

Helpdesk Research Report: Women's Participation in Elections in Afghanistan
24.12.10

Query: Please synthesise materials and reports relating to women's political participation in Afghanistan during elections to cover materials not consulted (because not available) in the previous GSDRC report.

Enquirer: DFID Asia Regional Team

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1. Introduction

This review attempts to synthesise the available literature addressing women's election participation in Afghanistan, spanning a period of 6 years. It has not been possible in the time and space available to present a historical background to the issue being discussed, nor a survey of women's experience in each election. The review is informed by literature identified in an existing GSDRC (2009) report and additional literature which emerged after the initial review was commissioned. This review encompasses perspectives on both the 2009 and 2010 elections, providing an updated source of information on the situation.

Press coverage around the recent presidential elections in Afghanistan emphasised the low turnout of women voters, the perceived lack of security at voting stations, and election fraud. However, the entire issue of women voters and political candidates is subject to some debate – both in terms of numbers (the Independent Electoral Commission [IEC] declares that there is too little data; others have blamed this lack of data on the IEC itself), and the actual dynamics of women's access to the polls and platforms as candidates (Kandiyoti, 2007). Some of the most detailed accounts of women's experiences in the election process come from those who have stood as candidates. However, the motivations for standing as an MP, as well as the relations which govern women candidates is as yet unclear. There are obviously a number of barriers to women's participation in elections, and this can be viewed in two parts: (I) barriers to voting; and (II) barriers facing women candidates hoping to get elected, as well those which operate upon women once they are in office. A major limitation for the development and support of women candidates and office holders would appear to be the lack of unity between them: they are seen to act on an individual basis and have little interest in helping fellow female colleagues or would-be representatives.

Things are clearly changing in Afghanistan, with recent data indicating that women, who comprise 55% of the population (Esmaty and Ahamdi, 2010) and are considered part of the 'intelligentsia' within Parliament (Amiri and Benish, 2010) increased their Provincial Council participation in the 2009 election by 20 percent (333 female candidates running in 2009 as compared to 285 female candidates in 2005). However, the IEC reported that 38 percent of

voters in 2009 were as compared to 44 percent in the previous election (IEC/UNIFEM, 2009). However other civil society organisations in Afghanistan have provided an alternative figure, suggesting that that 58 per cent of voters in the August elections were women (ANFREL, 2009, P. 55). In reality, it is hard to obtain a uniform view of how women are faring: although women often possess the will to participate, this is often thwarted despite the legal provisions which protect the presence of women in the government (e.g. the Constitution stipulates that women comprise at least 24 percent of the National Assembly). For instance, after the last election in 2010 president Karzai appointed 3 women to ministerial positions, but 2 of the 3 were rejected by Parliament (Esmaty and Ahamdi, 2010).

3. Barriers to women's political participation in Afghanistan

The literature presents quite detailed discussions about the barriers facing women in the political sphere in Afghanistan. These cover issues such as lack of security, conservative/traditional attitudes towards women participating in political life, a lack of decision-making power within the household, and inequalities in education. The political sphere in Afghanistan is dominated by men, leaving little opportunity for women to enter the political process through established political groups (GSDRC, 2009). Often international assistance fails to appreciate the political realities of the country, creating unrealistic expectations for both MPs and female voters (Wordsworth, 2008). Indeed an over-riding issue here is that 'public' life is reserved for men and regulated for women by men (e.g. Sudhakar and Worden, 2010). Women are often therefore ill-prepared for political life, and this can be used against them by men (Esmaty and Ahamdi, 2010). These realities are hard to navigate away from and need to be at the forefront of any planning decisions.

Although as indicated, policy and legislative commitments to enhancing women's political participation exist, gender issues are often simplified within the public discourse and political will is largely lacking (Esmaty and Ahamdi, 2010). In order to adequately address all the barriers women face in participating fully in political life in Afghanistan, 'template' approaches to gender mainstreaming would need to be revised in favour of a reform of the entire gendered security and socio-political system (Flescheneg, 2009). Further, the IEC's weaknesses would also need to be addressed: according to one report, during the 2009 elections the Commission lacked focus on women's issues, and subsequently failed to resource female voting stations adequately. Instead of the 80, 000 female staff required to operate the female voting stations, the IEC was able to provide just over half this number (SIGAR, 2009).

