

Women,

Peace AND

Security IN

Afghanistan

looking BACK to move FORWARD

**WOMEN'S  
PERSPECTIVES  
SERIES**

1 August 2014

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Democracy

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# methodology

This project consisted of 9 consultations with 74 women from 20 provinces—Nangarhar, Logar, Bamyan, Herat, Kandahar, Helmand, Uruzgan, Khost, Paktia, Faryab, Badakhshan, Kunduz, Takhar, Baghlan, Jawzjan, Sar-e Pul, Samangan, Balkh, Parwan and Kapisa—in late 2013. 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. Note that where direct quotes from the data are used, the English language translation was modified for grammatical purposes in some cases, but care was taken to keep the sense of the statement as intended.

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As Afghanistan enters the Transformation Decade, progress in the areas of peace, reconciliation, and security is tenuous and dormant. This project revisits the Peace Process Roadmap to 2015 from the High Peace Council as a means of looking back in order to determine how to move forward as Afghanistan undertakes critical political and security transitions.

EPD's consultations found that participants engaged positively with the challenging issues in Roadmap 2015 but their contributions also highlighted the disconnect between the political level process of the peace and reconciliation process and the needs and capacities of communities. In particular given that women's concerns and perspectives are marginalized in Roadmap 2015, this project used the discussions to outline the ways that women's voices can contribute. The discussions highlighted women's perspectives on the peace process as well as traditional and more context-specific security obstacles faced by Afghan women.

The paper outlines the major challenges to women's involvement in and attainment of peace and security, the areas where there is room for positive capacity-building and provides actionable recommendations for key stakeholders. Fundamentally EPD recommends that political, international and civil society actors focus on mechanisms that allow for a greater grassroots contribution to the peace process. The overall trend of the consultations suggests that there is an urgent need to enhance and refine the inclusion of women and their communities to achieve sustainable peace in Afghanistan moving forward.



# introduction

The High Peace Council (HPC) was created in 2010 with the mandate of establishing a framework for talks with the Taliban. At this time, the Afghan government also released the Afghanistan Peace and Reconciliation Program (APRP) with the objective of reintegrating lower-level fighters into local communities and providing incentives to encourage fighters to abandon the Taliban cause, explicitly aiming to promote peace through a political approach. In 2012, the HPC released the Peace Process Roadmap to 2015 (Roadmap 2015), an ambitious document outlining a plan envisioning the Taliban, Hizb-e Islami and other armed insurgent groups in Afghanistan to give up armed opposition and be active participants in Afghanistan's political and constitutional processes, and all foreign troops to leave Afghanistan by 2015.

Roadmap 2015 includes provisions for incorporating the Taliban and other armed groups into peace talks, measures for balancing regional relations, in particular enhancing security ties with Pakistan, and a timescale for the peace process.<sup>1</sup> It has been criticized as unrealistic and for its strong focus on the Taliban. Moreover, despite Afghanistan entering a critical political and security transition phase, many of the provisions, especially those centered on disarmament and reintegration, remain elusive. Roadmap 2015 also completely ignored women's concerns in the peace process. The document mentions women only once, and at no point does it refer to the need to mainstream gender concerns or women's perspectives in peace and reconciliation processes.

The HPC and the broader Afghan government approach to the reconciliation process have furthermore been criticized as falling short in terms of public outreach and involving civil society, as well as the process being marred by a lack of transparency. This has amounted to a considerable disconnect between government peace efforts and the views

of Afghan civil society, which is particularly troubling with regards to women's issues and the risks for the achievements of the past decade. Notably, civil society and the Afghan public were not consulted in the development of Roadmap 2015.

The relationship between women, peace and security is now understood to be vital for the creation of lasting peace<sup>2</sup> and women have a key role to play in achieving sustainable peace in Afghanistan. EPD conducted focus group discussions with 74 female leaders, activists and community members from 20 provinces, discussing the Peace Process Roadmap to 2015 from the High Peace Council (HPC) and the needs and perspectives of women in Afghanistan's peace and transition processes.

The focus group discussions conducted by EPD engaged women on the difficult issues in Roadmap 2015 and Afghanistan's peace and reconciliation processes. The qualitative data collected from the dialogues was coded for thematic patterns and analyzed by two researchers. What emerges are strong cross-cutting themes regarding the ways in which communities in Afghanistan can develop the capacity for resilience and the challenges and opportunities for women to play an active and vital role in the peace and reintegration processes. Participants outlined a strong need to ensure that peace processes are not merely political but community-based and community-led, with sufficient mechanisms for civil society and population consultation and oversight. With the impending political and security transitions, Afghanistan faces a unique opportunity to reassess its approaches to the peace and reconciliation processes and adopt more effective and inclusive policies moving into the Transformation Decade. EPD has drawn on the focus group data to devise key actionable recommendations for three main stakeholder groups: civil society, the international community and donors, and the Afghan government and High Peace Council.

1 Peace Process Roadmap to 2015 [http://www.foreignpolicy.com/files/121213\\_Peace\\_Process\\_Roadmap\\_to\\_2015.pdf](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/files/121213_Peace_Process_Roadmap_to_2015.pdf) (accessed 20/05/14)

2 See for example United Nations Resolution 1325 (2000)

# challenges in peace, reconciliation, security, and reintegration

**SECURITY** Physical insecurity is still a central impediment to women's daily lives and participation in democratic and peace processes. "Security" was the single greatest crosscutting theme to occur within EPD's consultations. This reflects the broader trend in the country where insecurity is most often perceived as Afghanistan's biggest problem.<sup>3</sup> The Taliban were the most frequently cited source of insecurity, with all participants regarding them as having the potential to negatively impact peace. Suicide attacks were referenced as being a particular cause of fear and a key security concern, particularly in the south. Attacks on girls going to school and the particularly high levels of insecurity experienced in rural areas were also sources of worry, mostly in the south consultations. Tribal conflicts, family feuds, warlords and other warring parties were mentioned and the need to incorporate a consideration of all these elements into a holistic security analysis emerged as a primary theme of the dialogues. Abuse of power by police or persons of authority and the misguided activities of young men were cited as problematic as well in the south consultations.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, a central issue that was highlighted by respondents was the need to prevent "interference" from neighboring countries in order to achieve security, which was mentioned in all but one consultation. This mirrors the concerns of the Roadmap, which specifies the need to stabilize regional security relationships, in particular with Pakistan.

The participants also pointed to the need to educate and develop the national police force with particular reference to the need to recruit female personnel.<sup>5</sup> Some women expressed a distrust of police, feeling they are often dishonest or corrupt.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, they noted that the vetting process for police needs to be improved, ensuring that those who are a part of the police force do not have criminal pasts and have not been involved in violent conflict.<sup>7</sup> The need to improve police presence in remote areas was also noted, especially by participants from the south.<sup>8</sup> In the north consultations, many participants felt that the ANSF generally have the dedication and motivation required to provide protection, albeit with weak capacity. Many also felt that more training and education for police is necessary, and that international forces should continue to provide more training for police.<sup>9</sup>

Based on the focus group discussions it is clear that insecurity is a central concern for women when they are considering peace and how peace processes should function. Some of the issues mentioned, such as suicide attacks and the Taliban are very traditional national security concerns. However, some sources of insecurity such as violence against women, forced marriages, attacks on girls going to school, the practice of *baad* and family feuds can be considered less traditional security issues. These problems have obviously gendered dynamics that need to be factored in and accounted for by key stakeholders.

