

AIU Assignment: Business Ethics

Ref: My curriculum design proposal: 5th topic

To enhance understanding of programme/project management through the fundamental principles of business ethics

Studying business ethics in an organization as well as in an individual context: The course will also look at globalization as a key context of business ethics

Present a case study on the challenges small scale entrepreneurs face in their daily business activities and how they navigate through them.

Topic: The oxymoron of business ethics in Afghanistan: A look at Afghan women and entrepreneurship (Afghanistan Case Study)

Introduction

Business ethics has been referred to as an oxymoron (Crane and Matten, 2010) quoting Collins (1994). These writers explain that oxymoron refers to the bringing together of two apparently contradictory concepts such as “a cheerful pessimist” or “a deafening silence”. Scaffolding on these statements, this essay builds a case study specifically looking at Afghan women and entrepreneurship. The essay argues that despite the plethora of donor aid in Afghanistan for all the 20 and beyond years of political and social instability and war, the justification and use of the aid still remains dubious. I will argue in this paper that different countries committed to providing aid in this country have yet to positively change the social-economic and political trends of Afghanistan and more specifically the entrepreneurial status of women. Butler, A. (2013) notes in her report Afghan Women’s Economic Participation that poverty in Afghanistan is increasing for the rural populations across large parts of the country with families struggling to put food on the table and educate their children. Economic development is something that is worrying many Afghans. At least 70,000 households, Butler (ibid) reports, are headed by women, which are usually poorer and more vulnerable than households headed by men (pg. 26). The rural women therefore still remain poor or have become poorer. Their efforts to change socially and economically have been thwarted by their own government, corruption, their own culture, beliefs, illiteracy, infrastructure to name but a few. The rural communities including women have, in a way, remained cheerful pessimists when not affected by insecurity or domestic violence OR have assumed deafening silence in the face of not knowing what is likely to happen. If you ask any one Afghan, he/she will tell you: “We live only for today”. “Tomorrow is in the hands of Allah”.

Given this scenario, we are, albeit hazily, accorded an impression that business ethics and the actual entrepreneurial practice for women in Afghanistan is a hodgepodge of a menu that makes it difficult for one to decide what to order. After all, who can be trusted to provide the atmosphere that is conducive for carrying out

even the smallest of the enterprises? Simmons-Benton, Heinzelman, and Sackett's (March 2012) USAID report on Economic Empowerment Strategies for Afghan Women identified three areas of high importance that would enable women in Afghanistan succeed in business. These three areas were/are first, support from the family, second, support from the work-place and third, support from the country through legal framework. Family support is required to allow girls to go to school and work whereas workplace support would provide a conducive working environment that can enable the woman to produce and sell or be employed. The third area of support i.e. legal framework would support the women's role in society, support in allowing business associations, and finally society support to enable the woman become a productive member of that society. This enabling environment, the report reveals, does not exist in Afghanistan (pg. 2). It is made worse by the restrictions given to women to travel alone for any type of business activity. In fact, any form of travel even by those that are employed must not only be approved by the family members but must also have an escort. This prohibition goes against Article 48 of the Afghan constitution which guarantees the right to work to all citizens. Resistance to women working outside their homes still persists (Butler, 2013)

Before however we release the gavel to pronounce judgement on the ills of business ethics and the challenges women face in Afghanistan, let us be clear in our mind that business ethics as a subject is not in itself an oxymoron (Crane and Matten, 2010 pg.5). We must also be clear in our minds that we are dealing with both morals and law where "morals" refer to knowing what is right and wrong and where "law" refers to the minimum standard of acceptable behaviour. The difference between "ethics" and "law" as explained by Crane and Matten (ibid) is that ethics refer to business situations, activities and decisions where issues of right and wrong are addressed while law is the institutionalization or codification of ethics into specific social rules, regulations and proscriptions (pg. 5). In the Afghan context cultural proscriptions tend to water down the law. Law and morals have overlaps but equally so, there is distinct difference between them. Law for instance prescribes whether we should drive on the left or on the right. The decision however to drive on the right or on the left is a moral one. Law does not prevent us from being unfaithful to our beloved ones. Morals do. The intersection between morals and law is what makes the entrepreneurial menu hodgepodge depending on where we are, what we are engaged in, our beliefs and customs and religious prohibitions and our legal systems. Whereas law is supposed to defend the Afghan woman entrepreneur, morals and traditional beliefs and practices are so cast in stone that no amount of law volumes and court arguments will change them. Q.E.D.

Afghanistan at a glance

The Islamic Republic of Afghanistan is a landlocked mountainous central Asia country with a population of around 32 million people (DFID, 2008; Karlsson and Mansory 2007). Of the 32 million, slightly above 14 million are women whereas about 16 million are men. There are about 3 million Afghans in the diaspora as

refugees in Pakistan, Iran and elsewhere. No reliable figures are available because census has not been taken for decades.

