

# A Study of Gender Equity through the National Solidarity Programme's Community Development Councils

“If Anyone Listens I Have a Lot of Plans”

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**Funded by:**  
Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA)/Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation

**Implementing Agency:**  
Danish Committee for Aid to Afghan Refugees (DACAAR)

**FINAL REPORT**

## **DISCLAIMER**

The author's views expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect the views of the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development, the Canadian International Development Agency, the Swiss Agency for Development Cooperation or the Danish Committee for Aid to Afghan Refugees.



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## Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the staff of the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, DACAAR and the World Bank for their patience and assistance with this study. I would also like to highlight the role of the Afghan Women's Education Centre (AWEC) and Cooperation for Peace and Unity (CPAU) who were kind enough to loan their staff for the fieldwork in this study. The study would not have been possible without their staff who at times endured security risks to patiently complete their interviews. Staff at the National Solidarity Programme have been available at short notice and extremely helpful with their time and information. National Solidarity Programme Facilitating Partners kindly shared information and hosted our field trips sometimes at short notice. I would like to thank all those interviewed who shared their time and opinions with us and helped us put together the picture represented by this report.

## Acronyms and Abbreviations Used in This Report

<b>AIHRC</b>	Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission
<b>AWNGO</b>	Afghan Women's NGO
<b>CDC</b>	Community Development Councils
<b>CHA</b>	Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance
<b>CIDA</b>	Canadian International Development Agency
<b>DoWA</b>	Department of Women's Affairs
<b>FP</b>	Facilitating Partners
<b>GoA</b>	Government of Afghanistan
<b>MDG</b>	Millennium Development Goal
<b>MoE</b>	Ministry of Education
<b>MoWA</b>	Ministry of Women's Affairs
<b>MRRD</b>	Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development
<b>NGO</b>	Non-Government Organisation
<b>NSP</b>	National Solidarity Programme
<b>PRT</b>	Provincial Reconstruction Team
<b>RAFW</b>	Responsive Fund for Advancement of Women
<b>SO</b>	Social Organiser
<b>UN</b>	United Nations

## Gender Glossary

### Sex:

Is the biological difference between men and women. Sex differences are concerned with men and women's bodies.

### Gender:

Sex is a fact of human biology gender is not. The experience of being male or female differs dramatically from culture to culture. The concept of gender is used by sociologists to mean all the socially given attributes, roles, activities, and responsibilities connected to being male or a female in a given society. Our gender identity determines how we are perceived, and how we are expected to think and act as women and men, because of the way society is organized. This means that all women will not experience their gender roles, needs or relations in the same way – they are not a homogenous group. People tend to forget that there are hierarchies among men and women in rural communities too e.g. wealthy women, middle income women, poor women, disabled men and women, adolescents, old people, widows, orphans, different ethnic groups, etc.

The term gender is often used as if it is synonymous and interchangeable with the word women. This is not the case. The reason why gender approaches often address women and girls is because of the acknowledged discrimination and exclusion which most women face in developing countries, but more importantly because of the confusion between Women in Development (WID) and Gender and Development (GAD) approaches discussed below.

**Strategic and Practical Gender Needs:** Meeting practical and/or strategic gender needs takes on important when we consider WID and GAD approaches, elaborated below. The following definitions were taken from the March et al. book:

### Practical Gender Needs (PGN)

Are the needs women identify in their socially accepted roles in society. Practical gender needs to challenge the gender divisions of labour or women's subordinate position in society, although rising out of them. Practical gender needs are a response to immediate perceived necessity, identified within a specific context. They are practical in nature and often are concerned with inadequacies in living conditions such as water provision, health care and employment.

### Strategic Gender Needs (SGN)

Are the needs women identify because of their subordinate position to men in their society. Strategic gender needs vary according to particular contexts. They relate to gender divisions of labour, power and control and may include such issues as legal rights, domestic violence, equal wages and women's control over their bodies. Meeting strategic gender needs helps women to achieve greater equality. It also changes existing roles and therefore challenges women's subordinate position.

**Gender Equity:** Broadly, this relates to the fair distribution of resources and benefits between women and men. Different institutions have different emphases. DFID, for example, stresses equity of outcomes, meaning that the exercise of rights and entitlements leads to outcomes which are fair and just. Gender equity should reflect the specific needs and priorities of the Afghan government. In this report, gender equity refers to the first part of this definition.

**Gender Equality:** "[W]omen should have equal rights and entitlements to human, social, economic and cultural development, and an equal voice in civic and political life."<sup>1</sup> Gender equality is an integral part of universal human rights and an important development goal in itself.

**Gender Analysis:** "Examination of social process which considers the roles played by women and men, including issues such as division of labour, productive and reproductive activities, access to and control over resources and benefits, and socio-economic and environmental factors that influence women and men. Gender analysis also refers to the systematic investigation of the differential impacts of development

1 Derbyshire (2002)



on women and men.”<sup>2</sup> There are a number of gender analytical frameworks (e.g. Harvard, Moser, etc.) which are applied by practitioners.

**Sex Disaggregated Data:** is quantitative statistical information on differences and inequalities between women and men.

**Gender Analytical Information:** is qualitative information on gender differences and inequalities. Gender analysis is about understanding culture, e.g. the patterns and norms of what men and women, boys and girls do and experience in relation to the issue being examined and addressed. Where patterns of gender difference and inequality are revealed in sex disaggregated data, gender analysis is the process of examining why the disparities are there, whether they are a matter for concern, and how they might be addressed.

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2 Ibid.

## Executive Summary

Afghanistan remains on the lowest ranks of the human development index, with some of the worst social indicators among women and children who constitute more than half of the population. Against this backdrop, the National Solidarity Programme (NSP) has achieved unprecedented, widespread involvement of women in rural Afghanistan's community decision-making apparatus which aims to promote equal representation of women in NSP's Community Development Councils (CDCs). The quality and outcomes of this involvement are the subject matter of this report. NSP's establishment of CDCs across 34 provinces and the use of multiple Facilitating Partners (FPs) provides the valuable opportunity for a thorough study of gender equity in community decision-making activities—in particular, the extent to which rural women meaningfully participate in effective management of local resources, as men do; the ways in which community females and their livelihoods benefit from CDC decisions; and variations in female participation and benefits according to geographical area and/or the Facilitating Partner (FP) that has established the CDCs in a given area. Not only do socio-cultural, political, and economic factors pose challenges to gender equity in community decisions, in spite of NSP's commitment to equity; the vast and complex nature of NSP also presents challenges in isolating these factors and measuring their effects on gender equity.

NSP is executed by the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development (MRRD) and was created by the Government of Afghanistan to develop the ability of Afghan communities to identify, plan, manage and monitor their own development projects. NSP promotes a development paradigm whereby communities are empowered to make decisions and manage resources during all stages of the project cycle. The programme lays the foundation for a sustainable form of inclusive local governance, rural reconstruction, and poverty alleviation. This would tend to indicate that NSP should be viewed through a social engineering rather than a simple project delivery lens.

NSP consists of four core elements:

- Facilitation at the community level to assist communities establish inclusive community institutions through secret ballot and democratic elections; reach consensus on priorities and corresponding subproject activities; develop eligible subproject proposals that comply with NSP appraisal criteria; and implement approved subprojects;.
- Building the capacities of CDC and community members (both men and women) in participation, consensus-building, accounting, procurement and contract management, operations and maintenance, and monitoring;
- Providing direct block grant transfers to fund approved subprojects; and
- Linking CDCs to government agencies, NGOs, and donors to improve access to services and resources.<sup>3</sup>

Through support from CIDA's Responsive Fund for the Advancement of Women this study provides a rigorous, qualitative study of gender equity in communities covered by NSP. The project has examined and addressed these variations using robust research methods—i.e., collecting evidence-based data and analyzing the data—in order to determine causes of variations and, in turn, identify best practices and recommendations for more gender-equitable approaches to decision-making by CDCs regarding matters of community development. The project's objective was to identify means of increasing the degree to which CDCs reflect and further women's development priorities and to mainstream the associated recommendations. The project's partners have included NSP FPs, NSP staff, Rural Development staff of the World Bank and development partners working with MRRD. The ultimate target group and stakeholders are the men and women of communities covered by NSP.

The following are the main research questions which formed the basis of this study:

- What are the main determinants of gender inequity in CDCs?
- How can women's meaningful participation in CDC processes be increased?
- How much do CDCs reflect and further women's development priorities?
- Do CDCs improve women's access to the following and how can this be improved?
  - Funds and other resources
  - Power/influence and voice

Another topic which was added after consideration was **gender and masculinity** which has been researched in the Afghan context for the first time.

The study covered samples from **eleven districts** in **seven provinces** of Afghanistan. The main ethnic groups covered were Pushtuns, Tajiks followed by Hazaras and Uzbeks. Communities covered also included Baluch, Turkmen, Arabs, Pashayee and others. **438 men and women** from all walks of life were interviewed for this study. 71 sets of interviews were undertaken with CDCs and women's groups attached to them in 43 villages making this one of the larger qualitative studies undertaken on NSP. Within these interviews the team questioned, individually or in groups, 168 women and 165 men who were CDC members or ordinary people from the village. Local mullahs would often join the male focus groups. 38 interviews were undertaken with key informants<sup>4</sup>. 55 male and female staff members from FPs were interviewed in Kabul, in provincial and district level offices. 12 staff members from NSP were also interviewed. Apart from interviews there were numerous interactions with people from the sample categories and staff from other organisations working with NSP, e.g. the World Bank, which have informed this study. The sampling was based on advice from a range of individuals and from previous experience of the research team. Most of the research was conducted using semi-structured, open-ended questionnaire checklists and conducted in Dari or Pushtun since the entire team were fluent speakers of one or both languages. The survey team also used focus group interviews.

