

In the Name of God, the Most Merciful, the Most Kind



March 12, 2018

## Afghan Women Economic Empowerment: Identifying Main Barriers

Women empowerment is one of the most important socio-economic issues in Afghanistan; it is the development of mental and physical capacity, power, and skills in women for them to operate meaningfully in their social and economic roles. In order to experience more favorable level of social and economic recognition and subsequently enhance their socio-economic status in the society, it is necessary to establish and improve their socio-economic infrastructures. Some scholars hold that as a result of women's wide ranging responsibilities; productive, domestic and community duties, they are generally involved in a wider range of roles and functions than men and will need a broader range of technical know-how on which to ensure their sustainable livelihood in the society.

Unfortunately, studies conducted in Afghanistan and other developing countries show that women are strongly affected by poverty, prone to diseases, susceptible to discrimination, marginalization and environmental degradation. And all of them play a detrimental role against women economic empowerment and poverty reduction in these countries. It is clear cut that in any traditional society including Afghanistan, the presence of gender related constraints continue to prevent women to enjoy their rights, and full participation of them in socio-economic activities. Research evidence show that Afghanistan is a highly, traditional society where men dominate almost all spheres of life; and women are kept and a subordinate position particularly at community and household levels. The women studies in Asian and Africa found out that even where national policies encourage equal opportunities, women still generally lag behind in educational attainment, earning capacity and other respects. Women share in the labor force is very low in Afghanistan, implying that the number of females who could work and are not working is very high than that of men. In general, women face more significant barriers than men in struggling with their livelihood: lower pay, lack of access to adequate education, training, leadership and management opportunities and exclusion from policy making process that can affect them positively if they have a say in the policies. Social scholars attribute these trends to cultural practices, higher illiteracy rate among the female sex and gender discrimination in both employment practices and income generation activities in Afghanistan. Assessments of the extent of economic empowerment of the Afghan women based on evidence of their participation in various economic activities show that economic powers of the Afghan women have systematically and persistently deteriorated since 2014 too.

As a result, only few women would inherit the economic empowerment conferred on them, unless there is a general empowerment of all women in Afghanistan. Also, women studies show that even domestic empowerment in Afghanistan is too low because evidence have shown that resources that are of great importance in the life of women for the purpose of addressing their domestic and matrimonial commitments are not enough and not available in most cases. In other words, domestic facilities are not within the reach of average Afghans and these problems are subjecting women and children, especially the girls, to different hardships.

The goal of women economic empowerment is to improve the socio-economic status of women through creating and enriching an economic culture that to address the technical know-how in the pursuit of women's multi-faceted roles, retooling them with different economic instruments as well as enhancing the of women form poverty and economic dependencies which is the main factor of their other dependencies to the males.

The reason is that women are "generally poor" and form half or even more than half of the population of Afghanistan; therefore, targeting them will be a fundamental pre-requisite for any poverty reduction strategy to be effective here.

There have been many initiatives to improve women economic status during the four decades including Nations United Nations conferences on women at Beijing in 1975, 1985, 1995 and international decade on women where laws have been passed for the improvement of women's condition. Also, there have been many changes in the laws and public policies of Afghanistan in terms of women empowerment in clouding elimination of all forms of discrimination against women, the National Action Plan for Women of Afghanistan, etc.

Also Afghanistan has taken strategic initiatives based on MDGs that considered women's conditions and included gender equality and women empowerment as part of its objectives. In Afghanistan, a lot of programs have been implemented to improve the lives of women. Different initiatives have been taken with a view to reducing the level of poverty and improving welfare of the masses who are mostly women, yet the condition of Afghan women leaves much to be desired.

As there have been many measures taken in Afghanistan to empower women, it is necessary for the government and the international community to identify factors that inhibit the Afghan women from gaining economic empowerment and poverty reduction. Thus, they shall take the necessary measures to address them in practice in order to realize women economic empowerment in the country.