Afghanistan is bordered by China, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan in the north, Turkmenistan in the north-east, Pakistan in the south and eastern side, and Iran in the West. These are six countries that enclose Afghanistan with such a grip that it would require cautious détente and entente to make its national and international trade to thrive. Thriving would also mean marshalling all citizenry, men and women alike and engage them in meaningful and sustainable economic productivity. Unfortunately, as this essay argues, the social-economic playing ground is full of potholes. Quoting their own proverb Afghan has remained a palm tree growing in the shade which does not bear any fruit. The country according to Karlsson and Mansory (2007 pg. 126) is endowed with large amounts of unexploited natural resources such as petroleum, natural gas, coal and iron. Other minerals Karlsson and Mansory (ibid) point out include copper, talc, barites, sulphur, lead, zinc, iron ore, salt, precious and semi-precious stones. Agriculture is seen as the mainstay of Afghan people with wheat, barley, corn and rice as the main crops. Livestock is equally highly valued. Poppy which produces opium is another highly valued crop especially during droughts. Its cultivation is encouraged by the international drug market and the lack of control of the smuggling trade through Russia and Central Asia (Karlsson and Mansory 2007). There are 34 provinces ruled by elected Provincial Governors with the Central Government placed in Kabul – the Capital City.

As a country, Afghanistan has been wholly or partly in conflict for over 20 years. The Taliban rule was overthrown in 2001 and a new government under the leadership of His Excellency Hamid Karzai was established. Many areas of Afghanistan have however remained insecure with some parts of the country still under warlords and others under Taliban fighters (DFID National Audit Office, 2008). DFID has been one of the key funders of Afghanistan's three broad areas namely, state building, economic management and rural livelihoods. Indeed United Kingdom Government is the second largest bilateral donor after United States. The amount disbursed to Afghanistan through DFID since 2001 is pegged at £490 million. The DFID National Audit Report (2008) points out that since April 2006, UK has provided £6 million to support the implementation of over 150 joint-UK Quick Impact Projects that aim to provide immediate and visible benefits to the people of one Province – Helmand. DFID has however been able to disburse only half of the targeted fund due to insecurity. The Micro Finance Investment Support Facility for Afghanistan has benefitted from DFID's £3 million. Another £150 million has gone to 405, 000 Afghans in terms of small loans with over 70% of the beneficiaries being women. The donor funding menu does not stop here. There are other countries that provide funding for various development programmes. International Non-Governmental Organizations also have their humanitarian and development menu needless to mention the United Nations Agencies. This generous menu from generous

governments and NGOs reminds me of the “Ancient Mariner” – an old novel by Samuel Taylor who had “water, water everywhere but not a drop to drink”.

Based on the above DFID figures and the figures of other bilateral donor countries (see below) we expect that business in Afghanistan should be at its highest pick supported by ethics and the deeply rooted religious and cultural morals. But, as we shall see below, this is not the case. Many challenges still dog businesses including the microenterprise entrepreneurs and more so women. Business environment scenarios coupled with the social-cultural dynamics assume the behaviour of a hydra. When you slash one head of a hydra, it soon develops another and keeps going. The political and social-cultural and economic hydras in Afghanistan have the notoriety of multiple sub-divisions some of which are so minute that they become undetectable as they destroy individual economies. On the one hand the levels of trust in business ventures have diminished. On the other hand the level of corruption in the country is interminable. These are but two heads of our hydra amongst other heads. The moral of the hydra analogy is that when one problem seems to have been solved, another one of equal or more weight develops. The effects are far reaching and at times disastrous.

Distribution of Donor Aid in Afghanistan

Turmoil, insecurity and the doubts about continued security provision by International Security Assistance Force, have left Afghanistan with ambiguity of funding pledges, so says, a report prepared by Scensei for European Network of NGOs in Afghanistan (ENNA, 2013). This ambiguity is seen to affect every aspect of life in Afghanistan; from the daily function of the government to programming by implementers of development cooperation and humanitarian aid to economic coping strategies of ordinary citizens. The envisaged implication is that it may further push the Afghan economy into further contraction and aggravate ethnic and social tension in already fragmented society (pg. 4). The report objectively argues that donor predictability smoothens sector revenues, facilitates household spending and business budget, and alleviates uncertainty with respect to designing and implementing development cooperation programmes. Billions of dollars from the European Union, United States and European countries have continued to flow into the Afghan economy but with little tangible effects on the lives of the people. Although continued support is welcome, it is time we shift gears from military funding to strict economic development through education and eradication of poverty through promotion of microenterprise business across the country’s regions.

The following section gives an overview of different country funding profiles for Afghanistan.