3 Keith Shave (2013) The Asia Foundation. "Afghanistan in 2013: A Survey of the Afghan People" <http://asiafoundation.org/resources/pdfs/2013AfghanSurvey.pdf> (accessed 10/5/14) p. 6

4 South consultation 1

5 South consultation 2, 1

6 South consultation 3, 1

7 South consultation 1

8 South consultation 3, 4

9 North consultation 1, 2, 3, 4

# ISSUES WITH GOVERNMENT PEACE PROCESSES

While Roadmap 2015 places a heavy emphasis on relations with Pakistan and measures to negotiate with the Taliban, women expressed opposition to both of these approaches. While some women felt it was important to include the Taliban in the reconciliation process,<sup>10</sup> many participants adamantly rejected the idea of reconciliation with the Taliban out of fear for limitations on women's rights and a lack of trust in their commitment to the process.<sup>11</sup> Several women recalled their experiences under the Taliban, citing past offenses as an obstacle for any peace process.

Participants expressed skepticism regarding the current process and those leading it, namely the HPC and Roadmap 2015 itself. Some felt that some members of the HPC have questionable backgrounds

and lack the right capacities and the trust of the people.<sup>12</sup> Others felt they were corrupt or motivated by personal gain.<sup>13</sup> Some participants felt that Roadmap 2015 was not designed for the benefit of the people, and that it is contrary to human and women's rights.<sup>14</sup> There was general consensus across discussions that the current process does not adequately consult the Afghan people and is particularly missing adequate representation of women and women's needs and rights.

Roadmap 2015 outlined large roles for Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and the US in the negotiation process between Afghanistan and the Taliban. The peace talks that nearly took place in 2013 followed a similar formula, with Qatar hosting the Taliban's political office and the US closely involved in mediating the talks. However, the peace negotiations broke down quickly, with the Taliban blaming the derailment on the US and the Afghan government. National ownership of the peace and reconciliation process was a strong theme of the discussions, mentioned in every focus group discussion. The women consulted felt very strongly that the process should be Afghan, and some felt that the talks should take place in Afghanistan with no foreign involvement, and only after a considerable reduction of foreign troops.<sup>15</sup> A number of participants also discussed security issues and interference from neighboring countries as a key issue to address in the interest of peace and security in Afghanistan.<sup>16</sup> However, the general tone was that these parties should not be a direct party to Afghan talks with the Taliban, but rather these issues should be addressed separately.



## OPPOSITION TO REINTEGRATION

The disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) process in Afghanistan was notably unique in that it did not emerge from a peace agreement but rather was an externally driven process initiated together with the establishment of a new

*We need peace as we need water and oxygen. The government has to improve the security troops' capacity and tools. The people who make the situation worse, they are all Afghans. I mean they are citizens. And they are still in the country.*

*- North consultation 1*

10 South consultation 1, 3, North consultation 3

11 South consultation 4, 5, North consultation 4, 3, 2, 1

12 South consultation 5, 1, 4, North consultation 4

13 North consultation 4

14 South consultation 5

15 South consultation 3

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

national government and security structure.<sup>17</sup> The various DDR initiatives, namely Afghanistan's New Beginnings Programme (ANBP) from 2003 to 2005 and Disbanding Illegal Armed Groups (DIAG) from 2005 to 2011, APRP from 2010 to 2015, Afghanistan Reintegration Program (ARP), and others, have been widely acknowledged as initiatives of greatly mixed success, largely politically driven and embedded in local and national power alliances and partisan allegiances.<sup>18</sup> Of particular note is the emphasis on disarmament and demobilization, and a lack of notable achievements in the area of reintegration and reconciliation. An analysis of the reconciliation efforts undertaken in conjunction with the DDR process characterized them as "ad hoc, top-down, and predicated on the willingness of former Taliban commanders to work within a new government system that they had no hand in helping create."<sup>19</sup> The consultations undertaken by EPD echoed the larger analysis of the DDR process in Afghanistan; there is still a long way to go in addressing reintegration.

Women's opinions on reintegration echoed those on peace talks and reconciliation, with reintegration cited as another major security concern for women and the people of Afghanistan. For many participants, discussions of Taliban reintegration in their communities were associated with fear of threats, insecurity, and violence, and several again strongly rejected the inclusion of the Taliban. Some participants again cited a trust deficit based on past experiences that continues to paint the Taliban as a considerable threat, particularly for women.<sup>20</sup> Participants expressed fear that allowing the Taliban to return to society would have a negative effect and the reintegrated fighters would renew violence and anti-government activities in their communities.<sup>21</sup> Many opposed the idea of any reintegration process altogether,<sup>22</sup> suggesting a failing in the reconciliation process. Themes of reconciliation include healing, truth, justice, and reparation, which should be addressed at the political, national, and local levels. The consistent resistance to reintegration by participants would suggest that the reconciliation process in Afghanistan has failed to provide a forum

17 Michael Bhatia, Robert Muggah and Mark Sedra, "DDR in Afghanistan: When Statebuilding and Security Collide," in *Small Arms Survey 2009: Shadows of War* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2009) pp. 285-315.

18 Ibid.

19 Ibid.

20 South consultation 1

21 South consultation 5, 3, North consultation 3, 2

22 South consultation 5, South consultation 4

We have no good memory of the Taliban and they are not welcome to our communities. The Taliban would beat us with sticks and batons when we would come to the city shopping and that has been inscribed in our memory. We cannot forget that — the crimes they have committed.

- South consultation 4

I am not in favor of negotiations with Taliban. The government must solve this by fighting and using arms against them. They are our enemies. It is about 12 years since our government wanted to negotiate with them and invited them to live with us in peace, but they never accepted. In these 12 years, in every moment they killed us, attacked people, murdered our educated people and destroyed our cities, but still the government wants to negotiate with them and let them take part in our government. As the citizens of this country we don't want the Taliban; we want to fight them.

- North consultation 4

for addressing past grievances and allowing women to envision a future of a unified post-transition Afghanistan such as that outlined in Roadmap 2015.