Aside from these general barriers and challenges, the issue of women's participation is presented in terms of (I) female voting and (II) female candidates in Parliament

Barriers to voting

- Rural/urban disparities: There are disparities in number of women voters in different areas. CARE International (2010) have focused on this as a major problem, citing UN figures. For instance, in the south, the UN estimates that only 19 percent of registered voters were women, in Uruzgan province 9 percent, in Zabul province 10 percent, and in Helmand Province 16 percent. In the 2004 presidential elections, only two percent of women voted in Helmand province; in Uruzgan provinces only seven percent of women voted. Much of the focus has tended to be placed upon urban women rather than those in rural areas. Research by CARE International showed that rural women were concerned about the lack of consultation on national issues in comparison with urban women. The agency of these women is thought not to be taken seriously, and instead they are treated as 'beneficiaries'. This has created divides between women (CARE International, 2010, p.11). Rural women are further hindered by proximity to voting stations, making travel difficult.

- Security: There are significant security fears surrounding the safety of female election workers. Their safety has been an issue since the first post-Taliban election in 2004, where the first “night letter” was circulated in one of Afghanistan’s central provinces, threatening female election workers with death. A few weeks later, a bus carrying female election workers was attacked by the Taliban when a bomb exploded inside it, killing three women and a child (Sheridan, 2004 in Maltbie, 2009). The concept of segregated polling stations, with dedicated female staff members, seems a reasonable solution where women and men are used to not interacting in public, but this has backfired in some cases. Maltbie (2009) argues that in Afghanistan segregated polling places have ended up pulling a double-barreled attack on women for two reasons:

1. Because the polling stations are segregated, they become sitting targets for militants willing to commit acts of violence.
2. This has a secondary effect. Because the polling stations are segregated, when a polling station closes because of violence, the opportunity to vote also closes to women. They effectively have no other opportunity to vote in that election.

Election observers have noted that when female voters approached a station and noticed there was no female polling staff, they left without voting. In some instances, even female observers had to leave stations because men were operating them (Free and Fair Elections Foundation, 2009 in SIGAR, 2009). However, it should be noted that an AIHRC-UNAMA report argues that there is no evidence to suggest that female voters or polling stations for women were particularly targeted by armed groups, but the insecure environment prevented women from coming out to vote (ANFREL, 2009, p. 135).

- The influence of men over voting choices: Data from 2004 indicates that women’s choice is limited by men. In Afghanistan the practice of “family voting”, which involves women being led into polling booths by their husbands who effectively vote for them, is a common and accepted practice. The results of a major public opinion poll prior to the 2004 national elections found that the participation of women would be heavily influenced by men - Seventy-two percent of Afghans believed that men should advise women on who to vote for (Charney, 2004). The survey found that between one in five and one in three women may not have been allowed to vote (pp. 63-65) (Charney et al, 2004). However it should be noted that a number of other reasons for women not voting were cited: not understanding how the elections work (26%), not understanding politics (26%), personal reasons including illness and age (22%), not knowing enough about parties and candidates (7%), no interest (10%), not supporting any party (5%) and fear of violence or intimidation (3%) (p. 13).
- Registration: Before the 2009 election, fears of fraud surfaced during the registration process and continued throughout the campaign period and on polling day. A report by the Free and Fair Election Foundation reported that at a joint press conference on May 3, 2009, the United Nations Special Envoy to Afghanistan and the Head of Afghanistan’s Independent Human Rights Commission acknowledged voter registration irregularities and possibilities of fraud. The Foundation reported multiple registrations by individuals and registration of absentees, particularly women registered by male relatives or registered based on a list. Multiple registrations were also reported in the 2004 election. In addition, some registration centers were too far from populated, residential, and public areas and/or not staffed by females, which discouraged women from registering. Social norms and traditional practices generally restricted women’s movement and participation in public life. For example, district buildings, mosques, and government offices were used for registration, but some of these locations were not culturally appropriate for women to enter unaccompanied. The IEC’s voter registration exercise between October 2008 and February 2009 involved issuing voter registration cards to eligible voters who had not previously registered, and allowed eligible voters who had previously registered to update

