Family leaders and access to justice are key to eliminating violence against women

MAIDAN WARDAK: Panelists at UN-backed radio programme in Maidan Wardak province discussed the importance of family leaders and women's access to formal justice in combating violence against women and protecting their rights.

Participants identified insecurity, harmful practices or traditions, lack of trust in the judiciary and knowledge of their rights, as some of the factors deterring women from approaching legal and judicial organs to find a solution for their problems.

"We have laws on prevention of violence against women, which describe instances of violence against women and prescribe the sentences for perpetrators," said panelist Abdul Qayyum Rastman, civil activist and legal investigator at the Maidan Wardak provincial prosecutor's office, according to the statement from UNAMA.

The Provincial Director of Women Affairs, Shakela Ghani, warned that, "until women have access to formal justice and there is a gender-responsive justice system, laws and policies alone cannot solve women's problems."

Looking at the problem from the perspective of the Sharia law, a panelist Maulavi Mirzaman, said that, "Islam honors women and directs people to treat women with respect. In Islam, women are not inferior or unequal to men," he added. "Let's not mix Islam with Afghan traditions and cultural practices because Islam has empowered women with very progressive rights," Mirzaman said.

"If men treat their wives according to Islamic principles, there will be no domestic violence," agreed Abdul Qayyum Rastman, highlighting also the important role of family leaders in preventing violence.

"When a violent incident happens, a family elder must intervene and resolve the issue, so harm does not continue. If the problem persists, a woman victim of violence should report such incidents to the Department of Women's Affairs, police and the prosecution office and judicial organs. Their cases are then properly investigated and assisted by the relevant departments," he said.

Maidan Wardak civil rights activist, Karima, agreed that family leaders have a vital role to play in eliminating violence. "They are required to create a domestic environment free of all forms of violence and discrimination."

Karima called on women to report incidents of violence, "because keeping it a secret, will lead to more violence, even death in extreme cases."

This programme is part of a series of radio roundtables aiming at enhancing women's access to the formal justice system and prevent violence against women, as well as providing a platform for Afghans, particularly young women, to discuss how violence against women can be eradicated and enable women to exercise their fundamental rights.

The radio series is being extended to other provinces including Logar, Kapisa, Parwan and Panjshir of the central region in the coming weeks, engaging legal and judicial organizations, women department, human rights defenders.

UNAMA works with various institutions and individuals, including community leaders, youth groups, women and local media stations to create platforms – using radio, social media and television – for Afghans to engage in dialogue on pressing issues affecting their communities.

In accordance with its mandate as a political mission, UNAMA supports the Afghan people and government to achieve peace and stability. The Mission supports effective governance, promoting national ownership and accountable institutions that are built on respect for human rights. The UN in Afghanistan is an entirely civilian organization delivering its mandate with impartiality, according to the UN Charter.

The Kabul Times

200 Jiribs of agricultural land supplied with water in Logar

By: ***Nangialai Ibrahimi***

An irrigation canal 1,170 meters in length worth more than AFN 1.8 million funded by the Citizens' Charter National Priority Program of the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development (MRRD/CCNPP) including 10 percent community contribution (financial, labor or in-kind) has been built in Sultankhil village, Khoshi district of Logar province.

The irrigation canal, designed to supply water to 200 jiribs (equivalent to 40 hectares) of land, directly benefits a total of 49 households as their agricultural production may increase to a desirable extent which has a positive impact on their economy well-being.

Moreover, tens of skilled and unskilled labores have been provided with short-term employment opportunities during the implementation of this canal project in Sultankhil village.

Taking the current fiscal year into account, some 130 development projects, financed by the MRRD/CCNPP only, in various sectors have been approved for Khoshi district of Logar province. Some of these projects have successfully been completed benefiting thousands of households in various communities while the rest of them will soon come into operation in this district.