Many participants felt that they would only be open to the reintegration of the Taliban and other armed groups after they had been punished for any crimes or offenses and officially renounced violence, suggesting that women did not view amnesty for lower-level fighters and those who committed less grievous offenses favorably.<sup>23</sup> Some also felt that those who were reintegrated should be under the supervision of the government and monitored for any legal offenses.<sup>24</sup> In one consultation, reintegration was viewed as a motivating factor for others to join the Taliban, as they would see that there would be minimal or no consequences for their actions as a member of the insurgency.<sup>25</sup>

23 South consultation 5, 4, North consultation 2

24 South consultation 5

25 North consultation 4

Reintegration was viewed as a hesitant possibility in a few consultations.<sup>26</sup> Some women suggested that giving education on Islam was important for reintegration, and that all reintegrated Taliban should be required to sign a written document renouncing violence.<sup>27</sup> It was suggested that providing jobs or economic and educational opportunities could be a useful tool for the government to facilitate successful reintegration.<sup>28</sup> Some participants felt that communities, and women in particular, could assist with reintegration through raising public awareness

of negotiations and the terms of the reconciliation so that communities are aware of why the Taliban have to be reintegrated.<sup>29</sup>

## COMMUNITY, TRADITION AND MASCULINITIES

While respondents in Bamyan and all north consultations stated that they were well supported by male family and community members, participants from Herat, Nangarhar, Logar, Kandahar and Helmand stated that male members refused to support or actively opposed women's involvement in peace processes. It can be argued that certain masculine identity models (those aspects of male identity linked to perceptions of what it means to "be a man"), and traditional patriarchal structures such as tribal and religious leaders constitute obstacles to women's engagement with peace. Other aspects of tradition that were referenced as detrimental were forced marriage, the practice of baad, and opposition to girl's education.

There was reference made to the need to solve tribal, family, and land disputes through the formal justice system, which some viewed as a necessary component of peace and security in Afghanistan.<sup>30</sup> This is indicative of the need to centralize and regulate justice systems and to encourage the integration of local dispute resolution mechanisms into the formal legal justice framework. The desire to shift to more formalized judiciary structures could furthermore point to what can often be a high record of discrimination against women by traditional and religious leaders as patriarchal bodies. As suggested by a recent GNWP report, these informal mechanisms often do not act in favor of women or preside over practices conducive to gender equity.<sup>31</sup> Therefore there is room within the women, peace and security agenda for increased focus on shifting dispute resolution at the local level away from traditional mediums towards a centralized system or encouraging the adoption of more gender equitable practices at the local level. It is vital that the government focuses on enhancing judicial proficiency and effectiveness, with the support of the

<sup>29</sup> South consultation 3, North consultation 2

<sup>30</sup> South consultation 2, South consultation 3

<sup>31</sup> Zarin Hamid (2012) "Women Count – Security Council Resolution 1325: Civil Society Monitoring Report 2012" A Project of the Global Network of Women Peacebuilders [http://www.gnwp.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/02/Afghanistan\\_Report.pdf](http://www.gnwp.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/02/Afghanistan_Report.pdf) (accessed 10/5/14) p. 5

Our community has no choice but to accept them, and maybe this way we can stop them from doing violence. At first they must include women in the peace process for planning to raise the awareness of all women and society to encourage them to welcome Taliban fighters to join and also invite other men to join the peace process.

- North consultation 2



What we [in communities] can do is to raise public awareness of the negotiations and the terms of the reconciliation, so that communities are aware of why the Taliban have to be reintegrated. The fighters can be approached through mass media or through their representatives in the peace talks due to be held someday.

- South consultation 3

<sup>26</sup> South consultation 3, North consultation 3

<sup>27</sup> North consultation 4

<sup>28</sup> North consultation 3

international community where required. However, with the judiciary perceived as the most corrupt institution in Afghanistan,<sup>32</sup> and police sometimes fostering further abuse when women seek assistance, obstacles in this area are significant.

At the same time, the repeated reference made by participants to the notion of community highlights the fact that local hierarchies and structures are considered to be very important. Efforts should therefore be made to ensure that communities are respected and included in the peace process, but are also a component of the greater national whole and channel some community practices through formal channels. The emphasis on community and the family unit was also identified as an opportunity for advancing the peace process and reconciliation. One woman explained that the basic social unit is the family. Parents taking care in how they raise their children and instilling non-discriminatory and non-violent values can in itself be a means of advancing peace in Afghanistan.<sup>33</sup> Others also discussed the role of teachers and their positions of influence at the community level, and the potential of instilling positive ideas about peace through these means.<sup>34</sup>

## HUMAN SECURITY

Human security and a damaging needs deficit in multiple areas emerged as a very important concern within the consultations, referenced in all provinces. In particular, education (especially for girls, but also for the population generally), healthcare and employment were mentioned repeatedly as being vital to peace, progress and women's sustained empowerment. In Bamyan there was an emphasis on the need to generate investment and in multiple provinces infrastructure was highlighted as a point of concern, particularly the need to repair and improve roads and access routes between rural and urban areas. Again the concerns expressed by women during the dialogues reflect the broader trends where roads, education and healthcare all emerged as central areas of concern all across Afghanistan.<sup>35</sup>

32 Mohammad Razaq Isaqzadeh, "National Corruption Survey 2014," *Integrity Watch Afghanistan*, 2014, [http://iwaweb.org/ncs/\\_2014/docs/national\\_corruption\\_survey\\_2014\\_english.pdf](http://iwaweb.org/ncs/_2014/docs/national_corruption_survey_2014_english.pdf).

33 South consultation 3

34 North consultation 3

35 Keith Shawe (2013) The Asia Foundation. "Afghanistan in 2013: A Survey of the Afghan People."

Differences emerged between provinces with regards to how participants would perceive the attainment of peace and security based on what was most important to achieve over the next one to two years. While in Kandahar, Helmand, Khost and Paktia there was a focus on more traditional understandings of security and safety (prevention of suicide attacks, dealing with the Taliban), in Bamyan, Herat, Nangahar, Logar and Uruzgan more gender-focused indicators emerged as central, in particular the opportunity for women to participate in decision-making. Generally, human security emerged as a concern of parallel importance to more traditional security concerns. For instance, when asked what they would need to see in their communities to feel that peace and security exist, participants in Bamyan, Herat, Khost, Paktia and Uruzgan specifically mentioned building roads.

Employment and economic opportunity were also repeatedly mentioned as critical components of a peaceful Afghanistan. The need for economic opportunities for women was a central concern in discussions, and some women felt that this was a critical component to be included in any negotiations.<sup>36</sup> Economic opportunity was also mentioned as a deterrent for recruitment of fighters to the Taliban and other armed opposition groups.<sup>37</sup>

What this focus on human security in the discussions demonstrates is that Roadmap 2015, with its exclusive focus on political-level discussions, is disconnected from the needs of communities. In order to allow for a peace that taps into grassroots involvement and builds sustainability through community participation, human security must be factored into the plan. Participants were keenly aware of the political and international aspects that need to be addressed, yet in parallel to perceiving foreign policy and traditional security concerns as central to peace, they incorporate a need for investment, schooling, including education for girls, and the reduction of poverty.<sup>38</sup>

Despite the significant challenges and the number of issues identified with the present peace and reconciliation process and Roadmap 2015, there were many opportunities identified for moving forward with these processes in Afghanistan.

