Policy on increasing **WOMEN PARTICIPATION** in civil services

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Policy on Increasing Women’s Participation by 2% in Civil Service for year 2018

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IARCSC is grateful to those involved individually and collectively in sharing their views on the preparation and development of this policy. At the same time, IARCSC calls for their further cooperation on the practical implementation of this policy. This is of utmost importance, because according to the stated obligations of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, the issue of gender mainstreaming or women’s participation is a shared responsibility of all governmental and non-governmental organizations.

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Policy on Increasing Women's Participation in Civil Service

Introduction

For decades Afghan women were deprived of a proper education and denied equal opportunity in the public sector. A Taliban policy designed to systemically discriminate against women has had a lasting negative impact on Afghan women and hindered their progress in increasing their roles in public sector employment. These limitations have existed for decades and have subjected women to widespread deprivations. The years of excluding women from public life, especially in education and in the workplace, limited the involvement of women in the public sphere and confined them to their homes. Even when women did become involved in public life and politics, their presence did not last for long, shattering all hopes of increasing women’s participation.

Even though women’s rights improved considerably after the fall of the Taliban, to reach a state where women’s participation equals that of men will take years. Serious obstacles and challenges remain, despite some progress. This progress is more tangible in Kabul than in the provinces and remote areas of the country. While the focus of the Afghan government and international donors is on increasing the number of women in the workforce, the leadership of the institutions is still controlled by men.

The issue of equality for women and men requires the design and creation of legal norms in the form of short- and long-term policies and strategies. Fortunately, the Afghan government has taken necessary measures since the beginning of 2001 on the basis of a comprehensive understanding of the issue of gender equality commitments to the international community and the efforts of international organizations to change the status of women through the design and implementation of laws. Adopting all these rules, policies, and strategies, combined with ongoing litigation and socially integrated workflows, will be time-consuming and obstacle-filled; however, a progressive implementation of policies and commitments will help to increase women’s participation in the government.

Background

Gender issues are global, not limited to a specific nation, ethnicity or race; however, the specific nature of the issues may differ from country to country. This particular issue goes hand in hand with development issues; women are key to economic growth. Hence, every citizen of Afghanistan needs to be

provided with equal opportunity to participate in its economic development.

According to a World Bank estimate, women account for 39.5% of the global workforce, which is nearly 10% less than in 2005. Figure #1 shows the global female labor force.

![Female Workforce in the World](image)

**Female Workforce in the World**

While the rate of women’s participation in the workplace in South Asia – with Afghanistan part of this region -- has declined significantly, Afghanistan has made progress in bringing women into the workforce. Figures #2 and #3 show an estimate of women in the labor markets in South Asia and in Afghanistan.

![Figure 2](image) ![Figure 3](image)

As seen in Figure #3, the pace of women joining the workforce in Afghanistan has been slow since 2014, when international aid groups and NGOs started to leave the country. Understanding the impact of this international drawdown on Afghan women, the NUG announced empowering Afghan women as one of its key priorities. President Ghani personally championed women’s leadership in the Afghan public sector. Since 2014 the overall number of women employed by NGOs and international organizations has
declined, but their share in key leadership positions of government has increased.

Since 2014, while women’s recruitment rates have declined in non-governmental organizations and international institutions, their involvement in government positions has increased. For example, in the establishment of the Civil Service in 1395, the number of women workers increased significantly over the prior year.

Statistics on female recruitment in the past four years are as follows:

- 1393 - Total employment of 5,869, including 554 women
- 1394 - Total employment of 3,066, including 209 women
- 1395 - Total employment of 6,784, including 1,048 women
- 1396 (first 9 months) - Total employment of 4,359, including 687 women

The following data show women’s educational status in comparison to that of men in the civil service:
Afghanistan’s National Action Plan for the Women of Afghanistan (NAPWA) emphasizes: “Afghanistan will be a peaceful and progressive country where women and men enjoy security, equal rights and opportunities in all aspects of life” (11). However, NAPWA does not spell out the paths that need to be created to enable females to enjoy “equal opportunities”; rather, it provides practical strategies to pave the way for women to enjoy equal opportunities.

In addition, the Afghanistan National Development Strategy (ANDS) states: “It is the collective responsibility of all sectors, institutions and individuals to include women and gender concerns in all aspects of government work such as policies, budgets, programs, projects, service and activities, including recruitment, training, promotion, allocation, expenses and opportunities” (ANDS, 19). ANDS, the Bonn Agreement, CEDAW, NAPWA, the International Declaration of Human Rights, the Afghan Constitution and other commitments of the Afghan government focus on gender equality, women’s empowerment and increasing women’s presence, although no organization has developed practical strategies to realize and deliver on these commitments. Women’s rights activists are pressing for implementation of laws against gender-based discrimination and sexual harassment, but the results of these struggles are not yet tangible. Therefore, development of a comprehensive plan to achieve the goal of increasing women’s participation is an urgent, pressing need.