## Improving the Sustainability of Development Finance

By Ethiopis Tafara

To achieve the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals by 2030, trillions of dollars in state spending, investment, and aid will be needed annually. Although estimates vary widely, one UN report from 2014 suggests that total investment of as much as \$7 trillion will be required for infrastructure improvements alone. But whatever the final tally, these sums are far beyond the means of governments, and leaders working to implement the 17 SDGs will expect their domestic banking sectors to provide much of the funding.

This is a reasonable expectation. In emerging markets, banks hold assets estimated at more than \$50 trillion, meaning that they could impact dramatically how sustainable development is financed.

At the moment, however, many lenders don't have the capacity to evaluate properly the financial, environmental, social, and governance-related risks associated with these types of projects. If the international community is to meet its SDG targets, sustainable finance practices will need to be strengthened.

Fortunately, collaboration is already producing results. In May 2012, banking regulators from ten countries asked my organization, the International Finance Corporation (IFC), to help them establish the Sustainable Banking Network (SBN) to fund initiatives that are "greener, environmentally friendly, and socially inclusive." Since its formation, the network has grown to include 34 countries, accounting for \$42.6 trillion in bank assets - equivalent to more than 85% of emerging markets' total bank holdings.

Today, the SBN connects regulators, bankers, and agencies in emerging economies to improve finance practices for sustainability projects. These efforts, though entirely voluntary, are already having a measurable impact. For example, in 2016, the SBN became a key partner to the G20's Green Finance Study Group, which helped advance the bloc's global "green finance" agenda, and underscored the importance of environmental risk management within financial systems.

Moreover, many of the network's biggest economies have developed policies for sustainability financing that are in line with international best practices. Together, these efforts are encouraging regulators in member and non-member countries to deepen their support for socially conscious lending.

To maintain this momentum, the SBN needs tools to mea-

sure progress accurately, which is why the IFC has just released its first annual SBN Global Progress Report. The report's measurement framework, designed to track the adoption and impact of policies by member organizations and states, was developed by and agreed upon by all SBN participants, with support from the IFC. It represents a remarkable level of global consensus and breaks new ground for financial-sector analysis.

In the report, eight SBN countries (Bangladesh, Brazil, China, Colombia, Indonesia, Mongolia, Nigeria, and Vietnam) received high marks for innovation. Reforms in these countries included the introduction of large-scale and transparent monitoring programs, and new regulations that require banks to include environmental and social risk assessments in their decision-making processes. These countries also introduced market incentives to entice banks to finance more environmental projects.

One motivation for compiling an annual report is to document insights and lessons learned, and thereby help banking sectors engage in more productive reforms. In this regard, the IFC views this inaugural report largely as a blueprint to accelerate and streamline change.

Much work remains to be done to improve practices for financing sustainability in the world's emerging economies. For example, the SBN is now focused on helping developing countries capitalize on climate-related investment opportunities, which are estimated to be valued at some \$23 trillion. The network is also working to accelerate growth in the green bond market, which would help push other parts of the global financial system participate in planning and initiatives.

Still, SBN members have much to celebrate. In just five years, the organization has grown from an ambitious idea into a network of committed regulators, bankers, policy-makers, and international development organizations. As I have noted before, with the support of the SBN, countries committed to building better finance frameworks are putting their ideas to work.

Ending poverty, protecting the planet, and building a more equitable future for humanity - the overarching goals of the SDGs - will be costly. But with the right financial frameworks in place, and with new ways to measure progress, the investments we make today don't need to break the bank.