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

37 North consultation 4, 3

38 South consultation 4, South consultation 5, South consultation 3, South consultation 1

# opportunities moving forward for peace, reconciliation and security

## REVISITING RECONCILIATION

The Afghanistan National Independent Peace and Reconciliation Commission (Programme Tahkim Sulh or PTS) was established in May 2005 with the purpose of ending inter-group armed hostilities, resolving unsettled national issues, facilitating healing of wounds from past injustices, and preventing a repeated civil war. However, it mostly focused on reaching out to “opposition” elements and promoting reintegration.<sup>39</sup> The Peace, Reconciliation and Justice in Afghanistan Action Plan developed by the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC), the office of the President, and UNAMA in 2005, outlines reconciliation and national unity as one of 4 key actions and paid lip service to a number of concepts such as “heal[ing] the wounds and pains of the victims” and introduces the idea of establishing truth-seeking mechanisms or reconciliation committees.<sup>40</sup> However, this Action Plan had little impact in practice,<sup>41</sup> and subsequent initiatives paid less attention to the concept of reconciliation. Roadmap 2015 and the peace and reconciliation processes have thus far largely overlooked any concrete policies regarding

39 Surendrini Wijeyaratne, “Afghanistan: A Study on the Prospects for Peace,” Canadian Center for International Cooperation, March 2008, [http://www.ccic.ca/\\_files/en/what\\_we\\_do/002\\_peace\\_2008-03\\_afghanistan\\_study.pdf](http://www.ccic.ca/_files/en/what_we_do/002_peace_2008-03_afghanistan_study.pdf).

40 Peace, Reconciliation and Justice in Afghanistan Action Plan of the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, 6-7 June, 2005, [https://www.cimicweb.org/cmo/Afghanistan/Crisis%20Documents/Governance\\_Participation/Government%20of%20Afghanistan/Policy%20Documents/Action%20Plan%20on%20Peace,%20Justice%20and%20Reconciliation.pdf](https://www.cimicweb.org/cmo/Afghanistan/Crisis%20Documents/Governance_Participation/Government%20of%20Afghanistan/Policy%20Documents/Action%20Plan%20on%20Peace,%20Justice%20and%20Reconciliation.pdf).

41 Sari Kuovo, “A Plan Without Action: The Afghan Government’s Action Plan for Peace, Justice and Reconciliation,” Afghanistan Analysts Network, 2012.

accountability for abuses committed during the conflict or establishing platforms or mechanisms for addressing past grievances and national healing. The memories of past injustices and lack of meaningful involvement thus far in peace and reconciliation processes appear to have left women feeling that reconciliation and reintegration without justice for war crimes and human rights violations, particularly those committed by the Taliban, is unacceptable.

Participants’ definitions of ‘reconciliation’ varied, including equality for men and women, absence of discrimination, an end to violence, civic responsibility, recognition of the rights of all citizens, and finding common ground. However, several participants did not know the meaning of reconciliation, both in terms of its definition and its application in the Afghan context.<sup>42</sup>

Of those who offered definitions, none of the participants’ definitions outlined a vision of reconciliation that included blanket forgiveness of the Taliban at any level in the absence of criminal prosecution for past offenses. The dialogues included regular references to legal frameworks as the appropriate avenue for justice. The women consulted discussed the need to ensure that those who have committed crimes, especially war crimes, and those that involve the killing of civilians, are dealt with via the courts.

However, despite these reservations, many participants also recognized what was deemed as a necessity of dialogues not only with the Taliban,

42 North consultation 2, 3, 4

but also with other groups including Hizb-e Islami and other armed opposition groups as a means of ushering in peace and security for Afghanistan. Participants largely acknowledged that all factions should be included in an agreement that supports the new government based on common ground, and that free, fair, and inclusive elections are vital for peace and security.

Still we don't know what reconciliation means. It means to become friends and not to kill each other. But, in our country it means that one side has the right to attack and kill people, and the other side that is the government and supporter of the people does not have the right to defend innocent people. Most of our people have no idea about what reconciliation means and the word really affects them negatively. When they hear about reconciliation they think that again the Taliban will come and rule our country.

- North consultation 4

Even though reconciliation may demand acquitting them of their crimes, they have to be dealt with and punished for any crime they have committed in accordance with the LAW. If someone, be they Taliban or an ordinary citizen, has committed the offense of manslaughter or has aided or abetted it, must not be let scot free into the community or the consequences will be disastrous for the future.

- South consultation 3

You cannot negotiate with criminals on the offenses they have committed; what about those orphans whose parents and older brothers were killed? Who will give them their future? Their future is DESTROYED. Justice has to be done. The criminals have to pay for the harm they have caused.

- South consultation 2

Despite intense reservations, there was a moderate openness to looking for a way forward with the Taliban by several participants, particularly echoed in their messages to the Taliban fighters and leadership. Some felt that clarifying misconceptions about Islam would serve as an entry point for moving forward.<sup>43</sup> Others highlighted existing gender dynamics, appealing to the Taliban to renounce violence against their 'mothers and sisters' and stating they would respect them as brothers.<sup>44</sup> Some based their appeals for an end to violence on the future generations of Afghanistan and creating a better future for youth, all together as one Afghan people.<sup>45</sup>

These sentiments indicate that with the right approach, a way forward may not be impossible for establishing peace in Afghanistan. Women chiefly expressed a desire for an end to violence, and under the right conditions, would be open to exploring any opportunity that may enable this for the future of Afghanistan.

## INTRODUCING WOMEN'S CONDITIONS FOR PEACE TALKS

As part of the negotiated outcome, Roadmap 2015 stipulates that the Taliban and other armed groups must cut ties with Al-Qaeda and other terrorist groups and verifiably renounce violence. It also states that the outcome must be acceptable to the Afghan people and serve the national interests of Afghanistan as a sovereign, Islamic country. The women consulted felt that preconditions for negotiations should at a minimum stipulate that fundamental freedoms cannot be limited in any way, women's and children's rights will not be ignored, negotiating parties must be Afghan, the Constitution must be safeguarded, and the Taliban should be required to demonstrate that they are negotiating in good faith by ensuring security and being subject to conditions that ensure they do not go back on promises made.

Regarding women's interests, if peace talks were to occur, participants wanted both the government and the Taliban to guarantee that they will protect the achievements that women have made in the past ten years, comply with what is commanded in the Qur'an,

43 North consultation 4

44 North consultation 3

45 South consultation 2

abide by the law, and guarantee that women's rights will not be taken from them. Protecting the Constitution was also of central importance across all discussions.