Country	Rank among European donors	Support areas	Amount in USD so far disbursed	Planned allocations in indicated currencies	Year
European Union	1st	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Governance • Rural development • Social sector • Rule of law • Health etc. 	2.95 billion	USD371 million	2002-2012
Germany	2nd	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Security and economic development • Energy, water and education • Open support to Afghan modernization • Integrated approach to military aid etc. 	2.40 billion	USD277 million	2002-2012
UK	3rd	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peace process • Security and political stability • Promoting economic stability, growth and jobs • Empowerment of Afghan women etc. 	1.77 billion	USD1.11 billion	2002 - 2012
Netherlands	4th	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integrated 3D approach: Diplomacy, defence and development • Afghan government 	1.43 billion	€37 million in 2014 and same amount in	2014-2015

		<p>reconstruction funds</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agriculture, human rights, democratization • Integrated police training etc. 		2015	
Italy	5 th	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthening local capabilities to improve Afghan management and enhance national empowerment for development process • Quick response to emergencies • Support local communities especially most vulnerable etc. 	980 million	USD6 million	2002-2012
Denmark	6 th	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integrated political, civilian and military engagement • Security • Living conditions and economic growth • Good governance 	704 million	USD 496 million in 2014 and USD531 in 2015	2014 and 2015
Norway	7 th	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good governance • Education • Rural development • Strengthening women position etc. 	7.85 million	NOK750 million	2002 - 2017
Sweden	8 th	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development 	342	USD308	2002 -

		cooperation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on the poor particularly women, girls and youth • Democracy and Human rights 	million	million	2012
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Source: European Network of NGOs in Afghanistan pgs. 14.1- 14.8

With all these monies already disbursed and monies yet to be disbursed, in all those years and coming years, we should be seeing an already developed Afghanistan. Achumba, Ighomereho and Akpor-Robaro (2013) quoting Hazen and Horner (2007) describe this phenomenon as “Paradox of Plenty” in Nigeria and indeed (in my own words) a hodgepodge of a menu. The “Paradox of Plenty” phenomenon originates from Nigeria’s great earnings in oil sales but fails to use these earnings to meet the needs of its people and to develop infrastructure as well as the economy. Similarly, there is so much donor funding given to Afghanistan through bilateral agreements yet there is so little that is tangible on the ground except of course the trained armed forces who are still battling it out with the Taliban and other anti-government insurgents. The other hidden paradox is that some of the European Union members sell arms to Afghanistan although this is a matter that touches on very raw nerves and cannot be discussed in such a paper. In their survey Afghanistan’s Willing Entrepreneurs Supporting Private-Sector Growth in the Afghan Economy, Cusack and Malmstrom (Nov. 2010) noted that all too often, billions of aid dollars have benefitted foreign contractors and Afghan elites at the expense of the population.

Business in insecure environments

Achumba, Ighomereho and Akpor-Robaro (2013) contend that the insecurity environment of business refers to variables that affect the performance of a business but over which the business enterprise has little or no direct control. In their paper - Security Challenges and the Implications for Business Activities and Sustainable Development - Journal of Economics and Sustainable Development, these scholars give examples of variables in Nigeria that affect businesses. The variables range from theft to organized armed robbery, kidnapping, demand for ransom, assassination, repeated invasion and blockading of business installations, social injustice, unemployment, lack of access to livelihood resources, rising cost of living and bombing (pg. 83). All these variables of crimes and social maladies the writers note, have made Nigerian security environment complex. Compared to Afghan, similar crimes and social maladies happen each day with some of them targeting women. The implications of insecure environments are varied. They could for instance discourage investment in the country. Recent attacks on Serena Hotel and an earlier attack on a Lebanese Restaurant both in Kabul sounded a loud gong in the minds of prospective investors. In Nigeria, Achumba et al (2013) report that

insecurity can and in many cases, actually halt business operations during periods of violence and also cause outright closure of many enterprises in areas where violence is rife. Ordinarily, citizens having small and medium size businesses cannot open shops for business transactions when they feel insecure. Other effects of related business insecurity include low production, marketing difficulties, lack of human resource among others.

The Department for International Development (DFID) National Audit Office (October 2008) proffers detailed account of operating in insecure environments. The Department notes that insecurity, including war, armed conflict and communal violence can cause death and displacement, destroy communities and their livelihoods and exacerbate poverty (pg. 8). Armed conflict, the paper notes directly affects half of the world's poorer countries with a number of other poorer countries also suffering from localized political violence. Insecurity has its toll on economic costs. For instance, the average economic costs of civil war outweigh the £150 billion given as global development aid (DFID 2008). Localised insecurity on the other hand retards national development by diverting government expenditure from social to military expenses and adversely reducing investor confidence. Nothing is far from this truth if you look at the situation in Kenya, Syria, Libya, Egypt, South Sudan, Somalia and of course Afghanistan among many more insecure countries. Because of insecurity, delivery of aid to needy communities becomes impossible. Aid workers are also put at risk. The aid itself may also fall into belligerents' hands thus creating an even more difficult situation.