“Gender empowerment and equality” has taken on a very broad meaning in most policy and research (NAPWA, 11.) National Action Plan for the Women of Afghanistan. 2007 - 2017

documents. While cultural barriers and other societal factors are difficult to tackle in the short term, one must develop and apply other methods to attract and hire more women in the civil services. In order to increase the appointment of women to jobs, the Afghan government must ensure a clear policy that is action-oriented and result-based. The government of Afghanistan promised its people and its international partners that it would increase by at least 2% the number of women appointed in civil services in 2018, with a 30% increase in 2020.

Goal

Unlike in theoretical approaches, this policy is based on everyday observations and experiences of women in the workplace and on a critical analysis of the status of working women in Afghanistan. The main purpose of this policy is to provide possible facilities for women and bring about safe work environments and encourage them to participate in public service. This policy has been developed by IARCSC to increase the recruitment of women by 2% in Afghanistan’s civil service workforce in 2018. The recipients of this policy are all civil service institutions in Afghanistan; IARCSC is the first institution responsible for implementing these measures in an effective, efficient manner. Of course, other civil service institutions are also responsible for implementing the policy in addition to the IARC Gender Department, which, with the cooperation of the Gender Departments of pertinent institutions, will monitor the implementation of this policy and track its results.

To achieve the aforementioned goals, the following phases should be considered:

1: Identifying the Problems (Situational Analysis)

Government officials will not find organizational solutions if they persist in seeing women as “the problem.” As long as employees of an institution (governmental or non-governmental) perceive women as a hindrance, they will not be able to find reasonable solutions to facilitate the participation of women.

A 2009-10 study in Ireland found that senior managers attributed much of the blame for women’s under-representation in the workforce to the women themselves. They focused on their perceived “lack of career planning and ambition, low self-esteem, poor political skills, inability to market themselves,” etc. (Ibid). Senior management of an organization must accept that the under-representation of women is an

organizational problem and seek to change their own organizations; in most cases, women were blamed for working as subordinates in the workforce. The men in the organization targeted by the study said that women, due to their lack of professional and purposeful planning, low self-esteem, poor political skills and inability to demonstrate their skills and exert themselves, were unable to gain more participation in the workplace. The findings of the report apply not only to Ireland but also to the rest of the world, including Afghanistan. Therefore, senior management of an organization must accept the fact that women working as subordinates is a widespread organizational problem which must change.

Meeting to assess problems of women in the Ministry of Defense

In Afghanistan, security, tradition, and customary practices have long been cited as the main issues in keeping women out of schools and the work force. However, families’ — especially male members — perceptions of the work environment should also be considered serious issues. As protectors of cultural values, the honor of the family and clan, and the representation of men’s high principles and righteousness, women are usually the ones who make sacrifices.

Therefore, it should be the moral and ethical responsibility of the observers to take fair and careful steps in recognizing the problem while observing implementation and monitoring a specific policy and/ practice.

2: Recruitment Phases

At the outset, recruitment phases should be analyzed, and development of ToRs and recruitment should take place through modern mechanisms.
2.1: **Pre-recruitment Phases**

a. Women should be informed of vacant positions in the government;

b. Awareness workshops should be organized in governmental and private universities explaining the nature of exams and the types of questions and methods of recruitment to increase women's participation in the government and provide general information for new graduates;

c. Quotas should be considered for women in the process of short-listing as a form of positive discrimination;

d. Recruitment committees should be inclusive, with women in key roles for recruiting for all positions (interviews and short-listing);

e. The VA must make a clear reference that the organization in particular encourages female candidates to apply for the position;

f. A women's information data bank (CV Bank) should be developed and used when announcing new positions and generating awareness among women;

g. Women's career development centers should be established so that women will be made aware of opportunities in civil service institutions;

h. Mock exams and interviews should be arranged for women to familiarize them with the exam and interview processes. Similarly, necessary help and advice should be provided to women on writing resumes and filling out application forms because these are important issues and the main problems (lack of familiarity of women with phases of recruitment and with writing and sending their resumes/documents). IARCSC has established a center for training women and girls (first in Kabul and then in the provinces) to teach interviewing and other necessary skills and provide advice on writing resumes and learning about other pertinent issues; and
i. To attract more female candidates, different approaches, such as posting jobs in key locations and advertising jobs to the right audiences, must be considered. The VA must clearly state that the organization encourages female candidates to apply for positions.

2.2: During Recruitment

a. When women are called for interviews and exams, the environment should be welcoming and friendly. The location of the interview should be free of psychological pressures so that it will not cause fear or concern. IARCSC should develop strategies to implement the aforementioned suggestions;

b. Phases of recruitment in the ministries and institutions should be reviewed and assessed and necessary changes made. New systems should be put in place to identify discriminatory and stereotypical practices;

c. The Human Resources Director, with his/her professional team, should be sensitive to gender issues and able to identify negative and undesirable effects of discrimination which hurt women in the recruitment process;

d. The ground must be laid for women's appointment to civil service jobs in the provinces and districts, with stronger capacity and social protection services through the implementation of incentive programs (medical insurance, accommodation, travel expenses, transportation means or equivalent, and a few more days of annual leave considering travel back and forth);

e. One of the reasons behind the low participation of women in public service is strict standards foreseen as prerequisites. Therefore, internships during education and education during work should not disqualify women;

f. IARCSC has revised the CBCR procedure and made a flexibility index with regard to women's work experience and education. For instance, if women are up to three months short of fulfilling the requirement of experience (and other similar instances), it should not result in their disqualification; same rule applies to all women applicants;
g. The head of the gender department in the civil service must be a woman; and

h. Serious consideration should be given to retention of women employees in offices and the fact that they should not be harmed while revising structures, removing positions, and changing structures.