## CREATING A SPACE FOR CIVIL SOCIETY AND WOMEN'S INVOLVEMENT

Civil society has a large role to play in society, serving as a voice of the population, acting as a watchdog, holding the government accountable to its promises and citizens their civic responsibilities, and undertaking advocacy and awareness raising activities. Civil society has an even more critical role to play in the aftermath of conflict, where social relationships have become polarized and the government is often new and fragile. In this context, civil society actors can act as a channel for communicating the needs and will of the people, build bridges between groups, and promote dialogue and reconciliation. In several provinces, participants felt that conducting research is an important responsibility of civil society.<sup>46</sup> Many participants suggested that civil society should undertake research and opinion polls from all Afghan people without discrimination, then publish the results through civil society, human rights defenders, and the media to ensure that the peace process follows the will of the people.<sup>47</sup> These women also suggested an elected representative from each province to communicate civil society's input to the center and a more active and engaged media.<sup>48</sup> Women in Khost and Paktia suggested a civil society forum consisting of parliamentarians, civil society organizations, and tribal leaders to be consulted regarding the will of the people in any peace talks.

According to UN Resolution 1325 the attainment of sustainable and lasting peace is linked to the involvement of women and the incorporation of their needs and perspectives in peace processes.<sup>49</sup> Participants articulated a strong desire to see women and women's needs represented within the Afghan peace process. Roadmap 2015 mentions women

46 South consultation 5, North consultation 4, 3

47 South consultation 5, North consultation 4, 3

48 South consultation 5

49 United Nations Development Fund for Women "CEDAW and Security Council Resolution 1325: A Quick Guide" <http://www.unwomen.org/-/media/Headquarters/Media/Publications/UNIFEM/CEDAWandUNSCR1325eng.pdf> p. 5.

only once, in the final paragraph, which provides an overview of the guiding principles of the document and is a reference to the rights of Afghan citizens generally. At no point does it refer to the need to mainstream gender concerns or women's perspectives in peace and reconciliation processes. Moreover, concerns regarding any potential concessions made to the Taliban or other groups that may infringe upon women's rights and freedoms are unacknowledged in the document. Of the HPC's 70 members, only 9 are women. These gaps are deeply problematic and are indicative of a lack of political will to incorporate community and gender perspectives into peace and reconciliation planning.

Participants unanimously felt that women's rights and the advancements made in the past decade were non-negotiable in any peace talks with the Taliban or other armed opposition groups. The women also felt that, to ensure the protection of women's interests, women need to be actively involved in the talks, and their participation must go beyond the symbolic presence of women in other processes in Afghanistan.<sup>50</sup> One woman explained, "There has to be a formal delegation of women representing women's interests. We do not mean that men would not defend our interests, but I think that only women could understand what we need and how we feel."<sup>51</sup> The Ministry of Women's Affairs, the body responsible for implementing the government's political and social policy to secure and expand the legal rights of women, was only mentioned once in consultations, but it was felt that they should have been more active in securing and protecting women's interests in Afghanistan.<sup>52</sup>

In the interest of ensuring meaningful participation, many women felt that any women involved in the HPC, or any government structure addressing the peace and reconciliation processes, should meet certain qualifications, including being literate and well-educated, well-versed in women's rights, have a comprehensive understanding of Islam and Afghan tradition, possess strong logic and argumentation skills, be eloquent and charismatic, and be experienced and recognized advocates for women's rights.<sup>53</sup> Others added that they should also have an understanding of the daily lives of women

50 South consultation 1, 5, North consultation 3

51 South consultation 2

52 South consultation 2

53 South consultation 2, South consultation 5

in both urban and rural areas, and should consider the needs of women from all over Afghanistan and not only those of their own region or ethnicity.<sup>54</sup> The importance of the participation of women who will not abuse their power was also highlighted.<sup>55</sup>

**DEMOCRACY** Democracy was mentioned during the dialogues in all 20 provinces and was strongly aligned with the theme of peace. In some consultations, participants identified negotiations with the Taliban as their democratic right as Afghan citizens, whereby they have the right to take part in the government.<sup>56</sup> The message of participants from Uruzgan to the Taliban was, “Come and join us in our efforts to rebuild Afghanistan. It is possible that we can find a common ground. You are Afghan citizens, so why not make use of democracy?”<sup>57</sup> Others viewed the consultation of Afghan society in any peace talks as a necessity of democracy.

**RELIGION** During the dialogues participants referred to interpreting Islam in a manner that offered support for women’s rights and equal participation in society. They understood highly conservative takes on religion to be “anachronistic” and not the right way to incorporate the principles of Islam into Afghan culture and tradition.<sup>58</sup> Islam fosters unity within Afghan identity structures,<sup>59</sup> and as articulated by participants, religious leaders can exert a positive influence on a broad spectrum of demographics in the country.<sup>60</sup> Religious networks and beliefs used in a way that highlight rights and equality can therefore help to support the generation of social capital and peace. One avenue for achieving this nexus, as identified in the dialogues, was the education of mullahs. Similarly, religious leaders were identified as key agents of change in previous EPD research conducted with the Women’s Regional Network.<sup>61</sup>

54 South consultation 5

55 South consultation 4

56 South consultation 2, North consultation 2

57 South consultation 2

58 South consultation 5, North consultation 4, 3

59 Rodney J. Stewart (2011) “Afghanistan in a Globalized World – A Longer View” *Globalizing Afghanistan: Terrorism, War and the Rhetoric of Nation Building* (Duke University Press Books) 1. 1061

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

61 Women’s Regional Network Report (2013) “Surviving War and Transition: Perspectives from Afghan Women” [http://www.womensregionalnetwork.org/images/uploads/CC\\_Afghanistan.pdf](http://www.womensregionalnetwork.org/images/uploads/CC_Afghanistan.pdf) (accessed 10/5/14) p. 29

They [the Taliban] should come and take part in our struggle for peace. We call them dear brothers! Come back to your own homes and join in the peace process. Afghan women want peace. Your women and children can get trained well, they can study. We say we are your mothers and sisters.

- North consultation 3



In every discussion, participants also focused on the peacefulness of Islam. Participants suggested that educating the Taliban and other violent actors on the true principles of Islam could help in establishing peace.<sup>62</sup> Many asserted that women’s rights and human rights are principles of Islam and must be respected.

## WOMEN’S SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

Throughout the history of Afghanistan, women’s rights have been used as a political tool and advancements in women’s social or political status have often been accompanied by a conservative backlash.<sup>63</sup> The dialogues demonstrated a keen desire to foster peer-based support networks, to merge community activism and social support with political participation. There is a strong awareness that women are half of society and deserve equal influence according to the principles of democracy. An Afghan women-owned and led social movement structure

62 North consultation 4

63 Shireen Khan Burki (2011) “The Politics of Zan from Amanullah to Karzai: Lessons for Improving Afghan Women’s Status in (eds.) Jennifer Heath and Ashraf Zaidi (2011) *Land of the Unconquerable: The Lives of Contemporary Afghan Women* (University of California Press, Berkeley, London)

If Afghan society is not part of the consultations, then whom are we doing the peace talks for? I am sure it is for the Afghan society, so if the Afghan society is not part of it, then I think we would be compromising the ideals of democracy in the negotiations.