Insecurity causes further damages to infrastructure. Schools are turned into army camps. Children are made to stop learning or worse still become merchandise. Corruption becomes the order of the day as aid workers become unable to monitor programmes implementation in the field. This occurrence makes donors develop fatigue directed towards insecure countries. As a result, they divert their funding to less insecure countries. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) noted that 10 out of 14 under-aided countries were insecure (DFID, 2008). These stated facts suggest that business functions which would otherwise be sources of supply for basic needs are grievously affected. The outcomes of such effects are demoralized business communities due to lack or loss of capital, lost trust, disaffection with the government and an ultimate resort to criminal activities. Indeed as Achumba et al (ibid) report, the lack of basic necessities by the people of Nigeria has created a pool of frustrated people who are ignited easily by any event to be violent. This is in spite of the country's rich oil resources. In many of these episodes of insecurity, women and their children bear the brunt. Attempts to start businesses come to a grinding halt.

This begs the question: - What is the law for if it is not honoured? Other questions also surface. Why are colourful policies about micro-enterprise programmes that are meant to help women shelved? Why is there open discrimination against women when they wish to access funding for business start-ups? Why is there so much on

the donor entrepreneurial menu that is never equitably distributed? In my kikuyu culture I would liken this situation to “a child carried near the mother’s breasts against another child of the same mother but carried on the back”. One keeps feeding. The other keeps yawning. And even when the child at the back stops yawning to start crying, the mother’s nails pinch his bottoms. When finally the child at the back is set free, his disaffection to the little sibling is not concealed; his resentment to the mother, likewise. Let us see more of the social-cultural and economic context for women’s entrepreneurship.

Social-cultural contexts versus women and entrepreneurship

Richardson, Howath and Finnegan (2004) of International Labour Office, Geneva give us a picture of the cultural and economic contexts of women’s entrepreneurship. These writers point out that even with official policies, laws and regulations that promote gender equality, there are cultural and traditional norms that negate them. They argue that there are some factors in a society which can either encourage and enable, or discourage and disable women’s enterprise development. These factors are difficult to measure and concern for instance, women’s position in society, what society and communities perceive as acceptable or not. In terms of business ethics we are being asked to question whether official policies, laws and regulations supersede societies’ moral values. In Afghanistan, the colourful government policies, rules and regulations have little to do with what the society perceives as acceptable morals. Women are placed far below these policies. In November 2013 during the launching of Swedish Committee for Afghanistan (SCA) Strategic Plan, one SCA woman employee said this to say: “It is after the Taliban rule that we (women) started living”. Her wish was that the current government and any subsequent government would recognize women’s role in development.

Perceptions about and attitudes towards women participating in development have been shaped by values prevailing in the religious culture and traditional norms. In her research paper – Examining women in enterprise development in Afghanistan - Ritchie (2013) asserts that economic activities are constrained due to traditional cultural norms and practices. These cultural practices, Ritchie argues, have shaped market functioning, actor behaviour, and the scope of traditional business development in Afghanistan. Ritchie (ibid) observes that while several women-led businesses and associations have emerged in recent years, these are predominantly in the urban areas through elite business families (or those with political connections) and are often motivated by financial support from international donors such as USAID (pg. 4). Are these the favoured children on the mothers’ breasts? Are we discussing ethics when there is inequitable distribution of resources? The poorer rural women struggle to go beyond the status quo due to limited skills/knowledge, and restricted mobility, embedded in prevailing attitudes and practices. And when they raise eyebrows, they are quietened by empty rhetoric and sometimes threats. You will not find women particularly in the rural areas selling their wares in an open market. Women in Kabul are lucky to have their own separate market wherein only

women are allowed. The gate into the market is guarded by armed men. For the rural women, even buying food from the market requires the husband's permission.

National Disability Survey in Afghanistan conducted by Handicap International (Trani and Bakshi (2005), indicate that in large areas of the country, women are not allowed to work in the field and are limited to household tasks. Only 2.4% of Afghan women aged between 15 -64, the report says, are looking for a job. 45.8% of the women are unemployed but the reality is however more complex than this. Land ownership is by the heads of the families and women come in only to supplement the workforce. Several women take care of the family livestock. For those women with a disability, the situation is even worse. Besides lack of employment which leads to lack of personal autonomy and financial independence, women with disabilities are treated as non-entities and more so if they cannot bear children.