As of June 07, 2021, the MRRD/CCNPP has been able to complete 2,452 projects in irrigation sector while another 1,879 are ongoing in all 34 provinces of Afghanistan. Having facilitated the irrigation of nearly one million jiribs (equivalent to two hundred thousand hectares) of land, these projects directly benefited 343,525 households in as many as 123 districts across the country. Meanwhile, more than three million labor days have so far been created only in irrigation sector for both skilled and unskilled laborers during the implementation of projects.

First Ever Spectrum Auction in the History of Afghanistan

By: Jalal Shams

One of the greatest achievements Afghanistan experienced during the last two decades were the establishment of fast telecommunication networks connecting Afghans with the rest of the world through the provision of seamless telecommunications services that Afghans have never witnessed before. Technology and telecommunication once regarded as mythical has now become a reality for common Afghans with the proliferation of telecommunication networks in Afghanistan.

Introducing the Spectrum and the mechanisms for auctioning it

Devices such as cell phones and wireline telephones uses digital or analogue signals to connect and communicate from one end to the other. These signals are carried through airwaves that must be propagated through designated frequencies to avoid interferences from similar signals which ultimately ensures quality of service. The government owns all the publicly available assets within the geographical boundaries of the country; including the airspace and airwaves. With the increase in use of cell phones, wireline telephone and internet users, the need to provide more space is more apparent than ever.

Telecommunication companies willing to set up the required infrastructure to transport these waves from one end to another are required to obtain the rights to specific electromagnetic spectrum frequency ranges to propagate signals, the government auctions these airwaves from time to time. These airwaves are bundled into frequencies ranges called the electromagnetic spectrum that includes the longest wavelengths to the shortest; gamma-rays to radio waves. All these ranges are sold for a certain period of time, after which their validity lapses.

At the start of the cell phone industry, spectrum licenses were allocated on the basis of 'comparative hearings' where government granted the licenses based on its evaluation of applications from interested users – often referred to as 'Beauty Contests'. As the industry grew and the profitability of such licenses attracted new entrants, the comparative review became contentious and unworkable. Comparative review was replaced by lotteries. Multiple applicants submitted expressions of interest and the award was made randomly. For the first time in 1993, the Federal Communications Commission of USA developed a system by which spectrum licenses were to be awarded through auctions.

From the start of the spectrum auction, most of the countries have generated revenues. India is practicing this type of auction since 1994. Recently, on 1st March 2021, India auctioned with a total of 2308.80 MHz spectrum. Three bidders participated in the auction. Which ended with a total of (US$11 billion) revenue generated from the auction. Pakistan held its ever first auction in 2004. From 2014 to 2017, the government of Pakistan earned USD 1.8 Billion through auctioning the electromagnetic spectrum.

In Afghanistan, the following spectrum transitions have taken place in the past:

· In 2003, GSM license were awarded to AWCC and Roshan for US$5 million each, including 2´6.8MHz in the 900MHz band and 2´10MHz in the 1800MHz band for a period of 15 years.

· In 2005, 15-year GSM licenses were awarded to Areeba turned MTN and Etisalat for US$ 40 Million each, including the same amount of spectrum as in the licenses awarded to AWCC and Roshan in 2003.

· In 2006, Wasel was awarded a geographically limited CDMA license in 22 districts within three provinces in northern Afghanistan for 15 years, paying AFN 50,000 per district. The license included a spectrum assignment of 2´3.69 MHz in the 850 MHz band.

· In 2012, all GSM licenses paid US$25 million for an additional spectrum assignment of 2´10 MHz in the 2100 MHz band for 15 years, including an upgrade of the license to be technology neutral and allow the construction of backbone network.

· In 2014, Wasel paid US$ 1million to convert its geographically limited CDMA license into a nationwide license for 10 years.

· In 2008, AWCC and Roshan paid US$ 1.5 million each (negotiated down from US$60 million that had initially been suggested) to renew their expiring 2003 licenses and 900/1800 MHz spectrum assignments for another 10 years.

Unfortunately, none of the above previous spectrum assignments were awarded through auctions. Therefore, Afghanistan Telecom Regulatory Authority decided to award frequency spectrum in the 1800, 2100, and 2600 MHz bands to mobile network operators (MNO) in the country through a competitive process called "auction".