NSP has achieved unprecedented, widespread involvement of women in rural Afghanistan's community decision-making apparatus with interesting and exciting changes albeit on a modest scale which can be built up with appropriate interventions. NSP has provided a unique opportunity for women to participate in the development process from a government-sanctioned platform, allowing women to gather and discuss their development priorities within a formal framework for the first time and have their concerns taken seriously. This has had profound impact on certain individuals and communities. NSP has also provided many women with the possibility to learn skills or become literate. Infrastructure projects have changed the quality of life for women and men in communities across Afghanistan. Gender inequality within any development programme, however, represents a huge loss of human potential, with costs for men as well as for women and NSP is no exception. This is a lesson which has reached policy makers and project implementers in the Afghan context but much more can be done.

Daikundi Women: "NSP Allows men and women to decide together...It is the first time that women's opinions have been asked about a project in the village...I have been back from Iran since the nineties but no organisation has ever given women a role in shuras before NSP came along."

Parwan Women: "NSP was the first programme which involved government support and sanction for women to leave their houses and to become active in communities."

Paktia Women: "When women do not even own their own bodies how can they own community goods? They do not own anything."

Paktia Men: "Our women are illiterate so they are not allowed to discuss anything...Our women are such that if you take them to the bazaar they'll get hit by a car. How can they become powerful?...Mullahs, sharia and learned people all say that women have no brains so we do not share anything with them."

The main determinants of gender inequity in CDCs include a range of issues. Women's low status together with FP and community lack of recognition of their roles and abilities reinforce gender stereotypes about the importance of men and the subordinate and minor role of women. The study found, for instance, that women have been working on community solidarity for hundreds of years but today sadly some of their roles are gradually dying out as communities modernize. They are finding new roles as teachers, doctors and community representatives but the male attitude is often that women have no role.

Overall, pressure for men to be masculine in performing gender roles limits women's mobility, decreases their confidence, limits information, denies them control of funds and leads to interference in women's activities. These all hinder the achievement of gender

equity in NSP. Women often lack experience and need much more time and training to be improve their capacity to engage with and manage the development process in their community. The threat of violence

<sup>4</sup> These included female role models in community, religious leaders, tribal leaders, female MPs or provincial councillors, provincial Department of Women's Affairs (DoWA), MRRD and Ministry of Education (MoE) staff, among others. Relevant NGO and UN staff were also interviewed.

Paktia Tribal Elder: "Once we had a problem with a village. At night the elders agreed amongst themselves that we would go and solve the issue. And we took arms and ammunition but on the way we don't know how the women from that area got wind of it and barred our way and asked forgiveness and said end this killing. Believe me when I said my entire body was shaking and because of respect to women we turned back half way and I told all the men in the area that if anyone goes towards their village he will die by my hand. These customs still exist among us Pushtuns."

Paktia Young Men: "Sometimes when men see that a problem is not being solved they say to the women if you can solve this problem I will buy you this or promise other things. The women then have to solve the problem and so in Mangal and Mirzakah it is still the custom that women take the Quran and go to the enemies' house and beg forgiveness and invite them to end the conflict".

or abuse is also an indirect but ever present factor, limiting women's voice, mobility and ability to be proactive. Lack of appropriate spaces and inability to control their own time and labour are also contributing factors. There are variations in gender relations according to the predominant ethnic groups in the region creating modalities in approaches which should be taken.

Gender segregation at various stages of the development process does not lead to team building between men and women and does not always improve gender relations. In fact, even though women are 'given' a project, often as passive recipients, such moves do not lead to gender equity as women are excluded from the community level development process. Women may be involved in the NSP process to choose a project and so on but may not have access to and control of the outcome. There are ways to try and ensure that women, especially those from vulnerable categories do not get denied access to community goods. Elite capture also contributes to gender inequity. According to recent research "a significant number of Afghanistan's women fall within the category 'chronically poor' as defined by the MDG goal currently subscribed to by the GoA...[S]uch poverty is not necessarily an attribute of one category of women such as 'female-headed' households"<sup>5</sup>. There are no specific activities for the poor or for other vulnerable groups.

In terms of quantity NSP and FPs have tried to achieve goals for women's participation. The quality of women's participation in CDC consultative decision-making processes has been low until now. High quality participation is better for ensuring sustainability of results than quantity alone. Women need a great deal more assistance to overcome resistance, get out and make strategic linkages to ensure sustainability of women's groups formed under NSP and currently numbers of women overcoming all the barriers and succeeding are relatively low. The quality of participation has been impacted by men in CDCs blocking information, lack of structured, two-way communication between men and women's groups, men controlling project funds and largely ignoring any input which women may want to make. Lack of women's confidence and confidence in women also block progress on gender equity. Men interfere a great deal in women's groups, directly or indirectly which coupled with FP inability to identify and support good women leaders leads to weak women's groups. In cases where men are not successful in influencing the election process for women they try to disparage the woman's leadership or management skills. Men's arbitrary selection of the members of the women's group is hardly participatory or gender equitable in allowing women to choose who should represent them.

Nangarhar Men: "We have women parliamentarians from our district and we are proud that they are vying with men at Nangarhar level and we hope they succeed."

Parwan Men: "We can take Commander Kaftar of Baghlan as an example. At the moment she is at the same level as General Dostum or Shahnewar Tani. Every time something happens in Nahrin they want her advice and without her view nothing can go ahead. So it is clear that women can be leaders as well."

The quality of women's leadership is critical and impacts not only the type of women's group which is created under NSP but also the lives of women and girls in the community. Good leaders try to ensure that the women in their group and in the village understand better what is happening but to do that they need good information. They encourage women to negotiate with men and raise their voices about issues which matter to them. Women who become effective leaders are often enterprising. They have good public speaking skills – often a combination of storyteller, comedian and diplomat. Women leaders often gave many examples of their charitable works. They have negotiation and conflict resolution skills. They provide advice and have the energy and drive to achieve results. They are inquisitive about their community, tenacious and quick to grab an opportunity when they see one. They actively train younger women to be

5 Banzet et al. (2008)

future leaders and are aware that others can be trained to replace them. Women who do not somehow challenge gender roles do not perform their leadership roles as well as those who do. Whether selected by the women or the men in the village, in order for leaders to be able to influence and gain power they must be seen to attract funding and projects to their communities. People will not support them or their policies if they are not seen to produce tangible results. A number of women who fit this description are leading NSP groups in different provinces of Afghanistan but they need recognition and support.

Jawzjan Women: "I was a teacher. I put make up on. Everyone especially my husband's family would say 'You married a loose woman who does not cover [herself]'. But my husband promised me that if I did my own thing he would deal with people. Eventually people came and told my husband we will pay you double your wife's salary if you are not man enough to earn a living but don't let your wife leave the house and earn a living. But now as time has passed others have learnt, especially the man who said this to my husband."

Paktia Elder: "Naturally men are under the influence of custom and culture of the area and they may even have been threatened about their behaviour with their wives through jirgas and elders in their area – it is obvious that they are under pressure and threat since all men behave the same way towards their women and this in itself shows that all men have no authority and matters are told to them from somewhere else. A number who live in town are separate but generally everyone lives under one set of cultural principles...We should work with the new generation to change this."

Some women who emerge as leaders have been exposed to different ways of living and working. Some been exposed to an urban setting such as Kabul or cities in the country they went to as refugees. Even here there are differences. Some women had educated or open-minded families who let them experience the world outside their homes but some women were taken as 'luggage'. Some women felt more modern because of the way they were able to dress, demonstrating urbanisation. In such cases, they feel that as urbanised women among rural women they should take the lead. Other women had been changed by the war. One took a very active role supporting Mujahideen troops by feeding them and hiding their weapons. Such women have the ability to take risks due to their socio-cultural status and this is an important point of leverage to negotiate for change in gender relations. Women whose husbands had status in the military or Mujahideen emerge as leaders since they have always had a certain cachet in the community. Motivated women, who no longer have small children to care for, because they have time and mobility, take on leadership roles.

NSP is implemented in a wide array of settings, with men in communities at different places along the continuum from passive indifference to active intervention on gender relations. Catering for such a range of outlooks and expectations requires technical capacity for gender analytical assessment to critically assess starting points for promoting women's involvement and organisational commitment to respond to the situation on the ground with appropriate interventions, back by appropriate policy and programme options. Misunderstanding of gender as a women's issue has meant that gender programming has been condensed down to a number of small capacity development projects and women's participation in meetings at during discrete phases of the NSP process, a good first step but not the endpoint of the journey to gender equity.

One of the main reasons cited for not involving women in NSP was lack of effective outreach to women. This was due to lack of female staff, conservative attitudes in an area, perceived insecurity, etc. It was found that not all FPs invest the same time and effort in reaching women. There is a dearth of good female staff in the field and both NSPs and FPs at times need to examine any reluctance to field female staff or to give them full support in the field. Many men in FPs, NSP and the community will delay or avoid work with women or fielding women due to security but probing this issue showed that security is not always the correct concern and that it is at times a very convenient excuse to exclude women. It is clear that when security is used as a reason to limit women's involvement it has to be unpacked. The issue of security and how it impacts work with women is an interesting one since it tests the ability to realistically assess risk of engaging with gender issues in a given context<sup>6</sup>. NSP provincial staff must regularly highlight the commitment to gender in regular interactions with FP field staff, discussing indicators, goals, successes, obstacles and seeking solutions.

Overall, at every level within NSP there appears to be confusion between gender and women's rights. Masculinity as the missing component of gender is a very exciting, new area which can make positive

<sup>6</sup> This does not refer to high risk areas of Afghanistan where the level of insecurity makes work with communities almost impossible.



contributions to discussions on gender in the Afghan context. Studies in other parts of the world have shown that there are detrimental effects of male exclusion and positive effects of male inclusion when striving to achieve gender equality and equity. Engaging men, in discussions on masculinity, helps them see that gender does not just equal women and includes them in the process of achieving gender equality. In Afghanistan male hostility and retaliation to 'gender' is already visible. Men feel anxiety and fear when they sense that 'traditional' masculinities are being undermined. The best way to handle this is with inclusive renegotiation of gender relations. In everyday life, men put pressure on each other to perform their gender roles as men, especially in the way they related to women. There are positive sides to masculinity which present opportunities for change. Men follow role models and in some areas these can be men who are considered powerful, wealthy and successful. Peer education may be a particularly valuable strategy for men, given the evidence that men's attitudes and behaviour are shaped in powerful ways by their male peers. This in no way decreases the importance of educating women on their rights and giving them awareness of gender roles, equality and equity.