- South consultation 2

We will ask [the Taliban] in which page of the Holy Qur'an it is written to fight and kill people. Listen to our voice and stop it. ISLAM is all about peace and friendship with people and respect for women.

- North consultation 2

which takes into account the contextual needs and particularities of Afghanistan's population is much more likely to be sustainable and avoid backlash than radical or externally-led transformation. The discussions demonstrated that this fledgling social movement structure is in place, though still vulnerable to obstacles and challenges. Moreover, as articulated by participants, there is still a need for various kinds of support from key stakeholders in order to enable this social movement structure to develop. In particular the women require access to training, civil society platforms, media and information outlets, financial and material resources, legal and government support and peer-based knowledge sharing forums. Given the emergence of a clear pattern of Afghan women synthesizing international principles to their local contexts, which is addressed in the next section, UNSCR 1325 could serve as an effective focal point for coordinating and engendering this necessary shared effort to effectively promote women's social movements among international actors, civil society, and at the grassroots level in Afghanistan.

While many Afghan and international civil society organizations have successfully implemented these projects and approaches, there is still a need to focus on the creation of more networking opportunities for women to exert peer-based influence, more trainings for sustainable knowledge and capacity building, more platforms and outlets for communication and expression of needs. The lack of emphasis on women's perspectives in Roadmap 2015 exemplifies the necessity of maintaining pressure on political actors and decision-makers to view women's involvement in peace as a necessity. Civil society activities need to be streamlined to maximize their resource mobilization and impact. With the transition away from international presence post-2014 there needs to be a sustained engagement with women on peace and security issues so that the government and High Peace Council consider women a central factor in decision-making around peace and security. Afghan

women, with their voices amplified through civil society mechanisms, still need more opportunities to exert power and influence on peace processes going forward.

## RIGHTS-BASED DISCOURSE

Throughout the dialogues, participants demonstrated a keen awareness of their rights and freedoms as humans, women, and Afghan citizens and the need to safeguard them. They evidenced a strong justificatory reliance on a rights-based discourse, citing women's rights and human rights extensively as legitimate and necessary principles of Afghan society. Amitav Acharya has discussed the importance of combining universal and local mechanisms for conflict prevention and response.<sup>64</sup> The ownership of a rights-based discourse demonstrated by participants suggests that women in Afghanistan reconcile universal human rights mechanisms with more localized Afghan community structures and social practices.

Women should be given the opportunity to identify what specific issues are important to them, or that they see as impediments to peace, security or daily life and freedoms. They should simultaneously be given the advocacy and campaigning tools to understand and communicate these needs and perspectives in terms of universal human rights standards. The need to combine human rights with participant-designated indicators that allow people to identify the most appropriate rights-based framework for their needs should be emphasized by civil society and international donors. In this way, the promotion of women's rights does not become disconnected from those it seeks to benefit.<sup>65</sup>

64 Amitav Acharya (2013) "The R2P and Norm Diffusion: Towards A Framework of Norm Circulation" *Global Responsibility to Protect* 5 pp. 466-479

65 Julie Billaud (2012) "The Making of Modern Afghanistan: Reconstruction, Transnational Governance and Gender Politics in the New Islamic Republic". *Anthropology of the Middle East* 7.1

# conclusion and recommendations

With the impending political and security transitions, revisiting Roadmap 2015 highlights many of the lessons learned and improvements that can be made to create a more inclusive and successful peace and reconciliation process entering the Transformation Decade. These transitions provide an opportunity to reassess existing policies, practices, and mechanisms. Based on the findings of these consultations and opinions and perspectives of participants, EPD issues the following recommendations to civil society, the international community and donors, and the Afghan government.

## GOVERNMENT

Government responsibilities were referred to in all provinces, which is indicative of a strong trend of expectations with regards to the enactment of governmental duties around women, peace and security mechanisms both from central and local government structures and institutions. The peace talks that outlined the future of Afghanistan in 2001 were unusual in not including a representative of the Taliban given that they were a prominent party to the conflict. Focusing on the provisions suggested in the Roadmap there was a general acceptance that the Taliban might be able to be part of Afghanistan's peaceful future, but a strong feeling that any inclusion of their representatives in the peace process must be highly regulated and well thought through. At this critical moment of political transition and with a new administration, the peace policies and structure must be critically reassessed and revised.

1. Establish a clear policy and strategy on all aspects of peace, reintegration, and reconciliation at both the grassroots and national levels

The political transition provides a unique opportunity to critically reevaluate current policies and structures in the Afghan government. Revisiting the Peace Roadmap to 2015 has highlighted a number of critical shortcomings—most critically, the complete absence of gender-sensitive frameworks, a unilateral focus on the national and policy levels with inadequate attention to civil society and grassroots consultation, and a lack of practical, actionable, achievable plans and goals. The new administration and the Afghan government as a whole should take this opportunity to establish a clear policy and strategy on all aspects of the peace, reintegration, and reconciliation processes moving forward.

2. Establish a platform or mechanism for addressing past grievances and national healing:

Addressing past grievances is a critical component of the national healing process that enables reconciliation and sustainable peace and facilitates public acceptance of reintegration processes. Though the APRP reached out to insurgents to address their grievances, a mechanism for addressing the grievances of the Afghan people has been largely unaddressed beyond occasional rhetoric by any of the past efforts related to reconciliation, including APRP, PTS, the Peace, Reconciliation and Justice in Afghanistan Action Plan, and HPC efforts, and particularly Roadmap 2015. Grievance mechanisms can take a variety of forms. In other post-conflict contexts, this has included tribunals and formal

adjudication for wrongs committed during conflict, truth and reconciliation commissions, and national and local dialogues, with the overall objective of enabling both sides to feel that the harm they suffered during conflict was publicly acknowledged. These consultations made it evident that women do not feel that the harm they suffered has been publicly acknowledged. Despite the fact that it has been 13 years since the fall of the Taliban, collective memory of past grievances still emerges as an impasse to reintegration processes and sustainable peace.

### 3. Consult and inform the Afghan people

Another key point emerging from the consultations was the widely held perception that any peace process must derive from the Afghan people, and building Afghans' awareness of ongoing peace processes will be critical to their success, particularly regarding reintegration. A substantial amount of consultations with Afghan men, women, and youth such as this EPD project have been conducted, including the AIHRC's 'Call to Justice' paper from comprehensive national consultations with over 6,000 Afghans and over 400 Afghan refugees on peace, reconciliation, and reintegration issues, the recent local roadmaps to peace project conducted by 11 civil society networks and the AIHRC with over 4,648 Afghans from all provinces of Afghanistan, and a host of other initiatives such as EPD's series of ongoing consultations with women at the grassroots level on peace and transition issues. These projects should be regarded by the Afghan government as a valuable source of information to inform future policies, programs, and processes that address ongoing issues at the local level from Afghans' perspectives along with national efforts in lieu of the top-down policy-oriented approaches that have dominated the post-2001 efforts in peace, reconciliation and reintegration. However, it is also important that those at the grassroots level feel the government is consulting and including them in the peace process, which could be achieved through more effective outreach from the Provincial Peace Committees or another subnational government entity.