2.3: Post-recruitment Phases

a. Women's share in administrative privileges (exceptional privilege, overtime, scholarships and other allowances) should be determined;

b. A specific budget should be allocated to develop capabilities of women in the government;

c. Supportive mechanisms should be developed to appoint women in leadership positions of institutions;

d. Five marks should be foreseen by the Civil Servants Law as positive discrimination and no procedure pertinent to the institution shall have the power to abrogate such a provision;

![Some women graduates of the Civil Service Institute](image)

Some women graduates of the Civil Service Institute

e. A quota should be determined for women's participation in capacity development programs (short-term training programs, and long-term bachelor and master's degree and scholarship programs); and

f. Guidelines are needed for newly-recruited employees and incorporating coaching programs for women.
3: Protections in the Workplace

The first step must be to provide a suitable and safe work environment for women where they can openly express their concerns about the conservative society that prevents them from entering civil service:

3.1: Medical Protection in the Workplace

a. Medical centers should be established in governmental institutions;
b. First-aid training programs should be arranged for women;
c. Medical and psychological guidance centers should be established for women;
d. Medical workshops should be organized; and
e. Women should have access to healthy drinking water.

3.2: Security Measures in the Workplace

a. Special safe rooms should be built for women in governmental institutions;
b. Women should be taught what to do in case of an emergency; and
c. Security alarms systems should be established in institutions.

3.3: Social Security

a. The work environment for women must be free of any type of discrimination (ethnic, racial, linguistic, gender);
b. Gender-based jokes, teasing or bullying must be banned and treated as a breach of professional code of conduct and must have consequences;
c. Procedures must be developed covering discrimination, sexual harassment and their consequences based on applicable laws of the country; 1) Monitoring and follow-up mechanisms; 2) Authoritative committees must be created; 3) Educational workshops should be organized; 4) Educational workshops and collective activities should be organized on the topic of professional behavior with women; and, 5) Security cameras should be installed in the office, and part of the gateways of the offices should be glass. IARCSC has taken its first steps in this direction;
d. Eliminate the culture of impunity and ensure punishment for the perpetrators of violence against women in general, and specifically harassment in the work environment must be endorsed;
e. Civil service institutions must plan regular training on organizational culture, psychological safety, gender-related awareness programs and anti-sexual harassment campaigns introducing potential consequences for the perpetrators as well as complaint procedures for their female staff;
f. All civil service institutions must have clearly defined procedures to attend to potential complaints of female staff. These procedures must guarantee the privacy measures of these complaints and should prioritize safety of the survivors;

g. Adequate paid maternal leave must be considered for female employees as predicted in relevant laws; and

3.4: Physical Safety

a. Appropriate ventilation systems should be installed in the workplace;
b. Pregnant women should be provided with welfare facilities;
c. Well-equipped, separate, and accessible ladies’ rooms must be available in every building;
d. Praying rooms must be provided for women in governmental institutions;
e. Quality kindergartens and day care are a must, with the cost fully covered by the government. In case an institution does not have the ability to provide a kindergarten, it should support female employees’ young children through different means. For example, that particular institution should compensate its employees by enrolling their children in different kindergartens;
f. There must be enough privacy for female members, especially for those with young children, including a room for breastfeeding; and
g. HR departments must have well-defined flexibility mechanisms in terms of working hours for female staff with young children, particularly for those breastfeeding their babies.

4: Publishing Stories of Successful Women in the Civil Service

Publishing stories and experiences of women is effective in empowering women and encouraging them to enter the workforce. The following programs can be effective:

a. Different radio and television programs featuring working women;
b. Discussions about the role of working women in daily, weekly and monthly newspapers;
c. Advertisements on successful women, highlighting their activities; and
d. Rewards for the most successful female workers.
5: Coordination with Relevant Departments

Relevant institutions should have complete coordination with IARCSC to ensure that this policy is results-based. The Commission will produce an annual report that will rank ministries and organizations based on a number of key performance indicators. The number of women recruited and the progress of institutions in creating a more gender-sensitive working environment would be among the key performance indicators. The Ministry of Finance, particularly in financial matters, is the principal addressee.

6: Limitations and Challenges

We are aware of the challenges this policy might face when translated into strategies. Implementation of this policy might also be a work in progress with the civil service constantly striving to improve. The policy will serve as a gateway in harmonizing gender mainstreaming efforts across the civil service system. It is also predicted that this policy might face resistance at all levels as it counters mental images, automatic expectations, and practices as usual with traditional perceptions prevailing. Part of the vision for this policy is the organizational culture change that it will initiate. It will facilitate the process of women’s inclusion, encourage their participation and growth, ensure their safety and make the civil service accountable for its gender-related responsibilities.