NSP must be commended for its commitment to addressing gender issues on a national scale in Afghanistan. Both MRRD and NSP need adequate and effective support in addressing gender issues more effectively. NSP tries to be an equal opportunities employer and to encourage FPs to take gender into consideration but there is still a dearth of people in management, be they male or female, who can ensure that programmes lead to gender equitable outcomes. Sound gender analysis is still lacking from much of the programme. For those FPs who do not have a long-term commitment to gender equality and equity their capacity and staff are already stretched by financial and contractual issues related to NSP and all the other programmes they run to survive. Without good guidance on gender mainstreaming in NSP some FP staff find the prospect daunting.

A cadre of well informed, trained and experienced female staff is critical for the success of any project which includes a gender component. Support of male staff to female staff is also a key factor. Female SOs in particular are critical for reaching, mobilising, training and informing women in communities but face many problems. The encyclopaedic knowledge of SOs needs to be downloaded, analysed and used to improve gender equity within NSP. One way to keep SOs engaged with NSP and to download their enormous store of information in a coherent manner to be used for lessons learned, baseline data etc. is as part of a long term endeavour linked to an academic establishment such as a diploma study programme.

Sarepul Religious Leader: "A girl was caught with a man. Her brothers connected a generator to her feet and killed her. In Kohistanat, a man cut his young wife in pieces because her father sold her by force and she had gone to the government to try and get a divorce. Women and girls who take animals for grazing are abducted and raped. We recently dealt with the case of a 13 year old girl like this. A woman brought her daughter in and complained that her son-in-law was forcing his wife into prostitution dressed as a young boy. We got a divorce for the wife and now she lives in town and she is very happy. A woman killed her husband for having sexual relations with young boys. She gave herself up to the law. People complain that their husbands are bringing prostitutes to the house or gambling in the house."

NSP policy to encourage the inclusion of women, various expressions of FP commitment to gender equality and most importantly community willingness to push women into programmes all contribute to women's involvement in NSP. In most communities, however, women still have some way to go to be involved in decision-making and representative local leadership. In order to increase women's meaningful participation in NSP it is necessary to insulate them from the influence of men rather than to segregate or isolate them. Insulation here means awareness of negative influences and steps to counter them. Women's independent choice in selecting candidates to run women's groups, for example, is likely to result in a higher and more dynamic level of women's participation in NSP.

Women need to be informed about NSP processes and attend meetings which provide a forum in which they can actively participate. Women's participation in programmes like NSP will only be meaningful if their contribution is valued and they are recognised as social capital by all stakeholders. Women will not mobilize if they do not feel confidence and support, especially where there are high levels of intimidation of and violence against women and girls. Anecdotal evidence implies that different forms of violence are widespread against women and children in many communities. Where women are not used to assuming positions of authority, considerable groundwork is needed to help them develop the self-confidence and assertiveness skills they need to deal with village authorities. Where there is violence alliances must be built with those who work to eliminate such behavior.

Gender equality and equity cannot be achieved without a recognition that men's behaviours and attitudes need to change. There needs to be a clear realization that men have a role and a stake in fostering gender equality and equity, this applies to NSP management all the way down to men in communities. Funding can be used as one form of leverage to increase women's participation, reducing funding to communities with no women's participation using funding as leverage, in tandem with appropriate workshops to discuss the benefits of women's participation. Similarly, CDC leaders, communities, FPs who show a genuine interest in women's activities and wish to help women's groups participate as partners in the development process should be rewarded with extra funding, maybe in the form of prizes.

Drivers for change which can be more effectively utilised to facilitate women's participation can also include 'gender advocates' in government and civil society. These can include religious leaders, local leaders (male and female), staff from other relevant ministries, business men, Afghan women's NGOs and women and so on. Recognising existing processes of change gives NSP and FP staff an opportunity to integrate their work into locally accepted processes of change, reducing the risk of conflict and resistance. For example, many Afghans have had profound life changing experiences, as refugees, displaced and migrants, which altered the chemistry of communities as well as the men and women within them. Recognising existing processes of change gives NSP and FP staff an opportunity to integrate their work into locally accepted processes of change. It reduces the risk of conflict and resistance.

Currently CDCs reflect and further women's development priorities as men from specific socio-economic groups see them. The interests of different socioeconomic groups of women and men (younger women, poor women, disabled women, female headed households, landless households, etc.) are not always represented. Inputs do change the quality of women's lives and skills are transferred using HCD projects but the impact of NSP could be much better. Community men and FP staff continuously buy into the assumption that women have no skills whereas the problem statement is more often that women in specific age groups have skills but cannot use them profitably. Marketing projects which use existing skills, for example, can be cost-effective and high impact ways of addressing women's concerns about unemployment and livelihood.

NSP has generally improved mobility for women, giving them somewhere legitimate to go on a regular basis, uniting women with a singular purpose for the first time. Some CDCs agree that NSP training has familiarized women with issues that enable them to participate more effectively in community life by meeting and discussing. Where active women in communities were looking for an opportunity to take some sort of leadership role and handle projects in the community, NSP unwittingly gave them this opportunity and the FP helped them build a platform. When men and women say that women are involved in decision-making as a result of NSP one has to be aware that there are different levels of access and control and that women's status may only have changed in a few cases. The focus of involving women in NSP CDCs and the development process must be on improving gender relations rather than 'adding' women. The question for NSP and FP management to determine and plan for is what level of participation they want to achieve with women and how.

Herat Men: "At the beginning of the 7 Saur Revolution when Taraki came and announced that he will give identity cards for men and women, when they came to our village and said we must register our women and bring their photos we all ran away and went to Iran. Do you know what happened? The Iranian police, in order to give us relief aid, registered families and would take the names and photos of each family member for that purpose. We said take our names first. There, neither our honour nor manliness remained. Even though we ran away because our government wanted to take our wives' photos, in Iran we were volunteering ourselves for that."

Paktia Young Men: "When we see women in Gardez who work and get a 600 dollar salary and even have body guards, a vehicle and other things naturally we are human and we would like our women to have the same. The new generation wants even more than the old generation who stayed illiterate and cannot do anything."

## Recommendations

### On Sex Disaggregated Data and Gender Analytical Information

- Before any intervention which aims to encourage the participation of women a thorough gender analysis of the situation is needed in order to have an accurate, unbiased picture of opportunities and threats. This should be drawn up by the appropriate staff of NSP and FPs and used to develop a plan, indicators and goals.
- NSP and FPs must engage with women's existing roles within the community as starting points for soliciting women's participation.
- One size does not fit all in NSP and the programme management must consider options which allow FPs to handle different communities developing at different rates.
- If women are to be empowered, to participate in their own right and have influence then eventually FPs can suggest that they and their communities must agree to refer to them by a name which indicates their new role in public but does not reveal their private identity. If each CDC for example chooses a flower name then the women in committees or groups can be known as Yassaman One, Yassaman Two, etc. This links women's identities to the public project rather than retaining links to their family roles.
- A diploma study programme based on social organisation skills for NSP would improve access to institutional memory among SOs and provide better access to best practice. This can be done in cooperation with the Ministry of Higher Education and an Afghan university partnered up with an international university.
- FP and NSP male field staff feeling isolated in insecure and hostile provinces need more support to discuss gender relations with local communities, key actors and government.
- Collection of baseline information by monitoring and evaluation units on women's mobility, level of information provided to women's gatherings, the quality of women's gatherings, sense of ownership of community goods, women's access to and control of productive assets, etc. will provide some indicators to measure some aspects of progress in women's involvement in NSP.
- Women should feel a strong sense of access and control in relation to community goods created as a result of the NSP process. This can be facilitated by the FP by setting up formal agreements which can be arbitrated by a third party. NSP policy makers in cooperation with other government bodies must set up the legal framework within which this can happen.
- NSP policy makers need to determine what areas of Afghan women's status can realistically be addressed by the programme and to set goals accordingly.
- If the FP is not providing conflict resolution and/or peace building training it should ensure that the community is receiving such training from potential NGO partners working in the same area.

### On Influencing the Development Agenda

#### Women's Participation

- To improve women's participation, NSP and FP staff at all levels must be willing to challenge traditional representation replicating itself within NSP. FPs and NSP must constantly monitor the quality of women's participation.
- NSP and FP, from management levels downwards, must adhere to a process of mainstreaming gender into all activities instead of having sex-segregated projects and activities. The more men and women have to share resources and negotiate, under supervision of an FP initially, the more they will learn to work more effectively as a team. Women can only effectively be included in the development process in this manner.
- NSP and FPs at every level must raise awareness among men and women that NSP provides a legally sanctioned platform from which women can become involved in the development process.
- The question for NSP and FPs to determine and plan for is what quality of participation they want to achieve with women in NSP and how.
- Communities and FPs that facilitate good quality women's participation should be rewarded by being given prizes or extra funding.
- FPs need to produce much more structured guidelines on communication between men and women's shuras. Good quality, two-way communication between men's and women's groups can be used as an indicator to monitor gender relations.



- ➔ Women who have access to male society and are CDC members should be used to improve communication between the CDC and its women's group. Female SOs should be encouraged to communicate and negotiate with men's CDCs where feasible to improve gender relations.
- ➔ FPs can experiment with giving responsibility to competent women's groups with setting up projects for the poor vulnerable in their communities. NSP can provide a specific budget for this.
- ➔ Where feasible women's groups should have a bank account and control their own money.
- ➔ Women's groups should be encouraged and assisted to seek assistance from other organisations through accompanied trips, building linkages, etc. This can be done by FPs and NSP at local level and by NSP management at national level. This can be done by putting small grants providers in touch with FPs who can introduce them to women's groups. It can also be done by encouraging other ministries to encourage and support the efforts of NSP women's groups to advocate and to make a change in their communities.
- ➔ Engineers and project designers must ensure that design of infrastructure and other projects is user friendly and gender equitable.