### 4. Ensure women's meaningful presence in all peace negotiations and decision-making processes regarding peace, reintegration, reconciliation, and security

The women consulted overwhelmingly reaffirmed what UNSCR 1325 outlines regarding women's participation in peace processes; it is vital. UNSCR 1325 reaffirms the important role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts and in peacebuilding, and stresses the importance of their equal participation and full involvement in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security, and the need to increase their role in decision-making with regard to conflict prevention and resolution. Through the consultations, it was clear that women felt that simply having women present does not constitute participation. There was a clear need identified by the women consulted to select qualified women who are literate and well-educated, well-versed in women's rights, have a comprehensive understanding of Islam and Afghan tradition, possess strong logic and argumentation skills, and are experienced and acknowledged advocates for women's rights to ensure that the women participating in peace and security processes are able to participate meaningfully and effectively represent and communicate the needs, perspectives, and opinions of Afghan women.

### 5. Consider women's needs in establishing preconditions

The participants consulted had reservations and articulated the need to be rigorous in demanding concessions from militants. The discussions demonstrated that women would require any negotiations with the Taliban to include the guaranteed safeguarding of women's rights, human rights, the constitution as it now stands, and the right to education. Some also stipulated that the members of warring parties should not be given positions with authority and power in government administration. Members of the Taliban and other groups must disarm and renounce violence in order to be welcomed back into society at the community

level and those who have committed grave crimes such as the killing of civilians must be dealt with and punished through the courts and legal system.

## 6. Have transparent and public planning on negotiations with the Taliban

The government should exercise caution in relation to any negotiations with the Taliban and ensure extensive public consultation and oversight before any offers or concessions are made. Concrete steps should include providing regular public forums for engagement with the process and media consultations to ensure that information about negotiations is freely available and contestable, and ensuring that these efforts reach even remote areas. Furthermore, given that the dialogues demonstrated concern around information reaching rural and provincial populations, special efforts should be made to channel information through local media outlets and community councils in these parts of the country. The High Peace Council, international donors and civil society need to ensure that women are given a platform to express their perspectives on obstacles to the attainment of peace and security if the peace process is to claim grassroots engagement.

## 7. Safeguard and promote the constitution

Another prominent theme to emerge from the dialogues is the constitution. It is clear that the women consulted understand the constitution to offer certain protection and to provide a symbolic and practical emblem of Afghanistan's democratic identity. Legal mechanisms are arguably the first step in changing attitudes towards women's rights and the constitution provides women with a concrete level of protection. Therefore, the government must ensure that the constitution is safeguarded and maintained intact during all peace negotiations. More information should be made available regarding the provisions of the constitution, including information targeted at those who are illiterate. This might include radio campaigns and peer-based information workshops.

## 8. Uphold women's rights in the face of political change

Karzai's record on women's rights was a mixed bag<sup>1</sup> and EPD's participants expressed the need for central and local government to keep promises and remain accountable to women. Generally the notion of political trust was discussed with some skepticism, since there is a perception that the promises made by politicians and government institutions have been broken in the past. However, the strong assertion of a rights-based ownership and the desire to hold government to their responsibilities regarding women's rights is indicative of cautious optimism going forward. Politicians and government representatives must take particular care to demonstrate a commitment to women's rights and equality. It would be useful to develop mechanisms for regular access platforms whereby women in civil society and community leadership positions can communicate directly with political figures to express needs or air grievances.

## 9. Improve police and security

A lack of police presence, particularly in rural areas, and a deficiency of female police officers were cited as key security concerns for women. Furthermore, the gender-sensitivity of state security providers has been acknowledged to be questionable at best. Further training and education as well as improved vetting of police could help instill trust in the police and improve their performance as a protective mechanism. Recruiting more female police would constitute improved access for women in the context of sometimes prohibitive socio-cultural conditions.

## 10. Improve access to justice and focus on prevention

Instead of an emphasis on solving disputes through traditional mediums, stakeholders should support a shift in emphasis away from reaction towards prevention. Community, culture and family emerge as strong and important themes. While local and

<sup>1</sup> Ashraf Zahedi (2014) "Afghan Women's Hopes for the Future" <http://www.e-ir.info/2014/03/23/afghan-womens-hopes-for-the-future/#.Uy7WOAWbauU.facebook> accessed 1/4/14

community structures are not always the appropriate avenues for administering justice, village councils and the influence of tribal and religious leaders should be drawn upon to create space for dispute prevention. At the community level there is an opportunity to provide people with the tools to channel conflict away from crisis without infringing on the rights and freedoms of women and girls, as some traditional dispute resolution mechanisms might. Moreover, this still allows for the centralization and strengthening of more formal justice systems as advocated by participants.

## CIVIL SOCIETY

The importance of civil society activity was highlighted in all provinces, particularly regarding civil society platforms and forums and the need for workshops and trainings. The role of civil society is critical in the context of peace and reconciliation, serving as a vehicle for ensuring that national processes reflect grassroots perspectives and needs, and providing an opportunity for bridging between groups. As such, EPD has the following recommendations for civil society:

### 1. Establish a civil society monitoring mechanism for peace and security issues from all perspectives

The wealth of initiatives on peace and security issues undertaken across civil society represent needs, perspectives, and interventions at all levels, including local, national, and international processes, from the perspectives of Afghan men, women, and youth. The disparate approaches to consultation and measuring and evaluating progress should be coordinated to allow civil society to jointly monitor the peace and security processes from all perspectives through a collective of individual efforts.

### 2. Develop online joint evaluation structures

In the context of declining available resources for projects and programming post-2014, it is imperative that civil society organizations develop mechanisms for lesson learning and information sharing between different NGOs and bodies. In particular, organizations that work on women, peace and security should share the successes and failures of their programming and make their raw data available to each other. This would hugely reduce the potential for unnecessary replication of project conceptualization and implementation. It would also allow organizations to learn lessons from the impact of each others' activities. A public or registered-user platform should be developed through which data, monitoring and evaluation reports and context-specific comments and impact assessments could be shared to allow for maximizing research resources and ensuring well-informed program development by sharing not only findings and lessons learned but also raw project data (interview transcripts, focus group notes etc.).

### 3. Speak with a unified voice

When dealing with the government and the High Peace Council, civil society needs to present a unified front and streamline its requests. Those civil society bodies that advocate on the issue of women, peace and security are much more likely to be successful if they can demonstrate that they represent the unified concerns of gender and peace-focused civil society more collectively and the voice of all the participants who work with each organization. Again, a knowledge sharing platform would allow civil society organizations to claim to be more representative of their collective beneficiaries, to refine their demands, streamline their programming, and increase their chances of making an impact on the decision-making structure of the High Peace Council and the government.