their information or receive replacement voter registration cards. Potential fraud surfaced during the registration update exercise, evidenced by improbably high levels of female registration in some provinces. The practice – originally “proxy voting” (men voting for women in their family), expanded into large-scale fraud, according to a June 2009 report by the International Crisis Group. Indeed, female registration could be described as an aid to fraud in some cases (Sudhakar and Worden, 2010; IEC/UNIFEM, 2009).

- Voter education: As indicated in Charney (2004), there are concerns that female women voters do not understand the democratic process and their rights vis-à-vis elections. Research undertaken by UNIFEM indicates that women voters sometimes experience difficulty in negotiating the ballot, and some shared experiences and stories suggesting that women often depended on assistance from IEC polling staff or requested family members to be permitted to enter the polling booth. In both cases, there exists an opportunity for pressure or influence to be exerted upon a women’s vote by men, which can lead to proxy voting (IEC/UNIFEM, 2009). However, Kandiyoti (2007) warns against focusing predominantly on civic education, arguing that the sociocultural constraints that prevent women from voting or standing as candidates cannot be altered through the quick fixes. It should be remembered that women and men often share and benefit from the same patronage networks. Civic education may actually cause a hardening of attitudes towards women’s participation in some instances.

Barriers facing women candidates

Because many women parliamentarians are elected on quota provisions, they are often understood by the general public, civil society, and their male colleagues to be first of all (but not only) representatives of Afghan women (Fleschenberg, 2009). This has meant that they are not always accorded the same level of respect as men, who are seen as acting on behalf of the country as a whole, and therefore lack legitimacy (Katzman 2008c in Fleschenberg, 2009). While increased emphasis is being placed upon the availability of female candidates in elections and their role in encouraging and promoting participation, often this is not a positive story: there are many instances of candidates simply being too scared to come forward as candidates.

Financing an election campaign is a prohibitive factor: women in Afghanistan rarely have control over their household assets and women cannot rely on social networks to provide funds like their male counterparts (IEC, 2010). Female candidates also find it physically difficult to campaign due to not being able to travel alone, or after dark, and finding childcare and doing other home-based tasks. For instance, the latter part of the 2010 campaign fell during Ramadan, ensuring that women had to spend a large part of the day organizing Iftar (evening meal). Social conservatism, security concerns and resource constraints have made it difficult for female candidates to campaign as well as to hold public meetings. Education is another prohibitive factor: Article 72 (2) of the constitution requires a higher education for a quota woman candidate in the lower house, which significantly reduces the pool of candidates (Fleschenbeg, 2009).

Other major barriers to women candidates who have succeeded in coming forward as potential representatives include:

- Lack of security: Human Rights Watch (2009) documents how women who participate in political life are accused of being ‘Christians’, ‘infidels’ and as questioning Sharia. Attacks on women have a significant ‘multiplier effect’ in terms of fear, shaking the foundations of other women’s confidence (Human Rights Watch, 2010). AIHRC/UNAMA (2009 in SIGAR, 2009) identify a number of key examples targeting of women candidates prior to the 2009 elections:

- May 5, 2009: In Yangi Qala district, Takhar province, female provincial council candidates received threat letters. Despite these threats, nine women ran for local office.
- May 11, 2009: In Rutaq district, Takhar province, a female provincial council candidate received a threat over the telephone. After the police intervened, the threats stopped.
- May 28, 2009: In Baghlan, a female provincial council candidate received death threats from an anti-government group. She relocated to Kabul and police advised her to wear a burqa.
- June 8, 2009: In Takhar province, a female provincial council candidate was harassed by her brother-in-law and family members; but she refused to withdraw her candidacy. The brother-in-law was also a provincial council candidate and allegedly had connections to a local criminal gang.

