women as a benchmark for asserting success in instilling democratic values

After the elections, official statements were laden with congratulations to Afghanistan, and particularly its women, for demonstrating their commitment to democracy. While the participation of women in elections is an achievement, blindly asserting this as

a success displays an ignorance or lack of attention to the extreme limitations they still face, such as autonomy in deciding for whom to vote and what could easily amount to widespread co-opting of women's votes. While images of women in burqas lining up to vote may make for a nice contrast to the Taliban-era imagery as a means of asserting progress and change, it also denies the validity and importance of addressing the still-numerous barriers to women's effective civic participation.

6. Support civil society's role in elections

Civil society has a critical role to play in promoting civic participation and ensuring transparency, serving as a voice of the population, acting as a watchdog, holding the government accountable to its promises and citizens to their civic responsibilities, and undertaking advocacy and awareness raising activities. While government activities regarding elections require the support of donors and the international community, civil society should equally be supported as a critical party in ensuring inclusive, fair and transparent elections in Afghanistan. Civil society representatives should be party to discussions and decision-making regarding elections processes and procedures, such as in vetting candidates for the IEC and IECC, undertaking reforms, and monitoring elections.

DRAWING UPON A SAMPLE CAMPAIGN MODEL FOR CIVIL SOCIETY

The methodology and principles of the "We Can" campaign are designed to be rights-based and community-focused, using "change-makers" of all genders. These rights-based principles resonated with project participants, and are an important foundation for civic engagement. The campaign is illustrative of the importance of relying on popular support and social transformation and of using local and community agents as central actors while also targeting so called "ordinary men and women." Civil society programming aimed at enhancing women's democratic engagement needs to strike this balance between emphasizing universal civil and political rights while being responsive to context and empowering those at the grassroots level.

In practical terms, the use of schools and universities, media (traditional and non-traditional forms), celebrities (or well-known and respected persons) by the "We Can" campaign is illustrative of the range of targeting and endorsement mechanisms that should be used to encourage civic participation. The unity of Oxfam's campaign message involved coordination across organizational and regional structures and an emphasis placed on regional and global solidarity and alliance formulation (with other NGOs, state bodies, student groups). Given that the women consulted by EPD expressed the desire to be supported by international women's networks and other country activists, the Oxfam campaign highlights the potential for creating a globalized social capital to enhance Afghan women's sense of solidarity in struggle.

See <http://policy.practice.oxfam.org.uk/our-work/gender-justice/we-can> for more information on the project.

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EQUALITY for Peace and Democracy (EPD) is a nonprofit, non-governmental organization dedicated to empowering women and youth at the community and policy levels in Afghanistan. EPD was established in early 2010 by Ms. Nargis Nehan, the Executive Director of EPD. EPD works to build the capacity of women and youth in order for them to be the front face in presenting their needs in development, peace building and democratic processes of the country. EPD further aims at mass mobilization of women and youth to contribute to overcoming the challenges of instability that Afghanistan is facing. EPD establishes platforms for women and youth to come together, establish networks, build trust and confidence, and strive jointly for transforming Afghanistan into a democratic country free of all forms of violence and discrimination.