#### 4. Provide human security-based capacity building

Poverty, lack of infrastructure, inadequate healthcare and other human security issues were articulated in the dialogues as obstacles to peace and security. Civil society has a role to play in mitigating this needs deficit through skills-based trainings and employment-oriented programming as well as supporting job-creation initiatives. Moreover, civil society projects can serve to advocate for improved provision of services such as road building, education and healthcare. Training communities on how to campaign and advocate on these issues increases community resilience and sustainable ownership of civic participation.

#### 5. Promote rights-based discourse

Activities centered on rights-based education and capacity building for religious leaders are already undertaken by some civil society groups. However, a focus on training and capacity building of women to represent their needs and perspectives through a rights-based lens should be mainstreamed. Using this discourse allows for clearer expression of contextual needs that resonate universally, and enhances the power and accessibility of women's capacity deficits and perspectives. It also helps to foster a sense of international unity, whereby Afghan women can understand that their perspectives have global validity. It can increase the generation of international solidarity with women in other parts of the world who may have similar needs and perspectives regarding peace, security and a demand for human rights. Fostering an awareness of UNSCR 1325 among Afghan women's social movements could furthermore serve as an effective means of pressuring the international community to support women's place at the table within the framework of a rights-based principle.

#### 6. Create networking opportunities, forums, and trainings

Participants articulated the utility of meeting with like-minded women, and receiving trainings from civil society organizations. Civil society has the potential to generate access mechanisms for women's voices that might otherwise not be heard. With reference to peace negotiations, participants understood civil society platforms at the local, regional, and national levels to be mediums through which they can communicate with negotiators.

#### 7. Create platforms and opportunities for Afghan women to build connections with women's rights defenders around the world

The consultations demonstrated that women in Afghanistan have comfortably adopted the principles of universal human rights mechanisms in the context of more localized Afghan community structures and social practices. The strong assertion of rights-based rhetoric and internationally promoted principles highlights the wealth of potential in facilitating interaction with women's rights defenders from other contexts and perspectives, creating platforms for exchanging ideas and experiences from other settings on peace, transition, and the promotion of women's rights, and providing support based on shared principles.

#### 8. Increase knowledge of the provisions of the constitution

The strong emphasis on the constitution in the discussions indicates its positive utility for women as a legal and advocacy tool. Every effort should be made to ensure that women understand their rights as outlined in the constitution and that information regarding those rights is accessible despite geographical or literacy-based information restrictions.

## 9. Increase and Improve media reporting

Print media, radio and television provide an excellent opportunity for encouraging women's participation in the peace process, as well as being a potential source of attitudinal change regarding women in society. Though trainings for journalists and media actors on women's rights and participation 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. Other opportunities for promoting media as a champion of women's participation should be explored, such as promoting female journalists or streamlining more gender equitable sources of opinion and information into media coverage.

## DONORS AND THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

There is a recurring understanding that Afghanistan needs to develop the capabilities to stand on its own and that peace talks and processes must be Afghan-led going forward. The development of greater economic and political independence is a vital aspect of creating sustainable peace in the country. The fostering of national unity and national ownership was a key crosscutting theme emerging in the dialogues. However, our participants articulated the need for the international community to maintain a careful and reserved level of support, particularly financial and resource-based. Mirroring the concerns of Roadmap 2015, participants also stressed the need to develop a carefully balanced regional dynamic, whereby neighboring countries would not exert or be perceived to exert a negative influence on Afghanistan's internal security. With this in mind, EPD issues the following recommendations to the international community and donors:

## 1. Invest in Afghan initiatives

The discussions emphasized the extent to which the purely political and elite level discourse of Roadmap 2015 misses addressing the needs and concerns of women and communities more generally. Any peace process that aims to be sustainable must incorporate a strong focus on the communities. Dialogues with communities and fostering peace and reconciliation at the local level must always be high on the list of priorities for the international community. International donors should invest financial and material resources in Afghan-run and led initiatives that support community mobilization around peace processes and focus particularly on the importance of incorporating women's perspectives into peace and security planning.

## 2. Advocate for a gender-inclusive peace and reconciliation process

In particular and in conjunction with the United Nations mandate delineated by UNSCR 1325, women's perspectives, experience and needs must be incorporated into each step of the plan for peace. The international community should publicly acknowledge that the current Roadmap does not sufficiently incorporate gender mainstreaming or planning. The language and principles of UNSCR 1325 are not only applicable at the macro level, and knowledge and awareness of the resolution and its principles should be promoted at the grassroots level as well as through the Afghan government by the international actors who are committed to it in principle.

## 3. Advocate for a more inclusive and grassroots-based peace and reconciliation process

International actors should actively advocate for a more grassroots-based peace process. While political and national-level negotiation and reconciliation is key to establishing stability and peace, sustainable peace will ultimately depend on the people of Afghanistan. The international

community has focused on facilitating dialogue and negotiation between the Afghan government and the Taliban and other regional actors. They should similarly support initiatives that foster the required complementary grassroots approach to these processes.

#### 4. Support regional security analysis in cooperation with communities

Communities should be regularly consulted on their perceptions of regional security and its local implications in order to build a cohesive and representative picture that includes both localized and national dynamics. The international community should support the development of local-level security networks whereby women in particular can be consulted regarding the impact of regional dynamics on local security concerns. A recent Research Institute for Women Peace and Security report demonstrated that women have influence over family members in neighboring countries and therefore their expertise can be useful in ascertaining a regional security balance as part of any peace process.<sup>1</sup>

#### 5. Exert political pressure to keep women's rights on the agenda

There is a danger that negotiations with warring parties would result in setbacks for women and concessions made on women's rights and capacity provision. A recurring theme in the dialogues was the need to emphasize that women's rights should be safeguarded in any peace negotiations, particularly the right to education and political participation. In support of this, the international community should provide funding and material resources for projects that draw attention to the importance of women's rights, sponsor media campaigns that highlight women's rights, and provide support for trainings for government employees on the importance of women's equal participation to the creation of

sustainable peace. Lastly, the international community can make international support contingent upon the inclusion of women in the peace process and the safeguarding of women's rights and freedom in any negotiations. Again, UNSCR 1325 would serve as a valuable tool in this approach.

#### 6. Promote coordination among women's organizations rather than serving as a source of division

Particularly with the strong donor interest in gender programming, competition over resources and funding has perhaps prevented the effective coordination among organizations working on women's issues rather than supporting it. Donors should be aware of the effect that the necessity for funding has on preventing effective coordination among organizations that rely on having unique added value as a means of attracting resources, which minimizes the benefits of coordinating and sharing information with other actors working on women's issues. Incorporating an awareness of this potentially negative consequence would allow donors to devise a strategy or coordinating principles to mitigate this unintended effect.

1 Second WPS Forum Report (July 2013) "Beyond Numbers: Ensuring Meaningful Inclusion of Women on the Provincial Peace Councils in Local and National Reconciliation Efforts" [http://www.riwps-afghanistan.org/site\\_files/13916841612.pdf](http://www.riwps-afghanistan.org/site_files/13916841612.pdf) (accessed 11/5/14)

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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.