Although there may be women who consider running for Parliament they hesitate because of insecurity, intimidation, threats, and a lack of faith in the integrity of the process. When women are threatened, the response from the government is generally weak. For instance, one MP attributed the protection she received to connections in the international community (Human Rights Watch, 2009).

- Unity: Women candidates or MPs do not constitute a united bloc and this has lessened their impact. Many women who reach power then fail to pave the way for other women, and instead act in a self-interested manner according to one former Presidential candidate (Esmaty and Ahamdi, 2010). According to a number of civil society perspectives gathered, several attempts made to support a women parliamentarian network or caucus have failed mostly due to (i) lack of commitment to work together in a bigger group on a regular and organized basis, (b) identity and personality politics (personal dislike, leadership struggle, urban-rural / capital-provinces cleavage), in addition to (c) issue-based political differences (progressive-conservative and ethnicity-based cleavages) (Fleschenberg, 2009, p. 129)
- Substantive power: It has been argued that the mere presence of women in the parliament will not automatically give them influence on decision-making. Analysts argue that looking beyond the numbers and addressing issues of power when measuring participation is far more challenging. When in Parliament women must work harder to 'prove themselves' in their roles as people's representatives (Fleschenberg, 2009, p. 12). Doing one's work can be hard when any Parliamentary decision must be passed by a majority of (male) MPs and lawmakers. For instance, in 2009 religious conservatives (*ulema* and *mujahideen*) represented the majority of MPs and chair 5 of the key commissions in the lower house. The table (Amiri and Benish, 2010, p. 15) presents the relatively small number of women who have been able to head commissions in Parliament over the last 4 years:

Table 10: Number of Women Elected as Heads of Commissions of Wolesi Jirga during the Last 5 Years

Year	Number of Commissions
2006	2 commissions (Natural resource commission – Women affairs, civil society and human rights commission)
2007	1 commission (Women affairs, civil society and human rights commission)
2008	1 commission (Women affairs, civil society and human rights commission)
2009	2 commissions (Natural resource commission – Women affairs, civil society and human rights commission)
2010	2 commissions (Natural resource commission – Women affairs, civil society and human rights commission)

Source: Office of Organizing Meetings of the Commissions of Wolesi Jirga

- Others have questioned the integrity of women candidates. Cavendish (2010) reports that some activists say that many candidates are ‘pawns in a game of patronage’, with the victors expected first and foremost to protect the interests of the strongman, powerbroker or mafioso who bankrolled their campaign. The alleged collaboration between some female candidates and the country’s power-brokers is seen as an indication of the way the parliamentary vote is less free and fair than the government (and international community) would like to admit. Candidates ‘supported by a bank, a warlord, a tribal leader; these are the people able to spend money,’ according to one activist. ‘I know villagers who have sold their votes [to a female candidate] for \$20. People will vote for her. Another very honest, women’s rights activist is not able to pay \$20 a vote. She’s not going to make it into parliament.’ This also calls into question the likelihood of long-term democracy in Afghanistan’s infant Parliament.

4. Opportunities

This section offers some perspectives on how initial success can be capitalised on in order to promote women’s electoral participation. Relevant guidance can also be found in the following section with regards to lessons learned.

- Overall, improving the presence of women in Parliament has enabled women to gain a foothold in formal governing structures in the country. Whilst at the Bonn negotiations in 2001 less than 10 percent of the delegates were women, the presence of women in decision-making spaces has increased dramatically. This has – and will have – a broader impact on women’s empowerment in general. Sultan (2005) argues that: ‘In the long term, the effectiveness of women legislators will determine the extent to which their inclusion in formal governing structures serves the goal of broad, national women’s empowerment. Building their capacity will be key’ (p. x). Supporting female MPs is not an isolated intervention, but one which has much wider significance.
- Concurrently, attitudes towards women’s participation in the political sphere is changing. A 2006 survey found that 80% of Afghans supported women in parliament, suggesting significant changes in social attitudes towards women in politics. However, the problem of whether women hold any real power persists. Women’s *shuras* (local councils), which are part of the National Solidarity Programme and administered by the Ministry for Rural Development and Rehabilitation, are active

throughout Afghanistan but are largely not taken as seriously as the more established, traditional men's *shuras*. However, there is clear evidence that conservative and traditional attitudes are changing. For instance, a bill proposed in 2006 which proposed that women MPs must be accompanied by a *mahram-e sharaii* (male chaperone) when travelling (in accordance with a conservative interpretation of sharia law), was defeated in Parliament (Womankind Worldwide, 2008)

