

About election exercise in Afghanistan the UN envoy Kai Eide said, "the most complicated elections I have seen anywhere in the world". In midst of fraud and controversy in recent presidential election the result will be out soon and there will be a new President and government in Afghanistan. The new power dynamics will be played out in the years to come. How much of the power of politics is going to be used for human development in Afghanistan and how much to further own power, position and accumulate wealth is for all to see. Sociologist Max Weber once said, "There are two ways of making politics one's vocation, either one lives for politics or one lives off it". In south Asia most politicians live off politics for the most part. I don't think scenario is much different in this part of south Asia. Without strong civil society and demand for accountability the politicians are not known to use power in favour of the people.

Afghanistan is still in the process of nation building after almost 3 decades of civil war and foreign invasion. Afghanistan's social, economic and political fabric is damaged and in some way torn apart. It is smeared with violence and blood. War may be advantageous to some especially those who greed for power and wealth at the cost of innocent civilians especially women and children. Present reconstruct process in Afghanistan has benefited many and some of them not deserving. The rich and powerful have exploited the reconstruction to their advantage at the cost of the poor and marginalised in Afghanistan.

The last five years of democracy has shown that rebuilding Afghanistan is not an easy task and building it into an inclusive, just and peaceful country is going to be all the more difficult task. Number of efforts and processes are on for capacity building, reconstruction and revitalise the governance and management system in Afghanistan. Rebuilding the State of Afghanistan means rebuilding her communities, her children and the women and men in the rural and urban areas. Rebuilding a nation is a complex phenomena but the primary task is to rebuild the capacity of people, human development of the country's population. But as usual in this process of development one half of the population, who are women are always taken for granted; their voice is not heard often by design than default.

No country and society is free of discrimination, socio-political, economic, not yet. However countries and communities which have deep rooted patriarchy, feudal system and strong religious orthodoxy are known to have gender discrimination in greater measures than the others. South Asian countries fall within this category and Afghanistan is no exception.

Therefore more care needs to be shown in the development processes in Afghanistan so that gender sensitivity is observed, and gender justice is adhered to in all the areas and domains of development, human and otherwise. Afghanistan has her constitution in place and which on many accounts is gender sensitive and gender just. Afghanistan's constitution adopted in 2004 by an assembly of tribal representatives defines Afghanistan as an Islamic republic, where women and men enjoy equal status before the law (Constitution Articles: 22 also see Articles 44, 53, 54, 83 and 84). The Afghanistan National Development Strategy (ANDS) is in favour of gender balance empowerment and has the potential for creating a gender just social order.

Like many countries in the world Afghanistan has the three constitutional and institutional pillars – the legislative, the executive and the judiciary. These structures and system are human made and are influenced by ideologies, beliefs, and value system of their incumbent as much as they are impacted by policies and rule of law. Therefore gender bias politicians, bureaucrats and judges (women and men) can do a lot of harm than good. Well articulated policy documents and letters of laws have to be translated into action by people. Afghanistan needs people who are aware, sensitive and committed to gender just society and have the political will to implement the gender just polices, programmes rules and regulations. Policies, Structures, system and laws are essential in governing the State but not enough. Afghanistan needs to capacitate women and men who are willing to make all efforts often voluntarily than paid for to change themselves and

assist change outside, change which is inclusive and equitable for all sections of society and for both women and men.

Gender based violence in a society, family and in various domains exist not because there are lack of policies, laws and pronouncement – national (Constitution, Afghan MDGs, etc) and international (Human Rights, UN SC Resolution 1325, UN SC Resolution 1820, international humanitarian law, ICC, etc). It exists because human beings are violent and often these acts of violence are gender based, both women and men suffer due to these acts of violence but women suffer more because they are women. Women from more vulnerable communities are more marginalised and excluded from development processes and therefore vulnerable communities marginalised ethnic groups and deprived sections of Afghan society have to be by design included in the process of development and nation building. Development in Afghanistan to be sustainable will have to be gender sensitive so that both women and men are engaged actively in planning, implementing and enjoying the fruit of these developments interventions.

Studies have suggested that gender discrimination and violence hinder sustainable development, enjoying full citizenship of the country and power sharing in public and private domains of society. In the given socio-culture of Afghanistan, participation of women in public life becomes difficult and the ongoing conflict and lack of human security add to the difficulties women face. As much as the societal institutions such as family, educational institutions, work places, religion, media, community and government are capable of gender justice they are guilty of promoting and sustaining gender discrimination. Margaret A. Mills, in UNSCR 1325 and Afghanistan: talking points for discussion, writes “The new Afghan constitution mandates gender equality, but the rule of law is still mostly an abstract concept in Afghanistan, due not only to re-intensifying violence, but also to a lack of personnel in all domains of governance (executive, judicial, legislative) trained to apply the laws that are being drawn up, or to ensure their compatibility with Constitution”. She goes on to argue “Practically speaking, recourse to court is costly (in travel, lost time and most significantly, in bribes and favours). Under these circumstances, women’s legal injuries hardly go to court”.

Shukria Barakzai, a member of the Afghan parliament and a women's rights activist said “the government, rights activists, and intellectuals must work to break old taboos and change perceptions about women's roles and rights. The Afghan people, too, step by step, have to learn and accept a new approach to women's position in society” (Afghanistan Times 22<sup>nd</sup> July, 2009:3).

The legislative, executive and judiciary will have to be more inclusive of women and men. Women to be empowered do not have to disempower men and therefore men need to be frightened. By empowering all the sections of society the society at large becomes stronger, prosperous and egalitarian. Efforts to capacitate and include women in legislation, executive bodies and judiciary at all levels (district, province and national) will bear much fruit in making development sustainable and address gender based violence in Afghanistan.

Governments in power do not always act in the interest of people because they have their own political compulsions and interest; they have to care for the vested interests of the lobbies that have supported and financed them. Afghanistan needs a strong and articulate civil society and Not For Profit Organisations (NFPOs) to ensure that people’s interest are not negated by the government and profit making organisations. Afghanistan has an experience of the flip side of NGOs and many are not happy with role played by a few NGOs. But it will be unfortunate that government and others throw the baby with the bath water; and frighten good people and good NGOs who are committed to development of Afghanistan and her people.

Let me conclude stating that Afghanistan and its people especially the women, children and marginalised groups and communities deserve a better quality of polity, governance and life. It is possible and needs political will on the part of the politicians, ministers and

determination on the part of the bureaucrats for effective execution of good policies and programmes which are gender just. We need to create an enlightened, responsible and competent cadre of politicians, bureaucrats and civil society which is committed to rebuild Afghanistan, Afghanistan which is free of violence in her private and public sphere. It is possible to have Afghanistan where women and men can work and live as equal citizens of this country, share the responsibility of development and enjoy the outcome of the same without discriminations especially gender based discrimination.

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