### **Mobilizing and reaching women**

- ➔ NSP provincial staff must regularly highlight the commitment to gender in regular interactions with FP field staff.
- ➔ An inventory of the 'resources' that women bring to a CDC should be made when elections take place. The message should be to stress women as existing or latent social capital. Men's CDCs should be encouraged to discuss girls' education and to value educated women as social capital. Education should be viewed as a long term investment.
- ➔ Steps must be taken to overcome the deference or muting of women's views in front of men. This can be done through training and awareness-raising.
- ➔ NSP and FPs must use every opportunity to encourage women and their communities about women's progress. This must be done in a constructive and responsible manner. Whenever an NSP or FP delegation comes to the community they must see women as well. Women's achievements must be mentioned at every opportunity since this is a strong motivating factor.
- ➔ Giving women an official title or certificate for skills they possess may improve their status as individuals and lead to women being increasingly seen as social capital.
- ➔ Confidence, assertiveness and public speaking skills are very important if women are going to negotiate with the men in their families and communities.
- ➔ NSP media and communications staff must look for ways to improve the use of the media to reach women and communities, as training resources, for advocacy, outreach and as a powerful social engineering tool.

### **Building A Women's Group**

- ➔ Women representatives will need special training, in leadership skills, confidence building and communication. Similar training should be offered to men to avoid alienation.
- ➔ Active female and male leaders should be supported and encouraged with activities which have tangible results for women. Good leadership should be rewarded and weak leaders should be pushed to improve performance.
- ➔ Women need a working space which is free of associations with certain families and socioeconomic hierarchies and does not reinforce power differentials. In places where women have no distinct space to meet, it may be possible to initially use a tent<sup>7</sup> as a neutral space placed somewhere appropriate in the village so that women can gather there. The best solution would be to build a room or stress that a community hall should be put at women's disposal at specific times.

### **Security**

- ➔ The relevant individuals and groups within both NSP and FPs must assess the security situation correctly and clarify the exact nature of the security risk when using it as a reason to avoid or curtail outreach to women in a community.
- ➔ NSP and FPs should be aware of violence, threats, intimidation and illicit activities such as underage marriage or trafficking of women in their area of operations. NSP should support AIHRC and DoWA campaigns on violence against women – this does not have to be overt or direct. FPs should be informed about shelters and services in their area of operations and discreetly inform women if cases of violence and abuse are revealed

7 Like the tents used as a temporary measure for schools.

### Women's Development Priorities

- Skills development is crucial and should go beyond small tokenistic projects for women, to include planning and design based on solid assessments of existing skills bases, local markets, expectation management and business plans.
- HCD staff should experiment with market assessment and linkage-to-market type projects that can reach more beneficiaries and utilise existing skills and producers in communities. They should assess existing skills within the community and link women to markets in greater numbers.

### On Gender Equality in the Afghan Context

- NSP management should invest in regular research which facilitates the identification of drivers of change e.g. key actors, processes, gatekeepers, etc. Both NSP and FP provincial staff should be trained in how to use drivers of change to forward NSP objectives.
- A list of resources for work with women should include local NGOs lead by and/or working with women. To overcome outreach problems with women FPs can partner with available Afghan women's NGOs.
- Masculinity and gender is an important area to explore and address through workshops at every level. It can include discussions with men about 'what people will say' and social pressure. Another way of addressing masculinity into workshops and trainings is by discussing peer pressure, including negative and positive role models for fathers, husbands, brothers, etc.
- Groundwork from FPs for setting up women's groups should include an assessment of ongoing and past activities with women together with a review of information available from other organisations and institutions working in the area. A basic list of who, what, when, where and how.

### On Understanding of and Exposure to Gender:

- Gender needs to be recognised as a pertinent technical issue, which requires expertise. Filling gender roles within institutions need to be taken more seriously than they are at present. Young, inexperienced women with English and computer skills may not be the best candidates for filling such roles which involve both understanding of concepts and the ability to negotiate for results.
- FPs need support and guidance to mainstream gender within NSP activities so that they prioritise gender and are not daunted by the prospect of including women in the NSP process.
- There is a need for gender awareness courses for NSP staff and FPs which are tailor-made to their activities. Such courses should include the basic building blocks of the concept of gender but then follow on with specific technical inputs which inform the relevant sectors.
- NSP needs professionals who can help with the process of gender mainstreaming within the institution, programme and process.
- Both NSP and FP staff need assistance to help them develop indicators which can help them measure and describe changes in gender relations more effectively.
- Deterrents for professional females must be taken into consideration and addressed within NSP and FPs if more positions are to be filled by women.



# 1. Introduction

Afghanistan remains on the lowest ranks of the human development index, with some of the worst social indicators among women and children who constitute more than half of the population. Against this backdrop, the National Solidarity Programme (NSP) has achieved unprecedented, widespread involvement of women in rural Afghanistan's community decision-making apparatus which aims to promote equal representation of women in NSP's Community Development Councils (CDCs). The quality and outcomes of this involvement are the subject matter of this report. NSP's establishment of CDCs across 34 provinces and the use of multiple Facilitating Partners (FPs) provides the valuable opportunity for a thorough study of gender equity in community decision-making activities—in particular, the extent to which rural women meaningfully participate in effective management of local resources, as men do; the ways in which community females and their livelihoods benefit from CDC decisions; and variations in female participation and benefits according to geographical area and/or the Facilitating Partner (FP) that has established the CDCs in a given area. Not only do socio-cultural, political, and economic factors pose challenges to gender equity in community decisions, in spite of NSP's commitment to equity; the vast and complex nature of NSP also presents challenges in isolating these factors and measuring their effects on gender equity.

NSP is executed by the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development (MRRD) and was created by the Government of Afghanistan to develop the ability of Afghan communities to identify, plan, manage and monitor their own development projects. NSP promotes a development paradigm whereby communities are empowered to make decisions and manage resources during all stages of the project cycle. The programme lays the foundation for a sustainable form of inclusive local governance, rural reconstruction, and poverty alleviation. This would tend to indicate that NSP should be viewed through a social engineering rather than a simple project delivery lens.

NSP consists of four core elements:

- Facilitation at the community level to assist communities establish inclusive community institutions through secret ballot and democratic elections; reach consensus on priorities and corresponding subproject activities; develop eligible subproject proposals that comply with NSP appraisal criteria; and implement approved subprojects;
- Building the capacities of CDC and community members (both men and women) in participation, consensus-building, accounting, procurement and contract management, operations and maintenance, and monitoring;
- Providing direct block grant transfers to fund approved subprojects; and
- Linking CDCs to government agencies, NGOs, and donors to improve access to services and resources.<sup>8</sup>

Through support from CIDA's Responsive Fund for the Advancement of Women this study provides a rigorous, qualitative study of gender equity in communities covered by NSP. The project has examined and addressed these variations using robust research methods—i.e., collecting evidence-based data and analyzing the data—in order to determine causes of variations and, in turn, identify best practices and recommendations for more gender-equitable approaches to decision-making by CDCs regarding matters of community development. The project's objective was to identify means of increasing the degree to which CDCs reflect and further women's development priorities and to mainstream the associated recommendations. The project's partners have included NSP FPs, NSP staff, Rural Development staff of the World Bank and development partners working with MRRD. The ultimate target group and stakeholders are the men and women of communities covered by NSP.

The report is laid out according to the four key areas recommended for effective gender mainstreaming. These are:

- Sex disaggregated data and gender analytical information (Section 4)
- Influence the development agenda – Level of participation (Section 5)
- Context specification to promote gender equality (Section 6)
- Understanding of and exposure to gender (Section 7)

8 NSP Operational Manual (2009)

Annexes at the end of the report provide further interesting quotes from interviewees. These add further insights to findings and recommendations provided in this report. Annexes also provide a detailed breakdown of interviewees, in-depth descriptions of some of the women leaders in the NSP process, a list of reference material which informed this research and interview checklists.

## 2. Methodology

The following are the main research questions which formed the basis of this study:

- What are the main determinants of gender inequity in CDCs?
- How can women's meaningful participation in CDC processes be increased?
- How much do CDCs reflect and further women's development priorities?
- Do CDCs improve women's access to the following and how can this be improved?
  - Funds and other resources
  - Power/influence and voice

To answer these questions the research focused on the following areas:

- Understanding of and exposure to gender
- Pertinent contextual factors – the gendered landscape
- Relations between women and men in CDCs
- Activities, strategic and practical gains for women
- Control, power and influence
- Women's leadership
- Time, space and mobility for women

Another topic which was added after consideration was **gender and masculinity**.

### 2.1. Geographical Coverage

The study covered samples from **eleven districts** in **seven provinces** of Afghanistan. Table 1 shows the six provincial locations selected for the study. All regions except the south were covered. Initially Kandahar was in the study plan but heavy fighting and insecurity during the period of fieldwork lead to a change of province. Surveyors also visited some CDCs in Sarepul while conducting fieldwork in Jawzjan.

Table 1: *Province Selection for NSP Gender Equity Study*

Province	Reasons for Selection	Location Main Ethnic Group	Level of Security Risk
Parwan	Convenient location – selected after suicide bomber diverted team from Gardez - Previous information from UN Habitat that there were interesting gender dynamics in some CDCs	Centre - Tajik	Low
Daikundi	Remote location Information from OXFAM that many CDCs are headed by women and operate jointly with men	Centre - Hazara	Low
Nangarhar	Tribal influence but long-term influence of international aid organisations in Afghanistan and refugee context due to border location	East - Pushtun	Medium - High
Jawzjan	Information from ZoA about strong female facilitators	North - Uzbek	Medium
Herat	Well-established Afghan NGO as FP	West - Tajik	Low - Medium
Gardez	Strong tribal influence	East - Pushtun	Medium - High
Kandahar	Replaced with Nangarhar since many CDCs and women's committees had been inactive for over a year	South - Pushtun	High

In many provinces communities are mixed but for the sake of brevity the dominant ethnic group has been chosen. As Figure 1 below shows, the main ethnic groups covered were Pushtuns, Tajiks followed by Hazaras and Uzbeks. Communities covered also included Baluch, Turkmen, Arabs, Pashayee and others. Mixed indicates a fair distribution of a number of different ethnic groups. The numbers of men and women interviewed in each ethnic group was roughly the same as the survey team consisted of men and women, sometimes working individually and sometimes as same-sex pairs.