Afghan women are not alone in this predicament. A report by Richardson et al (2004) reveal that in Ethiopia, no amount of good policies and laws are capable of changing societal attitudes and beliefs unless they are gradually inculcated in the educational and communications media of that society. In Tanzania, the cultural environment makes it even more difficult for women to start and run enterprises due to the expectations and demands of their traditional reproductive roles. In the traditional Maasai community, women are referred to as "nkerai" meaning children. They receive greetings from men with this reference. They are regarded as minors a phenomenon that limits their ability to own assets or enter into legal contracts and build collaterals. The good news however in Kenya is that women in society have been made to feel freer, more liberated and are indeed practising this freedom by engaging in all sorts of businesses including becoming truck drivers. Men seeking wives are looking at whether the woman is enterprising or just a dullard who sits at home to wait for the husband to bring food in the evening.

Challenges:

Most of the challenges cited by different writers indicate that micro-entrepreneurs are related to:

- Start-ups: the key challenge here is how to get the initial capital and business premises. Studies by Richardson et al (2004), ENNA (2013), Marron, D. (2010), UNDP Afghanistan (2013) and USAID Afghanistan (2012) show that most Small and Medium Entrepreneurs particularly women obtain their start-up finance from personal sources such as friends, family members and relatives. Some women use their small savings to kick-start their businesses. A huge discouraging factor to accessing financial assistance is found in the religious precept that credit is un-Islamic. This makes them develop fear that they might be unable to repay the amounts advanced to them. Another start-up difficulty is seen in premises and equipment. Accessing and affording a good business premise can be a real challenge. In Afghanistan this is equally

a challenge as most women do not own homes. They belong to readymade homes and have no authority over them.

- **Skills development:** This is an important area in any business venture. It is suggested that skills be built first before one engages in a business or have them built in the course of time. Skills development may differ in the sense that different people engage with different trades. The skills for running a food processing business are different from the skills required in carpet weaving. Whereas food processing requires a lot of human relations, hygiene and medical prerequisites, carpet weaving may only require marketing and acquisition of raw materials.
- **Formalization of business:** This aspect has an advantage because it makes the business legal. The government gets its right share of taxes and in turn issues licences to run the business. County Councils stop interfering with the business because it has been formalized. The process of formalizing the business brings with it the challenge of the long process, involvement of lawyers and the expenses. In some cases women face the challenge of harassment by government officials who demand money in order to have them cleared. In Afghanistan, Ritchie (2013) there is still a great deal of confusion related to business registration obligations and procedures. Due to a mixture of factors such as fear of tax, raised profile and lack of support, some small women businesses prefer to remain non-formal, avoid tax headaches and stay outside of the prey of corrupt government officials.
- **Marketing:** In marketing, the challenge is missing appropriate information about where and when to market the products. In Afghanistan, this is a real dilemma. Farmers produce so much horticultural crops which they market only in major cities of the country. Storage facilities to keep the products until prices increase are absent. As a consequence, farmers from Pakistan who have storage facilities buy the horticultural products e.g. onions at a throw away price only to sell them back to the country at exorbitant prices. When markets are unavailable, productivity goes down because producers are demoralized. A Kenyan study of entrepreneurial small-scale earthenware manufacturers by Matanda (2011) showed that access to new markets was negatively affected by personal interests in self- improvement, socialization and understanding of markets, physical locations and lack of information on global markets. An Afghan woman would weigh between her opportunities to do free marketing or court a domestic disaster.
- **Skilled manpower:** This is well analysed by the USAID Afghanistan document (March 2012) that cites women decrying the absence of skilled manpower. Because women are not allowed to engage in formal business skills learning, they remain behind in terms of skills improvement. They are left to do the menial jobs that require minimal skills. Ritchie's (2013) research paper

indicates that poorer women's skills are traditionally in handicrafts, kitchen gardening or in tending small livestock.

- Planning and managerial skills: Once again, women suffer from lack of these skills because they are not exposed to them. The lucky ones are those who have complete family support as well as the financial muscle or educated male family members. Low literacy rates affect women's business management. They are unable to strategize, manage finances and develop firm business contracts.

Afghan Chamber of Commerce and Industries (ACCI) in December 2013 analysed business bottlenecks in Afghanistan and came up with a list of 10 areas of business hindrances. Of specific interest from the survey was the point that medium and large companies had positive opinion for women being involved in business activities rather than small companies (pg. 4). The list included:

- a) Difficulties in getting land: – a cross cutting concern but majorly affecting manufacturers
- b) Availability of finance: - high interest rates which is taken as un-Islamic
- c) Tax system: - is complex, confusing and unpredictable opening doors for bad practices
- d) Custom conditions: - especially at border posts. They lack modern infrastructure such as storage facilities and technical laboratories. The customs procedures are also complicated and inconsistent
- e) Public tender: - Lack of transparency in bidding processes, bribery, excessive bank guarantee requirements and political interferences.
- f) Business registration and extension: - Although starting a business is not a big hurdle, there are problems when it comes to renewal of licenses.
- g) Infrastructure: - Lack of electricity, water sewage, transport and telecommunication services are a big problem in Afghanistan
- h) Qualified labour force: - Outmigration (brain drain) and lack of training facilities in Afghanistan make it difficult to get well qualified people
- i) Security: - This is a goliath of a problem. Transportation of goods e.g. construction materials is an uphill struggle. By the time the materials arrive at the shop for sale, the business owners have sweated it out with warlords and government security forces. Construction therefore becomes very expensive, hence contributing to lack of business premises or high rent rates of those premises.
- j) Attitudes towards women: - The range of economic activities available to women in Afghanistan is severely limited by a complex set of cultural and related factors. This leads to a loss of human resource in the country.

When all the above factors are combined they make the economic hydra unbeatable. The government of Afghanistan, NGOs, UN agencies and individual members of the society make efforts to minimize these bottlenecks but as indicated earlier in this

paper, not a single head of the economic hydra is entirely extinguished. Women entrepreneurs have to continue advocating for better level business playing fields without which, business ethics in the country remain oxymoron.

The nature of microenterprise business in Afghanistan- Focus on women

Afghanistan Chamber of Commerce and Industries (ACCI's Feb. 2014) survey cites insecurity as a major factor behind lacklustre economic activity and business in Afghanistan. The survey revealed that other than insecurity, there are other foreboding factors such as access to financial resources, taxation, customs bidding, registration and extension of licenses, basic infrastructure and status of women. The Bottleneck survey suggested strong policy and structural reforms in order to reflect the voice of the private sector on the major business obstacles. If this is done then we might experience positive change in women's involvement in entrepreneurship. The question however remains whether business ethics will be respected.

A different view about insecurity versus business is given by Marron, D. (2010) who quotes a study by Cusack and Malmstrom (Nov. 2010) as indicating that "uncertainty" not "insecurity", is the major impediment to business success. According to, Marron (ibid) Cusack and Malmstrom's findings showed that Afghans were more concerned with the uncertainty of the business environment than the physical insecurity. In Kandahar for instance, a city considered to be one of the most dangerous areas in Afghanistan, conversations with business people highlighted uncertainty about the quality and timing of the power supply, about supplies flowing in through border crossings, about local and national government, about financing, about removal of American force posture and about sanctity of obligations should political power shift – more than security issues (Cusack and Malmstrom, 2010). If uncertainty is compounded with insecurity, and proscriptions on women involving themselves in entrepreneurship then we get an umbra or total eclipse of business ethics in Afghanistan.

Is all lost for women entrepreneurs in Afghanistan?

In December 2013, the U.S. Ambassador to Afghanistan, James B. Cunningham released the Afghanistan Women Economic Participation Report. In a well- attended meeting by officials from the Afghan Ministry of Women's Affairs and Ministry of Commerce and the non-profit organization Building Markets at the American University of Afghanistan, the Ambassador released a report which resulted from a nationwide survey of 1,400 Afghan female business owners and managers. The report revealed that the women business owners had in fact employed over 5,500 workers. The Ambassador remarked that 12 years ago, women in Afghanistan were not allowed to own businesses. Today, women were engaged in diverse business sectors such as construction, logistics, food processing, architectural design, apparel, and software development. The ambassador also noted that empowering the private sector was one of the ways of improving Afghan economy and engaging

women in this development would make them live to their full potential. The report also revealed that the success of women was dependent upon family support, access to higher education, exposure to regional and international experiences and proper education and training. In the meeting, the women identified corruption, access to finance and security problems as their biggest challenges.

Incidentally, the meeting with the U.S. Ambassador was a follow-up of an earlier ACCI/UNDP meeting in November 2013 where women entrepreneurs had converged to present their initiatives regarding running businesses. It is from this meeting that a position paper was drafted. The paper discussed the challenges women faced in the business sector and way forward. Some of the recommendations given pointed towards increasing women's role in business, minimizing threats of business run by women, prioritizing funding for women entrepreneurs, women capacity development, entrepreneurship and development of soft skills. One example of a successful woman business owner was given at the meeting as that of Ms. Kamila Sadiqi who has 150 employees. Despite her success, Ms. Sadiqi described lack of security, cultural barriers, lack of trust in funding for women as well as lack of professional capacity as the main challenges facing women entrepreneurs.