- The IEC's Gender Unit established in 2009 presents a significant opportunity to increase women's involvement in election planning and implementation, argue Sudhakar and Worden (2010). They argue that the Gender Unit must be made into a viable and effective entity. In 2009 however the unit had little ability to influence the IEC leadership's decisions in spite of its organisational position. It was also formed too late to address many of the problems women faced during the registration and voting process of the 2009 election. Prior to the 2010 elections the authors argued that the unit should meet early and often in order to wield some influence with the IEC, as well as facilitate meetings with other women's networks and organisations.
- Charney et al, (2004) has identified some persuasive arguments used to convince Afghan men that women's participation in the electoral process is a positive development. The strongest arguments, which could be employed on the large-scale to educate Afghan men, were:
 - Islamic scholars in other countries have approved voting for women.
 - Women will vote separately from men.
 - Everyone must vote for themselves.
 - Women are allowed to vote in other Islamic democracies.
 - If women in your community don't vote, it will lose half its votes and its candidate may lose the election.
- Significantly, research undertaken by CARE International (2010) suggests that women candidates feel that while in the past only women from families of political leaders entered politics there was now a greater acceptance of women candidates of all backgrounds among both women and men (p. 9). This means that political space is not only opening up to women, but women of different backgrounds.

5. Lessons learned

There are a number of lessons identified in the literature, arising directly out of the issues discussed in relation to the participation of women in elections in Afghanistan. Lesson learning from prior elections has been described as a major building block to subsequent success in following elections, as Bernard (2008) has argued in with respect to the 2004 and 2005 elections. In this case, the actions of women's advocacy groups are highlighted for their role in identifying the problems and challenges the process was likely to create for women's participation both as voters and as candidates, as well as the influence of Government and NGO-sponsored programmes which conducted public information campaigns to encourage female voter registration; correctly identified physical safety and security as a major concern; created women-only voting stations staffed by female election workers and offered the highly publicised option of voter registration cards without the requirement of being photographed.

Subsequent lesson learning has built upon these initial lessons, although with a more critical stance as expectations have risen. Overall conclusions made by the seminal IEC/UNIFEM (2009) report on women's election participation suggest that female stakeholders feel that there needs to be much greater political will on the part of the Afghan government if women's concerns are to be adequately addressed to ensure their participation. It is thought that without increased emphasis on how to enable women's full participation in political

competition, women's role in the 'democratisation' of Afghanistan can be sustained or that the process is truly democratic or sustainable (IEC/UNIFEM, 2009). FNAW (2009) argues that the existing Afghan Compact actually provides adequate provisions to achieve the country's Millennium Development Goals 2020 which would provide a conducive environment for enabling women's rights to be realised. The implication is that strategies for increasing women's participation in elections needs to be integrated with the Compact. Further, withdrawal of the international community from supporting Afghanistan's long-term development will impact negatively upon women's empowerment.

Religion is a major issue which is not readily 'solved'. The received wisdom would suggest that Islam is a driving factor behind negative attitudes towards women as both voters and candidates. However a study by Tripp and Kang (2008) on quotas finds that when quotas and region were factored into their research model, Islam no longer appeared to act as a constraint on women's representation (quoted in GSDRC, 2009).

The following lessons are presented in two parts: (I) those relating to female voters; (II) those relating to female electoral candidates.