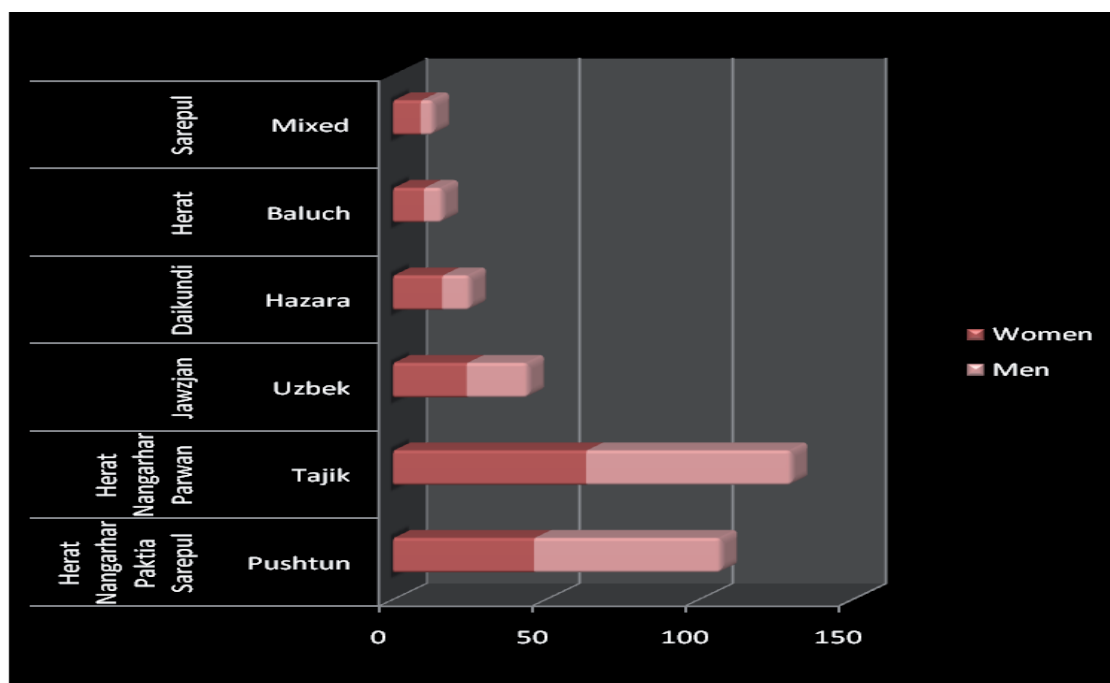


Figure 1 Provincial Spread of Ethnic Groups Covered by NSP Gender Equity Study

## 2.2. Facilitating Partners

A number of FPs were interviewed in Kabul before final selection of field research sites. In the final selection the FPs which hosted the research team were:

- UN HABITAT in Parwan
- OXFAM in Daikundi
- BRAC in Nangarhar
- ZoA in Jawzjan and Sarepul
- CHA in Herat, and
- CARE in Gardez

Apart from ZoA and BRAC all of these organisations have been working in Afghanistan for at least a decade. Most have been partners with NSP from its inception. CHA is the only Afghan NGO in the selection. Every organisation in the selection has some level of commitment to gender equality.

## 2.3. Research Instruments

Most of the research was conducted using semi-structured, open-ended questionnaire checklists and conducted in Dari or Pushtun since the entire team were fluent speakers of one or both languages. The survey team also used focus group interviews. The focus group setting was used not just as a cost-effective and time saving method of interviewing several people at once but also to provide an opportunity for the analysis of focus group interactions and dialogue. The staggered arrival of participants as groups gathered allowed individual and group interviewing in the same context. Interviews were a minimum of one hour long except in cases where interviewees had urgent business or chores to attend to.

Another instrument used was participant observation. The lead researcher's long-term experience in Afghan rural settings, advanced language skills, seeing and hearing people in many different situations of the kind which normally occur for them, as opposed to an isolated interview allowed for a form of participant observation taking advantage of the social context with its wealth of cues and information. This provides "an ever-growing fund of impressions, many of them at subliminal level, which give...an extensive base for the interpretation and analytic use of any particular datum. This wealth of information and impression sensitizes [the researcher] to subtleties which might pass unnoticed, in an interview and forces [her] to raise continually new and different questions, which [she] brings to and tries to answer in succeeding observations."<sup>9</sup> This approach helps overcome resistance to answering certain questions fully and permits exploration of topics considered impolitic, impolite or insensitive. Familiarity with the protocols in women's spaces in Afghanistan allowed the lead researcher to use sense of humour and knowledge of culture to create a sense of safety which in turn allowed us to achieve depth within the short time of interviews.

There are standard responses which are offered as part of the 'duty' which Afghan women and men now have, to deal with evaluators and researchers such as 'we were blind but now we are literate and we can see', 'now we know how to keep our children clean', 'women know their right hand from their left hand', 'women are much better', etc. It is very difficult for ordinary people in any context to step back and objectively analyse the more profound non-tangible impacts of a project but the survey team tenaciously probed to unpack such responses. The lead researcher's fifteen years experience in rural and community development in the Afghan context also brought in a historical perspective which informed discussions and meant that the team was able to quickly move beyond formalities as many interviewees felt they could 'get right down to business'.

## 2.4. The Sample

**438 men and women** from all walks of life were interviewed for this study. 71 sets of interviews were undertaken with CDCs and women's groups attached to them in 43 villages making this one of the larger qualitative studies undertaken on NSP. Within these interviews the team questioned, individually or in groups, 168 women and 165 men who were CDC members or ordinary people from the village. Local mullahs would often join the male focus groups. 38 interviews were undertaken with key informants<sup>10</sup>. 55 male and female staff members from FPs were interviewed in Kabul, in provincial and district level offices. 12 staff members from NSP were also interviewed. Apart from interviews there were numerous interactions with people from the sample categories and staff from other organisations working with NSP, e.g. the World Bank, which have informed this study. The sampling was based on advice from a range of individuals and from previous experience of the research team.

## 2.5. Study Limitations

Security restrictions hampered the research team but not the study. In Gardez the team missed a suicide bomber by minutes and the Taliban on another occasion arrived in a location minutes after the team had left. In Herat, the team arrived at the same time as operations were carried out to remove a powerful commander but luckily the team was not affected. In Daikundi, the team leader was followed around the bazaar by a Talib but once again it was fortunate that this occurred on the last day of the field trip. Sampling was also reliant on time and availability of individuals in communities. This in turn is impacted by the daily chores of rural women, the agricultural calendar and the election campaign in the early part of survey.

No community is homogeneous and where this study is incomplete is in the sample of interviewees which self-selected. In the time available and with security concerns when travelling to most communities it was not possible to ensure that there was a good representation of poor and vulnerable men and women. We also did not focus on specific age groups. Evidently women and men from high risk areas are also not represented here.

9 Becker & Geer (2004)

10 These included female role models in community, religious leaders, tribal leaders, female MPs or provincial councillors, provincial Department of Women's Affairs (DoWA), MRRD and Ministry of Education (MoE) staff, among others. Relevant NGO and UN staff were also interviewed.



**Please Note:**

Although NSP does not recognise men's CDCs and women's CDCs the majority of interviewees referred to them as such. FP staff often discussed 'women's CDCs' and local communities discussed 'women's shuras'. Gender relations in NSP group formation is far from straightforward with men heading women's groups, women running men's CDCs, joint CDCs with men and women and so on. All variations are referred to as 'women's groups' in this report except in reported speech.

### 3. First Impressions – The Impact of NSP

Interviews show that NSP is many things to many people: a platform for service delivery, a programme for building community based governance through representative institutions, a project in which money would be given in exchange for gathering women, a project for the poor, a programme which would give communities any project they wanted, etc. However it is perceived, NSP has definitely impacted the lives of women across Afghanistan in many different ways, either directly or indirectly and to different extents. An unprecedented number of women have been exposed to NSP and the ideas it espouses.

The following are the interesting and exciting changes noted, at times in smaller numbers of communities, changes which mark small but important beginnings to be built on. In Nangarhar, for example, men said that NSP has asked women to gather within a formal government framework for the first time and women now believe that they will be listened to in society. Even though such views came from a limited number of interviewees, it is apparent that the impact of the programme in some areas has been profound. Some women have learnt how to prioritise projects. Some women insisted that before NSP they had less of a say in family and community matters, that now they are more forthcoming and that they can express opinions about what is happening in the community. In another community in Nangarhar men have realised the importance of women and their participation since NSP came – they say that now they are even willing to experiment with giving women a project to see if they can run it. Some men felt that NSP may have encouraged women to feel more confident about participating in political processes such as voting. In Parwan and Daikundi some women are showing good leadership ability within the context of NSP. Below are more comments from interviewees on the impact of NSP.

**Daikundi Women:** “NSP Allows men and women to decide together...It is the first time that women's opinions have been asked about a project in the village...I have been back from Iran since the nineties but no organisation has ever given women a role in shuras before NSP came along.”

**Herat Women:** “People are more aware of government affairs since the NSP came.”

**Parwan Men:** “After NSP and participating in workshops women have learnt things. They get involved in different matters at family and community level. There are families who would not let their women express their opinions for gold but overall it can be said that after setting up the NSP women's shuras forty per cent of the women have changed.”