ATRA is honored for holding spectrum auction to Mobile Service providers for the first time ever in the history of the country. This Auction was conducted on June 30 2021 coinciding with 9 Saratan 1400 and as a result Afghan Telecom Company was announced as winner of 2x5 MHz frequency in 1800 MHz Band for 17,200,000 (Seventeen million and two hundred thousand) USD.

The aim of this Auction was to provide Telecom Service Providers with the opportunity for efficient use of limited natural resources and high quality of service provision through the advanced mobile broadband/4G services. Through this auction, three frequency bands that included 1800 MHz, 2100 MHz and 2600 MHz were auctioned for the first time. This process was conducted in the highlight of ATRA frequency allocation policy approved by the High Economic Council of Islamic Republic of Afghanistan.

The first auction was launched as per international reliable and standard approaches and was supported by international regulatory experts. This auction was not only successfully conducted but also resulted in coordination and consultation process between relevant sector and the government since it fosters competition for telecom sector and sets new useful rules to the telecom service providers for expanding advanced mobile broadband/4G services as per the authority commitments.

The auction facilitated open participation for all bidders as first national experience based on relevant policy and the auction results were evaluated and affirmed by an independent international organization responsible for running this process where the results were assessed through a transparent manner, using complex auction software and methods for conducting and transparency of the process.

The Afghanistan Telecom Regulatory Authority is committed to developing the telecom ICT sector for providing universal access and advanced telecommunication in the country.

About the Author: Jalal Shams is the current Chief of Staff for the Afghanistan Telecom Regulatory Authority (ATRA).

China says US hasty withdrawal leaves Afghanistan & region in mess

Chinese Foreign Affairs Ministry has called the US hasty withdrawal from Afghanistan as irresponsible, saying that the country has ignored its responsibilities and commitments and left the people of Afghanistan and the region in a mess.

Wang Wenbin, a Spokesman for the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, on Friday called the US withdrawal "hasty" and said Washington must honour its commitments to "prevent Afghanistan becoming once again a haven for terrorism."

According to the Chinses spokesman, US should make sure that the full troop withdrawal from Afghanistan does not lead to war and that it does not change to a safe haven for terrorism. Wenbin further said that US by ignoring its responsibilities and commitments towards Afghanistan has withdrawn its troops from the country and left the Afghan people and the region in a mess.

"The US disregards its responsibilities and duties and withdraws its troops from Afghanistan hastily, dumping the mess and war on the Afghan people and countries in the region, Wenbin said, adding that the US, as the original culprit of the Afghan issue, bears unavoidable responsibility for the current situation in Afghanistan. Meanwhile, Afghan political experts say US troop withdrawal from Afghanistan has definitely put the country into difficult crisis. They believe that US thinks terrorism has been rooted out in Afghanistan, while terrorism is still surging in the country. The Afghan political experts asked the international community and UN to not leave the people of Afghanistan alone. They suggested that the international community and UN should convince countries supporting the Taliban to stop supporting the group so that the group gets ready to resume negotiations with Afghanistan government. They also asked the US government for continued support to Afghanistan particularly the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces in war on terrorism.

On the other hand, a Spokesperson to Foreign Ministry of China Wang Wenbin has said that China, as a close neighboring country and friend has always supported the people of Afghanistan in protection of their national sovereignty, independence, national integrity and getting national destiny on their own hand.

The Chinese Spokesman for Foreign Affairs Ministry said that China was supporting the country's peace process led and owned by Afghans and has made effort to political solution of Afghanistan's current dispute.

China has said that it is ready to cooperate with the international community and region countries in expediting the Afghan peace process and maintaining peace in the country. This comes after US President Joe Biden announced last Thursday that the country's troop withdrawal process from Afghanistan will be completed on 31 August, assuring of the country's continued diplomatic presence in Afghanistan.

Suraya Raiszada