An earlier survey conducted by USAID in 2010 and discussed in the ACCI/UNDP meeting in November 2013, had noted that woman's economic empowerment brought changes in her status in the family, increased her decision making power, improved her shared responsibilities with her spouse and improved the living standards of the family. The survey had nonetheless found out that among the challenges faced by women in entrepreneurship included cultural disadvantages, financial limitations, production challenges, hardships in selling and marketing and lack of institutional support. The UNDP 2010 survey had also indicated that only 5% of the businesses in Afghanistan were owned by women. In view of these facts, it is evident that donor funding has not been reaching women entrepreneurs in the country. UNDP asserts that poverty reduction as well gender equality is inevitable unless women's economic empowerment gets on to the prioritized agenda of the government agencies and the international community. In the Afghan context business formation and growth for women can provide a desperately needed source of sustainable tax revenue for a country that relies more heavily on foreign aid than any other country in the world. If allowed to thrive, women entrepreneurship can also drive job creation and income growth for a population that is concerned as much about unemployment and poverty as security. My short stint as an employee of an International NGO and having an interest in observing business growth, I have noted that Afghanistan does not have the cutthroat competition experienced in other countries. Respect for culture and the strong trust amongst family businesses makes it possible to run businesses without too much of a hassle. In comparison with the Tienditas of Caracas Venezuela, as described by Pisani and Yoskowitz (2012) in their paper – a study of small neighbourhood Tienditas in Central America -

competitions of markets in Afghanistan are not threatening. Businesses run by women are discreet and respectable. Women entrepreneurs are not found in the streets of Kabul, or other major cities.

On December 3, 2012 at the United States Institute of Peace (USIP), a number of female entrepreneurs convened to discuss the opportunities and challenges faced by women in business in Afghanistan. Prominent women entrepreneurs such as Shaima Atiq Kabir, president of Foxtail Logistics, Roya Mahboob, president of Citadel Software Development Company and Kamila Sadiqi president and COE of Kawyan Professional Development Services shared their personal stories and perspectives about running business in Afghanistan. The USIP panel was chaired by the Deputy Director of Council for Foreign Relations' Women and Foreign Policy programme. The panel noted that women faced similar business challenges like their men counterparts. However, the female entrepreneurs indicated the women needed to overcome their own set of unique challenges such as cultural stigmas that see contracts awarded to men. The other cultural hurdles included limitations set on women to attend business meetings, limitations on travel (no woman is allowed to travel alone without a family escort), and lack of training opportunities that lead to jobs. The women were positive that barriers to women participation in business ventures could be overcome by creating access to higher education and vocational training especially outside of Kabul. Women who have tried their hand in technology, mobile money transfer use of internet have experienced success. Information Technology (IT) was particularly noted as good business for women because they could work from home.

Hopes of improved and acceptable business environment may unfortunately be thwarted in the near future. The refusal by the President to sign the Bilateral Security Agreement (BSA) confirms that security forces will withdraw from Afghanistan by the end of 2014. There are fears that the hard-fought gains made by Afghan women will be rolled back, reports Dunne, P. (August, 2013) in her paper "Hope for Afghanistan's Women Entrepreneurs? The World Bank has noted that the decline in foreign spending that comes with the shift will have profound and lasting impact on Afghanistan economy. These realities, Dunne (ibid) continues, will present even greater challenge for Afghanistan small group of women entrepreneurs and business leaders. The small networks of women entrepreneurs who once in a while participate in roundtables and business conferences and attending various trade shows are not effective because they lack follow up particularly in the provinces. The picture painted here is that of women being not allowed by their culture to freely move and interact with other business gurus elsewhere in or outside of the country.

In July 2013, the Asia Foundation hosted a women's entrepreneurs' roundtable in Kabul to discuss issues that Afghan women business owners faced. Only eight Afghan women were in attendance which clearly shows the restrictions they have in running businesses. The eight who attended were drawn from a trading company, e-distance learning centre, pharmaceutical industry, woodcarving, handicraft and fruits

and vegetables company. To give the roundtable moral support, there were representatives from the US Embassy, USAID and UN Women Programme. Among issues discussed related to formation of networking strategies, running and managing Small and Medium Enterprises, (SME's), the role of government in promoting or deterring women in business, the effects of security on business, regional trade and access to loans and financial support from banking institutions.

Globalization as a key context for business ethics

Before concluding this discussion, let us briefly turn our attention to globalization as a key context in business ethics. Globalization has become one of the most prominent buzzwords of recent times (Crane and Matten 2010). In their definition, Crane and Matten (ibid) argue that globalization is a process which diminishes the necessity of a common and shared territorial basis for social, economic and political activities, processes, and relations (pg.19). In this context, Afghanistan would be lucky to enter into détente with its neighbours and make entente more effective if it wishes to benefit from globalization particularly from the Asia and Central Asia countries. At the moment, there are unresolved political tensions from Iran and Pakistan with the two countries having Taliban connections. With reduced tensions (détente) and increased friendship (entente) with neighbouring countries, Afghanistan may have revived trust in terms of business investment.