**Parwan Women:** “NSP has taught women how to judge an activity and see if it makes their lives easier or not and to use possibilities to make life easier for themselves.”

**Parwan Women:** “NSP was the first programme which involved government support and sanction for women to leave their houses and to become active in communities.”

**Parwan Women:** “Women used to talk about family relations at weddings but now they talk about development.”

**Daikundi Women:** “Women used to have uncovered faces and wander around the mountainsides freely, like wild things<sup>11</sup>, but now because of literacy and meetings, they have confidence to say proper things.”

In terms of gender programming, NSP can be said to have won the lottery. What this means is that the scale of the programme has meant contact with thousands of women who have found ways to participate but not always because NSP and FP staff have actively pushed for the inclusion of women. Women's participation in the programme emerges from NSP policy to encourage the inclusion of women, but more importantly community willingness to push women into programmes and the commitment of specific FPs to gender equity. If some FPs were expecting the passive participation of women, for example, they were in for a surprise. A number of active women were looking for an opportunity to take some sort of leadership role and handle funds in the community. NSP unwittingly gave them this opportunity and the FP helped them build a platform. Some women managed to get hundreds of women together when NSP arrived in their community, preparing lists and mobilising people. In other communities, however, women barely received information and thought NSP was yet another way to get sewing machines. Whatever the outcome, a solid first step has been made in some areas and with the right level of commitment, financial and technical inputs the programme can make yet more strides with and for women.

11 These are the exact words used by the interviewee.

### 3.1. Increased Mobility

One of the basic steps in women's participation in programmes such as NSP is mobility and the possibility to leave one's home. This is fundamental step before women meet an organisation and begin to think about participating in activities and setting up a women's group. In most places the consensus seemed to be that involvement in NSP has generally improved mobility for women, giving them somewhere legitimate to go on a regular basis and showing men that women's mobility had a positive impact on their personal growth. Although mobility has improved as a result of NSP in some places it is not an indicator used in planning and for measuring progress.

Progress depends on the level of mobility women had before the start of NSP but there does seem to have been an impact even though it is difficult to build a before and after picture. Figure 2 below shows the % of groups who thought that women could travel beyond the boundaries of the community with or without a *mahram*. Uzbeks have the greatest mobility as attested to by accounts of women going to do business in markets, followed by Hazaras and Tajiks. Not surprisingly Pushtun women had the lowest mobility beyond the village. Women often felt they had more mobility than men would acknowledge, probably because men wanted to show more control and 'manliness'.

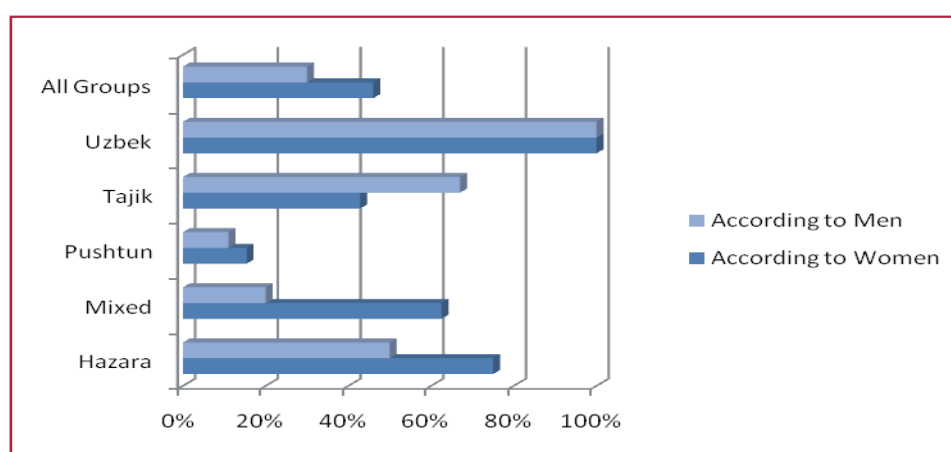


Figure 2: Women Who Can Travel Beyond the Village, Sometimes Without a Mahram

Mobility for women varies across Afghanistan. Men in Herat said that as long as a woman has *hejab*<sup>12</sup> and her behaviour and speech are appropriate then there is no problem for her to leave the house. Women can go on a group outing to Herat with one male *mahram*<sup>13</sup> from the family. In some areas women can go to local and even provincial bazaars, sometimes with children, other women or a mahram. In Jawzjan, some women go to the bazaar to trade so their mobility problems involve lack of affordable transport facilities. In Pushtun areas and even mixed areas influenced by a Pushtun presence, women have to travel with a male *mahram*, except if they are poor in which case communities turn a blind eye as women have to move around to secure a livelihood. Men and some more traditional women explained lack of mobility as a privilege for women, a sign of the esteem in which women are held as everything that women desire is brought to them. In Behsud, Nangarhar, women have a weekly rice pudding picnic which allows them to have an outing. Daikundi is unusual in that women can move freely and women from landowning and powerful families move without *mahrams*, with faces uncovered. Such women can travel all over Daikundi or to other provinces if necessary. Finally, women's mobility is restricted by their level of poverty, where poor women cannot afford transport facilities and the time taken to travel to places on foot.

<sup>12</sup> Appropriate cover for modesty according to Islamic sharia.

<sup>13</sup> Close male relative who is permitted to see a woman.

**Herat Men:** "Greater mobility for women in the village will be very damaging because people here especially men are peasants. If we really cross such boundaries society will become corrupted. Here men and women are both illiterate. They may copy negative actions and as a result both sexes will be corrupted."

**Nangarhar Men:** "Those who let their wives leave the house, well, it is very clear that they are shameless."

**Paktia Men:** "When a woman leaves the house she sees those who are better than her and those who are worse than her."

**Paktia Women:** "If a woman leaves her house a lot men and women will say that she is not respectable because she is out without her husband all the time."

**Paktia Women:** "We cover our faces but inside the village we move freely. But if a woman goes to markets without a man people think it is very bad so women do not go anywhere without a man."

**Parwan Men:** "After we allowed the women's shura to become active people do not make negative comments anymore and if they do nobody pays attention."

**Parwan Men:** "I will give you an example: a female teacher goes to school and teaches girls for which there are no problems. But if a woman goes to Bagram and becomes an interpreter for the Americans nobody can tolerate the matter – her family will be threatened and she may even be killed. This is because our society is not ready to accept such matters."

**Parwan Pushtun Men:** "According to our customs and culture women in our village do not have the right to go anywhere – they do not have the right to work outside the home and they have no access to information but if their information increases it would be good. We are a religious society and we do not have TVs. There are radios which only men are allowed to listen to."

**Parwan Women:** "NSP allowed women to come out of their houses and gather in groups. This has helped a great deal. The more women come out the less people will talk."

**Parwan Pushtun Men:** "Women are free inside the village but outside the village they would become every man's woman, it is against sharia for a woman to go to far places without a mahram and we would not tolerate this dishonourable stain on us and for men to insult us and say 'Look at so-and-so's wife!'"

Women's lack of spatial literacy and transport possibilities limit women's mobility. Men say that women cannot be as successful as they are because they cannot travel at night, or to distant locations and that sharia states that they must travel with a mahram. When women emerge from within the family their narrow focus is broadened to take in issues beyond problems with in-laws and so on. Mobility was an issue which was considered and described as 'constant' rather than variable but it was clear that mobility can be increased. Negotiating greater mobility for women is critical in ensuring their participation in and access to processes. The head of one women's group explained that TV and frequent exposure related to women's rights has raised men's awareness and sensitized them so they give women more mobility. Women themselves increasingly associate greater mobility with varied experience and find that men will listen to women who move around for socially acceptable reasons. In Daikundi men in a distant village selected a woman as leader because she was considered '*shahr dideh*' and '*donya dideh*'<sup>14</sup>. In some areas, professional women such as teachers have greater mobility. Women's mobility improves, even in Pushtun areas, as a result of the possibility to earn an income. Educated men recommended that women get out, receive exposure and experience new activities to improve their capacities and give them new ideas.

### 3.2. Women Gathering for United Action

Much was made throughout the interviews of women being able to gather in groups for the first time or more frequently as a result of NSP and this is indeed a milestone. Clarification is required here as women were gathering in the past but NSP had brought women together with a singular purpose for the first time. Evidently, the efficacy of women's gathering was affected by facilitation from FP staff and the quality of information provided by FPs and community men.

14 She has 'seen town' and 'seen the world'.

**Herat Men:** "After women came back from Iran and shuras have been formed for them they have become more united. They go to the shura and compared to the past they come and go more. They understand more. When they go to the shura they put make up and lipstick on and they say it is because there are other women there and they must look presentable."

**Nangarhar Men:** "When women gather they bring headaches home like they say so and so has china in her house I want some too or so and so's wife had nice clothes I want some too. God has said a woman has half a brain and the more she has contact with the outside world the more stupid she will become."

**Nangarhar Tribal Elder:** "Women used to gather but with NSP it is within a framework and it is official."

**Paktia Women:** "It was only in NSP that women got together and discussed, women did not gather before this and we will not gather after. Every 6 months in NSP women got together and because of this from time to time women may visit other women."

**Paktia Men:** "Custom meant we could not allow the women to have a shura and to participate in projects."

**Parwan Men:** "When my wife used to go to a funeral ceremony, she used to go at lunchtime and stay there for the whole day. But now when there are such ceremonies she goes for five minutes. She even tells the other women: 'Don't be a burden on the poor family who have lost a loved one and have to make an effort to entertain you'. She even says that eating food at a funeral is *haram*<sup>15</sup>. She has learnt all of this from socialising outside the house and attending trainings from organisations."

Figure 3 below shows that among groups interviewed, Uzbeks, Hazaras and Tajiks had the most positive attitudes to women gathering while Pushtuns lagged behind. Many men in non-Pushtun areas have no problems with women gathering in groups if they achieve tangible results and in some cases with NSP, they did. Women discuss a range of issues ranging from violence and inheritance to hygiene and fashion. The result in some places has been that women go to each other's houses occasionally, while in others women say that meeting together has given them unity through improved mutual understanding and bonds of friendship. Men and women noted a sense of greater unity among women.

