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Women and Nation-Building

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Cover Photo courtesy of AP Photo/Ed Wray, Photographer

Police recruit Anis Gul, left, and Capt. Gul Jan, right, pose for a picture after Anis Gul signed up for police training Monday, Feb. 16, 2004 in Kabul, Afghanistan. Seven widowed Afghan women signed up for police training, which is being run by the U.S.

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Summary

The challenge of nation-building, i.e., dealing with the societal and political aftermaths of conflicts and putting new governments and new social compacts into place, has occupied much international energy during the past several decades. As an art, a process, and a set of competencies, it is still very much in an ongoing learning and experimentation phase. The RAND Corporation has contributed to the emerging knowledge base in this domain through a series of studies that have looked at nation-building enterprises led by the United States and others that were led by the United Nations and have examined the experiences gained during the reconstruction of specific sectors. Our study focuses on gender and nation-building. It considers this issue from two aspects: First, it examines gender-specific impacts of conflict and post-conflict and the ways in which events in these contexts may affect women differently than they affect men. Second, it analyzes the role of women in the nation-building process, in terms of both actual current practices, as far as these could be measured and ascertained, and possible outcomes that might occur if these practices were to be modified.

The study team first surveyed the broader literature on women in development, women and governance, women and conflict, and women in nation-building. It then focused on the case of Afghanistan. This case study was chosen for three reasons: First, it is contemporary, and it offers a longer nation-building “track record” and thus more data than does Iraq, the other contemporary case. Second, the relevant debate and decision line is easy to track because gender issues have been overtly on the table from the beginning of U.S. post-conflict

involvement in Afghanistan, in part because of the Taliban's equally overt prior emphasis on gender issues as a defining quality of its regime. Third, in contrast to earlier cases of nation-building, the issue of women's inclusion is presently an official part of any development agenda, so that all the active agents in the nation-building enterprise have made conscious choices and decisions in that regard which can be reviewed and their underlying logic evaluated.

The study concludes with a broad set of analytic and policy recommendations. First, we identify the gaps in data collection and provide specific suggestions for improvement. Then, we recommend three shifts in emphasis that we believe are likely to strengthen the prospects of stability and enhance the outcomes of nation-building programs: a more genuine emphasis on the broader concept of human security from the earliest phases of the nation-building effort; a focus on establishing governance based on principles of equity and consistent rule of law from the start; and economic inclusion of women in the earliest stages of reconstruction activities.