World leaders, the European Union, UN agencies, prominent business tycoons have the word “globalization” encrypted in their speeches in a bid to make as many economic disciples as possible. Crane and Matten (ibid) quote Hank Paulson the chairman of the Goldman Sachs in 2001 as having said that the “gospel of globalization” is intended to increase interconnected world economy for better economic growth, global welfare, democracy and world peace. Even so however, world economies are not free from depressions and as such, they can have a lope side effect on businesses. In reference to Afghanistan, there is now the current fear that should NATO security forces and the American Army withdraw from the country by the end of 2014, businesses that have thrived in the last five or so years might nose-dive. Education system will be affected. Worse still, the stringent cultural practices loved most by the Taliban will be re-introduced. This will have adverse negative effects on businesses particularly those that have been started by women. The Taliban dictate which type of music, or games should be played. On the other hand, should smooth free and fair elections be in place, Afghanistan may enter into the world business arena. There are hopes that a new Bilateral Security Agreement (BSA) will be signed by the newly elected president but this is yet to be done.

What has prevented business globalization in Afghanistan is seen in the many facets of the country's political and social economic instability. Technology is one thing. Internet services are not well developed in many parts of the country. Even where internet is good, electronic business is hindered by the country's security fears, customs procedures and corruption. This tends to make orders via internet become

impossible. In Swedish Committee for Afghanistan, for instance, ordering equipment such as Braille Machine, Thermoform, Audiometers or hearing aids, and other equipment takes a whole year to procure because of the long process at the Customs Office. Politics is the next blockade. The process of getting into Afghanistan is long and tedious. Establishing reliable contacts that can be conduits to proliferation of business outside of Afghanistan is unthinkable. Within Afghanistan, territorial boundaries are jealously guarded. This territorial behaviour has even spread to the work place where specific programme managers will want to work with staff who come from their home grounds. Where women are concerned, it is difficult to get employment an aspect that reduces their economic productivity.

Cultural issues are yet another obstacle to globalization in Afghanistan. Moral values are taken far much seriously in the country than the law. Whereas child labour is taken as unethical in the European countries, some Asian countries take this as normal. Afghanistan is known to have huge problems of not only child labour but also early child marriages. Going against this practice is considered disrespectful to the culture. Legal issues contribute to the hindrance of globalization in Afghanistan. In developed countries, laws are strictly followed as benchmarks for protecting business ownership. For example, just recently in Kenya, a highly politicized payment of 3.1 billion Kenya shillings was paid to the owners of the defunct Anglo leasing company. This payment landed the Attorney General in hot soup but he was right in his arguments. When businesses are protected by the law, they are likely to thrive unlike when they have no protection. In the same vein, NGOs working in insecure countries may find themselves packing when they fail to toe the line. Sudan and Afghanistan are examples where NGOs have been forced to leave. Even though there could be valid reasons for them to leave, room for discussions is never accorded. Upon leaving, the employees of such organizations lose their jobs thus affecting their social economic progress.

Conclusion

Going back to the opening statement of this essay that business ethics is an oxymoron, Afghanistan has been portrayed as a perfect example. The essay has argued that for business to thrive there is need to look at the obstacles that stand on its way. These obstacles have been depicted in this essay as cultural, religious, financial, traditional and legal. The essay has looked at the environment in which women in Afghanistan practice their businesses and the challenges they face while doing so. Despite the oversupply of donor aid to Afghanistan, the essay contends that tangible effects on the development of women entrepreneurs are not justifiable. A section of the essay discusses the nature of running business in insecure environments drawing examples from Nigeria, Kenya, Somalia and South Sudan among other countries. The essay observes that women in the urban areas of Afghanistan are well placed in terms of business venture that women in the rural areas. These women have the advantage of getting support from the government as well as development partners in the country. Women in the rural areas have

continued to have slow economic progress because they have lacked support from their families and have not had any exposure to business entrepreneurial skills that can assist them in starting and running their businesses.

Inexplicitly, the essay seems to suggest that women in Afghanistan need to be given the opportunity to express themselves economically by being allowed to participate in open business entrepreneurship. The bias against women has so much tied them to their cultural cocoons even when they can be made productive and become positive contributors to the country's economy. Women need exposure to business skills, training and access to finances. Religious grips around beliefs that credits are sinful should be loosened. After all, the country itself has survived on credits ranging from army training, education advancement, agricultural economy and health. By loosening the customs procedures, opening free investment and international trade, Afghanistan would be in a position to join world economies. The paradox of plenty would be a thing of the past if practical approaches to economic recovery are put in place. It is my argument that Afghanistan should learn from its neighbours where insecurity has been toned down and where businesses are doing well.

The essay ends with giving an overview of globalization as the new gospel of economic development but also mentions that there can be the lope side of it. It would be advantageous for Afghanistan to ensure protection of business persons who may have an interest in investing in this country. That said, investors should not come to Afghanistan with overt interest on the one hand and covert interest on the other.

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