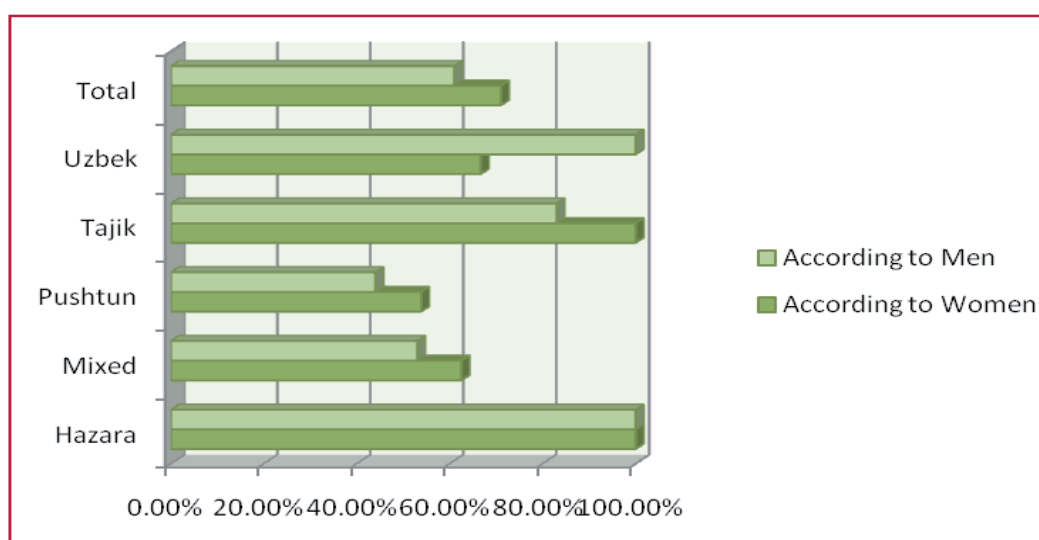


Figure 3: Positive Attitudes to Women Gathering with Purpose

NSP has allowed women, even in Pushtun areas, to be able to gather and to get to know each other albeit briefly in some cases. In some Pushtun areas the shame associated with women gathering was set aside while there was the chance that NSP would bring inputs. Once the NSP project was finished however women were no longer interested to meet and men would not let them. Even in conservative area, however, some small results have been encouraging. Some women explained that men have realised that NSP raises women's awareness on all sorts of issues so men and women are keen for the activities to continue.

Only older women were allowed to attend meetings but the women felt that if activities continued younger women and even adolescent girls might be allowed to participate.

Some CDCs agreed that the NSP training had familiarized women with issues that enabled them to participate more effectively in community life by meeting and discussing. The more educated men saw women as potential partners in the development process while less educated men saw women as capable of gathering but not doing much more. Where NSP FPs work well to integrate women, women's meetings are now considered a normal event, women have awareness of other women in their villages and try to come up with solutions for problems. They communicate and cooperate with the men's CDC to solve problems they cannot solve on their own but numbers are modest.

### 3.3. Control of Community Goods

NSP projects often create community goods as a culmination of the development process. Women may use these goods but feel no sense of ownership. If they are denied access they have no power to argue for their rights and they have little or no say in the maintenance and security of community goods. In short, women may be involved in the NSP process to choose a project and so on but may not have access to and control of the outcome. Where community goods are shared it is men who decide on usage, repair and security issues, unless they believe that the responsibility lies with government. Women have no say and at times no interest.

**Paktia Women:** "When women do not even own their own bodies how can they own community goods? They do not own anything."

**Paktia Women:** "Women do not own community goods but men look after community goods such as water pumps. But men do not look after schools, mosques and clinics or repair them because they say that this is the property of the government so it is not our responsibility."

Perceptions of ownership and control of community goods need further study but this research made a preliminary foray into women's perceived on the issue. Women expressed no sense of ownership and from accounts of what happened after infrastructure was built it is clear that elite appropriation after FP withdrawal is an issue in some areas. In one case in Gardez, elite women forced other women to pay for solar power. In a number of cases after wells were built wealthier people walled them off from the rest of the community.

There are ways to try and ensure that women, especially those from vulnerable categories do not get denied access to community goods. This can be done by forming terms and a contract which is arbitrated by a neutral authority beyond the confines of the community. If there is conflict over usage the individual or body can be applied to for arbitration. In terms of ownership of community goods, there are items which women can control. These include productive equipment such as looms which can be owned and rented from the women's group and used by many households, rather than donated to individuals. Equipment for celebrations such as chairs, plates, etc. can also be owned and rented out by a group of women giving them a form of community good to control and maintain.

## 4. Sex Disaggregated Data and Gender Analytical Information

Every context is 'gendered' in obvious and not so obvious ways. NSP is implemented in a wide array of settings, from rural to peri-urban, from communities with livelihoods based on agriculture to those full of civil servants, from remote communities who have only recently seen vehicles to returnees who have come back to their villages after life in a metropolis. Communities range from those arguing points in the operational manual and asking for computer courses for women to those who consider their women as illiterate and useless. Men are at different places along the continuum from passive indifference to active intervention on gender relations, and different approaches should be adopted for men at earlier and later stages of change. Catering for men and women with such a range of outlooks and expectations requires technical capacity to critically assess starting points and organisational commitment to respond to the situation on the ground with appropriate interventions, back by appropriate policy and programme options.

It is difficult to promote women's involvement in community level decision-making without a clear understanding of existing gender roles, together with male and female community members' perspectives and priorities. Context specific sex disaggregated data and gender analytical information helps us develop a clearer understanding of men's and women's priorities and to determine the baselines we are starting from. This in turn helps use design activities which promote equality in influence, opportunity and benefit. Myriad factors affect the implementation and outcomes of programmes like NSP. In discussing the impact of NSP, for example, educated men saw the benefit of activities for women and saw gains and improvements based on meetings and planning whereas uneducated men had a very negative outlook and wanted women to be engaged in agriculture and livestock activities with an income. Whether and how NSP and FP staff pick up on and respond to such differences determines the outcome of the programme.

A limited number of issues, related to culturally appropriate behaviour, and related good practice were repeatedly flagged up during interviews. These were:

- ➡ appropriate clothing for field staff, usually resembling that worn by locals
- ➡ eating food offered so as not to offend communities,
- ➡ using religious counterarguments with examples from the Prophet's (PBUH) female family members to encourage female participation, and so on.

Information which gives us more in-depth insights into the operational context should lead to actions which are explicit in policy documents and project frameworks, reflected in human resource policies and budgets and monitored and reviewed through appropriate indicators of change at various levels in a programme. The issues mentioned were all found to impact female participation in NSP but more in-depth information is required to build up our knowledge of 'what works'. Beyond such advice, the encyclopaedic knowledge of some social organisers (SOs) of the contexts they live and work in is not being arranged within an analytical framework and integrated into planning and design of interventions, including the development of 'ice-breakers' and useful entry points into communities. In fact, SOs did not volunteer this information until asked which indicates that they may feel it is irrelevant or lacks value. SOs are the business end of NSP and handle the difficult tasks of bringing NSP to the people. Their colleagues in provincial and Kabul offices provide the financial, administrative and logistical back up for them to be able to function effectively but can offer little in-depth insights into NSP in practice.

Another observation is that SOs have high turnover rate in some FPs because of the vagaries of funding which impact some NGOs more than others. One way to keep SOs engaged with NSP and to download their enormous store of information in a coherent manner to be used for lessons learned, baseline data etc. is as part of a long term endeavour linked to an academic establishment such as a diploma study programme. This can also be used as a way to possibly attract more people to work as SOs. Such a programme could involve field work and periods of study both at an institution and through distance learning. In this way, this field of work can be formalised and SOs encouraged to continue in the same field of work while building competence and getting academic kudos for their work.



## 4.1. The Status of Women

Like millions of women all over the world, Afghan women:

- have to work harder than men to secure their livelihoods
- have less control over income and assets
- have a smaller share of opportunities for human development
- are subject to violence and intimidation
- have a subordinate social position, and
- are poorly represented in policy- and decision-making.

We have already seen how women have little or no control over income and assets in most cases. The rest of this report examines some of the other contributors to women's low status mentioned above. Overall, NSP policy makers need to determine what areas of women's low status can realistically be addressed by the programme and to set suitable goals.

**Nangarhar Men:** "Our women are worst than blind. Nothing has changed in their life. If they were literate they could educate their children better, find an income and help their husbands in life."

**Paktia Elder:** "Our women were illiterate from the past and are completely useless to us."

**Paktia Men:** "Our women are illiterate so they are not allowed to discuss anything...Our women are such that if you take them to the bazaar they'll get hit by a car. How can they become powerful?... Mullahs, sharia and learned people all say that women have no brains so we do not share anything with them."

**Parwan Men:** "Women are backward in every respect so any training is good for them."

**Parwan Men:** "Women have a lot of conflict because their thought processes are not properly developed."

**Parwan Pushtun Women:** "My husband tells me not to raise my voice because someone talking to him on the phone might hear me."

The comments above are just some which show that women suffer from a low status all over Afghanistan. In some areas, women are no better than chattels and are inherited and exchanged for different reasons in more conservative and remote communities. In more traditional Pushtun communities, for example, gender expectations of men are that they should provide for their women, monitor them by barring women and girls from many activities, or punish them, at times violently, preserving the virtue of women so that they in turn can preserve their *gheirat* and the family's *namus*. Attending to gender relations and roles means awareness of the indicators of this low status and trying to address them realistically.