Lessons relating to female voters

1. Electoral administration and adequate voting space: A recent report (Sudhakar and Worden, 2010) suggests that previous experience has shown that for the 2010 election to have been successful, a safe physical and cultural space was required for female voters to participate in voting. Security was a major problem in the 2009 election, where female electoral staff were mainly stationed in urban areas and did not extend to rural areas, meaning that rural women often feared visiting voting stations. However this needs to be qualified: The presence of men at polling booths deters women from attending – not due to fear of physical safety, but because it is not culturally acceptable to interact with men outside of the home, the authors argue. Indeed this problem was compounded during the 2005 elections, where despite the presence of separate polling stations for men and women, a shortage of female poll workers led election officials to staff some female polling stations with older men (Sultan 2005). GSDRC (2009) identified the reform of electoral administration as a key priority in increasing the female vote.

The findings presented by Maltbie (2009) (cited above) need to be heeded in order to ensure that women are able to benefit from the opportunity to vote. This requires adequate election observation, as recommended in the GSDRC (2009) report. The presence of observers is thought to serve as a deterrent to fraud and malpractice. In general, international observers should be able to impartially assess the quality of elections and to provide suggestions on how practices can be improved. Observation methodology should take into account how various aspects of the electoral process can have a different impact on women than they do on men. Observers should carefully assess the way in which the legal framework, political parties, election administration and other factors affect women's participation. Ideally, observer groups, and particularly national groups, should include equal numbers of women and men. Specialized election observation efforts can be designed to focus exclusively on the role of women in elections.

2. Election administration: It is argued that election planning, budgeting, and coordination all need to be improved by placing at the centre of proceedings rather than as an add-on to the electoral process. 'Gender-neutral' areas, such as security, logistics and operations, all require review and adaption to meet the needs of women and all require additional resources to address the specific challenges women face. This would also mean election management bodies operating independently, impartially and transparently, with women holding positions on their boards (GSDRC, 2009).

3. Lack of data: Related to the issue of security is the wider issue regarding a lack of data on the security threat confronting female voters. The IEC (2010) have identified a gap in their knowledge with respect to a comprehensive security mapping. However, it has also been argued that the IEC themselves have been the source of blocked information, with (Sudhakar and Worden, 2010) arguing that the IEC have so far refused to release gender-specific data about the voting process. This information is thought to be central to informing the recruitment of female polling staff and observers, as well as where to locate polling stations. This lack of data also extends to basic data about voter turnout, the authors argue.

4. Voter registration continues to be a problem due to problems of proxy voting and a lack of photographic identification to verify a voter's identity. The GSDRC (2009) report suggests that voter lists should be compiled in a clear and transparent manner, enabling voters to check for mistakes and correct inaccuracies. In Afghanistan there is a significant disparity in voting registration rates for women in different provinces. For instance during the 2005 elections the UN estimates suggest that only 19 percent of registered voters were women in the south of the country, whilst in the Uruzgan province the figure was 9 percent, in Zabul province 10 percent, and in Helmand Province 16 percent. (Sultan, 2005). Democratisation needs to occur evenly across the whole country rather than being concentrated in urban and/or secure areas.

5. Voter education is an ongoing issue highlighted in discussions about both the 2009 and 2010 elections. With respect to the 2009 election, ANFREL (2009) highlights how IEC figures indicate that 1600 educators were deployed in order to explain the voting process, and that women educators were particularly successful. Voter education needs to comprise the dissemination of basic information on voting rights, the political system, candidates and issues, as well as specific information on where and how to vote (GSDRC, 2009). However voter education needs to be undertaken in good time prior to an election: in the 2009 elections, UNIFEM assisted in poster campaigns, and other organizations in radio broadcasts in attempt to help the IEC recruit women, but these efforts began too late and were largely ineffective. Sudhakar and Worden (2010) commended the early work of organisations undertaking voter education and outreach prior to the 2010 election, such as IFES-STEP (Independent Foundation for Electoral Systems–Support to the Electoral Process) and the Movement of Afghan Sisters. Voter education also needs to be institutionalised: the example of the Joint Electoral Management Body (JEMB) providing 220 of 830 small grants to women's groups (reaching 58,475 women throughout the country) and a media unit, created to ensure that voters had an opportunity to make an informed choice (used by 77 percent of women candidates during their campaigns) is cited by Bernard (2008).