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## Afghanistan: Shameful Rise of Violence Against Women

By Mohammad Zahir Akbari

Following the pervasive mark of women international day, 8th of march, the revealed report has divulged a shameful condition against women in Afghanistan. As per independent human rights commission annual reports, violence against women has increased 11.7 percent compared to the last year. Physical violence, women's murders, field trials, sexual violence, verbal violence and economic problems were the main issues the report divulged. Whereas the report expects further range of violence but due to ruling traditions and weak justice system, people and victims are reluctant to register women cases of violence to the formal justice system. It means, there are lots of obstacles in front of human rights observers to document these cases, especially in the remote parts of the country. Most Human rights groups, including Human Rights Watch and the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, have voiced concern at women's rights in Afghanistan. The United Nations called on the Afghan government to redouble efforts to ensure that "women's voices are heard in public and women are members of key decision-making bodies such as the Supreme Court or holders of senior positions such as governorships or ministerial appointments." "Empowering urban and rural Afghan women is essential to reducing poverty, inequality, and violence against women," said Toby Lanzer, acting head of the UN in Afghanistan, on the eighth of march event.

Sima Samar, the director of the commission said that the violence mostly carried out by the men of the families. "We have 4,340 cases of violence against women from which, 32.7 per cent are physical violence cases, 5.3 percent sexual violence, 3.3 percent mental and verbal violence, 17.3 percent economic violence, 14.4 percent are the absurd traditions and 90.3 per cent violence have been carried out by the families' men," she said. She added that 12 field trials took place in 2017 that only the perpetrators of one trial happened in Takhar province were arrested. "Field trial is a major human rights violation that is mostly carried out by Taliban fighters and irresponsible armed people in the insecure areas," she said. Villagers in a field trial, beat up a woman on the charge of illegitimate relation in the ChahAab district of Takhar. Taliban shot dead a girl in Ghor province on the charge of house escape and prior to that, another girl accused of torching a copy of Koran, was killed by a mob in Kabul. Thus, ministry of women's affairs said it had registered 119 cases of "severe" violence against women in 2017.

Afghan Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah stressed that peace would be impossible without participation of women in the process. He said there have been major gains over the last years in the area of ensuring women's rights and their empowerment, but he said that there are still problems in this regard. He said that it is women themselves who made achievements and the government only facilitated the

process. Abdullah Abdullah added, Taliban should cease violence for successful peace talks and cut ties to terrorist groups. He said that the Taliban could form a political party for political activities.

As aforementioned, there are numerous types of violence but one of most common violence which globally practiced is sexual violence against women. Large number of women and girls become victims of this crime in work places, streets and universities but as sexual violence is considered as a taboo in Afghan society it remains unseen. It occurs in form of sexual assault, uncommon sexual relations, insult and sexual humiliation, forced prostitution, forced abortion, etc. therefore, they try to conceal cases of sexual violence and not to be registered. Sexual assault is the most serious and concerning sexual violence in Afghanistan. In most cases, sexual assault is combined with other type of violence, which usually ends up with the death of the victim. The second type of violence is economic violence, most often women are prohibited from working outside the house, not paying alimony and dowries have been mentioned as economic violence against women. Last year, the commission dealt with 749 economic violence cases. The next type of violence is verbal violence, such as accusations, humiliation, especially for not having female babies, insults and verbal threats have been highlighted as verbal violence against women. The commission recorded 1,317 such cases indicating that of all places, including public places, homes, workplaces, hospitals, schools, universities and other educational places, houses have been recognized as the worst place for women. The report findings show that 90 percent of violence has been committed by male members of the families.

Other type of violence is social or political violence, especially for women journalists. According to a survey recently conducted in collaboration of Reporters without Borders, the that women who work in media faced with many challenges, particularly with security, social and cultural restraints. Security problems in different parts of the country forced many women to leave their jobs in media. Reportedly six women who were working in media have been killed during the last two years.

Overall, the situation for Afghan women has gradually improved in the last years, especially in economically and culturally poor areas. This cultivating violence culture in Afghanistan not only shows a weak justice system but also shows a shameful condition for an Islamic country. While the Muslim's prophet was the first person who fought in contradiction of violence against women and he rescued women from being burying alive in Arab ignorance era. His first wife, Khadija, was his chief adviser as well as his first and foremost supporter.

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