Lessons relating to female candidacy

1. Observing and reforming legal frameworks: Female candidates are subject to a number of legal provisions in order to ensure their representation. However this is not always reflected in other legal documents relating to personal status, property, violence, and identity. Secondly, the type of electoral system adopted can have a major impact on the number of women elected to office, with women more likely to be elected in countries with proportional representation (or party-list) systems than in countries with majority (or first-past-the-post) systems. Bernard (2008) argues that the SNTV system has benefited women candidates, for it enabled women to run as independent rather than as party candidates with "blood on their hands". However, Kandiyoti (2007) has highlighted concerns prior to the 2005 parliamentary elections over the SNTV system (together with quotas) may result in female candidates being elected with low overall ranks and only a minority of the. There is thought to be a serious risk here of breeding resentment towards female candidates who receive dramatically fewer votes than their male counterparts. Further, there is a general feeling of 'tokenism' with regards the quota system, making it hard for women to be accorded respect in office. Currently, open seats are referred to as 'male seats' (UNIFEM, 2009) and seen as more legitimate than 'female seats'.

2. Reform of quota system: Indeed, a study commissioned by UNIFEM suggests that the women's quota system requires reform. The study finds that general seats are not allocated to women who are the highest vote getters in their provinces; instead, these women are automatically placed into 'quota' reserve seats. Overall, reserved quota seats are understood to constitute a 'ceiling' for women's representation, rather than as a minimum requirement or floor (UNIFEM, forthcoming in UNIFEM, 2010). However, it should also be noted that the quota system – which has been successfully implemented in a number of other countries - has been commended for being an effective way of having ensured women's representation and participation (GSDRC, 2009).

3. Well-planned security arrangements: Security arrangements for women candidates (and MPs) cannot be an afterthought. Recommendations to improve the security have been provided in previous years, but were not well-heeded in time for the 2009 election, where security was disorganised (Human Rights Watch, 2009). There are major lessons to be learned by the IEC, according to Human Rights Watch, who only began to recruit the 1,400 women needed to do security checks on women voters at polling stations in mid-July, just weeks before the elections, as well as failing to recruit sufficient female staff to manage the polling stations, disproportionately affecting the conservative and insecure areas of the south and southeast (Ibid, p. 30).

4. Political parties: The GSDRC (2009) report has highlighted the role of political parties in determining both access to office and the behaviour of female candidates. Party machines often control decisions about who will be nominated to run for office, what positions candidates will be given on party lists, and who will receive support during the campaign and after the election, as well defining the extent to which women may express an interest in any particular issue. On a global level, the report suggests that political parties have constituted a useful tool for the advancement of women, while in others they have led to the compartmentalisation or marginalisation of women within the party. This relates to the pressing issue of women's cooperation in office: recent literature has emphasised the need for a strong women's caucus in order to increase voice and provide a more unified female front. Despite various initiatives to join women's efforts and work together, female MPs and others with key government positions are seen to work individually and not open to supporting other women. One exception is the Women's Parliamentary Network (formed in 2007), whose members come from different parliamentary groups, provinces, and assemblies, although they share similar views on women's issues. Fleschenberg (2009, p. 126-7) reports that the network's leader has said that the network suffers from competition between female MPs, alongside ethnic, tribal, partisan, and / or provincial loyalties which have caused resentments and opposition from female colleagues from different ethnic backgrounds. In her opinion, 'women parliamentarians still have to learn how to organize, work together, and tolerate each other' (Ibid, p. 127).

5. Financial support: It is argued that national resources must also be leveraged to support female candidates. For instance, AWN and other Afghan civil society organizations could sponsor 'safe havens' or women-only forums where female candidates could safely campaign without fear of attack. In addition, media outlets could be encouraged to provide a forum in which women candidates focus on and discuss campaign issues. Such politically-focused gatherings and forums would not only increase the strength of women's network ties and cooperation between women MPs and candidates, but also would promote active civic participation and encourage more female political hopefuls to run for office through the open promotion of female role models (Sudhakar and Worden, 2010)

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7. Additional Information

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