One of the most telling indicators of women's status in a community is their ability to have their own name and an independent identity in their own right. In more conservative communities in particular, women identify themselves by their family relations to a well known male. It is considered shameful if people beyond the household and community know their names. This begs the question of whether women enter the development process as individuals or as extensions of their families. One woman in Gardez refused to introduce herself other than Gulab's mother even to the female surveyor. She was adamant that that was enough of an identity marker for her. Male FP staff often discussed how they tried at length using religious arguments to get men in communities to tell them their wives' real names for official records. In short, if women are to be empowered, to participate in their own right and have influence then eventually they and their communities must agree to refer to them by a name or title other than 'mother of x' or 'wife of y'. This is just one area related to women's status where FP and NSP staff need assistance to overcome obstacles.

### 4.1.1. The Impact of Ethnicity

It becomes clear from FP staff and CDC members that different ethnic groups may require different approaches when handling gender relations. Many interviewees described stereotypes of different ethnic groups but systematic analysis of the results showed that there are marked differences in how different ethnic groups address gender relations.



**FP Staff:** "Only one or two CDCs are not mixed. They are on the border with Helmand and have picked up their habits."

**FP Staff:** "In Farsi and Adraskan women take key roles in executive committees. They are outspoken and if they do not like what the men in the CDC are doing they will definitely let us know."

**Herat Religious Leader:** "Pushtuns are much stricter than other ethnic groups and do not let their women get involved in projects.»

**FP Staff on a remote district of Paktia:** "Women said: 'We don't want men to decide about us. We want a shared *shura*'. Women chop wood there and do most of the physical work."

**FP Staff:** "Turkmen people are focused on carpet weaving and do not let their women come out of the house."

The consensus across FPs was that Pushtun and Turkmen areas are the most conservative and problematic areas for programming with women. Information gathered, for instance, shows less mobility (even within villages) for Pushtun women, less active women's groups within NSP, men's ability to withhold information and inputs from women and the lack of strong women leaders involved in NSP. These differences are tied to gender cultures among different ethnic groups which lead to "diversity in the constructions of masculinity and sexuality"<sup>16</sup> (See Section 6.2) and there will be further variations among the ethnic groups according to forms of social differentiation. FP and NSP male staff feeling isolated in insecure and hostile provinces need more support to feel enthusiastic and empowered to support female staff and discuss gender relations with local communities, key actors and government in certain regions.

#### 4.1.2. Women's Existing Roles in the Community

The study found that women have been working on community solidarity for hundreds of years but today sadly some of their roles are gradually dying out as communities modernize. They are finding new roles as teachers, doctors and community representatives. For men, whether in the community, in FPs or in NSP, not pointing out women's existing and important roles at community level is tantamount to reinforcing gender stereotypes about the importance of men and the subordinate and minor role of women. In the context of NSP, highlighting such roles ensures that men understand that women have already had important community roles which they can build on and expand.

**Paktia Women:** "Women's role is only to look after livestock and family life. Women also participate in *ashar*<sup>17</sup>. For both *eids*<sup>18</sup> women clean and paint the mosque and wash the carpets. If someone has a death in the family the women in the village bake bread and send it to their house for three days."

Women have a number of overlooked roles in communities which have traditionally helped glue communities together and strengthen bonds through ritual acts of visiting, preparing food and gifting but these are also taken for granted. Women have responsibility for ensuring that the rules of hospitality are obeyed and this is a critical aspect of Afghan culture ensuring that a household keeps its honour. Usually women's roles are tied to cooking food<sup>19</sup>. Women cook food for weddings, funerals and *khairat* (charity) and gather on such occasions ensuring that the community shares in the *gham* (sad) and *shadi* (joyful) events of an individual household. Women cook food and invite people to sit together and resolve conflicts. Women cook for the sick and go to ask about their health. They cook for women who have just given birth in the community. In some areas one hundred houses will send food to the household of a newlywed. Women's visits retain and strengthen community bonds. Women also contribute to hospitality and village life by producing handicrafts for decorating public rooms used by men to receive visitors within their own households.

Women in many communities have always taken a role in conflict resolution through acts related to *ozrkhahi* or *nanawati*<sup>20</sup> both of which mean asking forgiveness. In some parts of Hazarajat they say *zan*

16 Flood (2005)

17 Communal labour

18 Religious festivals

19 For a more in depth study of such issues see Tapper & Tapper (1986)

20 Nanawati is only used in cases of accidental or 'heat of the moment' deaths and not for premeditated murder in cold blood.

*raheh khun mireh*<sup>21</sup>” which means a woman can be sent to seek forgiveness for an accidental blood crime and the other party cannot refuse. A woman and a *sayed*<sup>22</sup> are generally sent to ask forgiveness for a blood crime in Hazara areas. It is usually older women in most communities who are involved in conflict resolution. Old customs still used in parts of Paktia and Nangarhar involved throwing their *chadors*<sup>23</sup> down to end clan conflicts. These acts could also include sending older women to the grave of someone who was accidentally killed as a sign of penance. They offer a sheep which if accepted means the conflict is over. Another is *daman gereftan* where women go to enemy houses and grab the skirts of men's long shirts. Women throwing scarves down to end conflict is another ritual act to end conflict. In many areas, however, women's traditional and powerful role in conflict resolution has been eroded as a result of the war and the rise of Islamist groups. Women in many areas can still cook food and invite conflicting parties to come and eat together to solve the conflict.

Women have also taken unusual roles in different periods of Afghanistan's turbulent past. In Nangarhar and Parwan, men and women recounted the support which women provided for the Mujahideen by taking enormous risks to cook for them and hide their weapons when they came to villages at night. Some women also took on security issues; a small number of women became commanders under the Communists<sup>24</sup>, continued under the Mujahideen and still hold on to their positions. In many communities stories were recounted of women taking up arms to fight the Taliban and others.

Even if we neglect the important community roles which women have held, women have a profound and fundamental impact on families which are the elementary units of social, cultural and religious life in Afghanistan and by drawing them closer together they influence community cohesiveness. In spite of all this men, within both communities and organisations, almost unanimously report that women have no role at community level especially before programmes such as NSP came along, a statement which highlights men's tendency to overlook or belittle anything and everything that women do. The short section above, however, has provided evidence that we are not starting from zero when it comes to community level role for women and that women have a status and distinct set of roles that we must acknowledge and build on to bring them into the mainstream.

## 4.2. Women's Access to and Control of Productive Assets

Some women interviewed, indicated that NSP gave them more of a say in family affairs and FP staff repeated this assertion. Taken at face value this is a positive result but if changes in decision-making and control of assets for women are used as an indicator of change in the status of women then there have to be some clarifications as to which level of decision-making is affected and how it can be measured. At the same time and in direct contradiction to this apparent result, some FP staff may unconsciously use women's lack of access to and control of productive assets as an indicator that they are generally powerless within communities and that their inclusion in the development process is a box to be ticked programmatically but not critical to real success.

When men and women say that women are involved in decision-making one has to be aware that there are different levels of access and control. Women do not control money. They have traditionally been given the task of hiding money but this does not indicate control. In many places women are in charge of day to day spending. In some areas women control their own income but lack of mobility and access to markets means that they cannot spend that money easily. On one level women are instruments in cultural and day to day processes e.g. deciding which girl their son should marry, deciding what to cook for guests, deciding how to spend money on household expenses and so on. This is definitely better than not being allowed to make such decisions but does not indicate empowerment and agency<sup>25</sup>. That comes when a woman can decide for example not to give her daughter in a *bad*<sup>26</sup> exchange, to send her daughter to school beyond puberty or that she invests money placed in her keeping in a small business endeavour. Currently such decision making is taking place only in a small number of cases.

21 A woman walks the path of blood

22 Descendant of the Prophet

23 Large veil which covers the head and sometimes the entire body

24 Surveyors conducted a full interview with Commander Nazira in Sheberghan, Jawzjan. She commanded 780 men and fought in 20 provinces.

25 “Agents act, and agency is the capability, the power, to be the source and originator of acts; agents are the subjects of action.” (Rapport and Overing 2005) - Rapport, Neil and Joanna Overing (2005) Social and Cultural Anthropology - The Key Concepts, Routledge.

26 Handover of a girl to family of the deceased by the family of the murderer to compensate for a blood crime.

**Herat Men:** "If a guest comes and the husband is not at home then women can spend money to entertain the guests but they must tell their husbands how much they spent."

**Nangarhar Women:** "I was 12 when I was engaged and married at 13. At 14 I gave birth to a daughter and at 17 and 3 months pregnant my husband was killed and I became a widow. My in laws sent me to my brothers' house. When I married my first daughter off my brother said: "Either leave my house or your son-in-law cannot enter this house because he is a stranger to my daughters". I became very upset, my younger brother took me to his house. After a while people told me to get my rights from my older brother and live comfortably, because when you become weak and cannot work your younger brother might throw you out. When I told my brother to give me my right from my father's inheritance because I am a widow and I need it, he insulted me a lot, and said if you mention inheritance again I will disown you. I told him that I would take a request to the government to get my rights. My brother said he would say that they are not related in court. And in front of all the people in the village I told my brother if you disown me as your sister in court I swear to God that I will ask the judge to engage us to be married. My brother hit me and the people of the village were upset with him and got my inheritance rights and now I live alone with my youngest daughter."

**(See Annex 2 for more quotes)**

In some exceptional cases where women do have more control in decision-making and assets there are other factors at play. One of these is land ownership. The most influential people in communities are often landowners since the most valuable productive asset in Afghanistan is land. In many communities, in spite of their rights in Islam, women are denied access to this asset to avoid shame and to protect men's honour and are thus denied a position in community hierarchy. The general custom is for women to give their share of inheritance to their brothers as their husbands were meant to provide for them once they leave their father's house. In Pushtun areas, if a man dies without sons, his brothers will inherit his property including his wife and daughters. Husbands feel ashamed and will be insulted by other men if they allow their wives to accept their inheritance.

Most FP staff, especially males, assumed, based on their own backgrounds, that women did not inherit land thereby negating the possibility that women can have influence in their communities but an analysis of the context, especially interviewing women, provided very different results in different contexts, once again based on gender relations. In a number of communities women do inherit land and manage their own assets. In Sheberghan, Jawzjan some women do own property, often inherited from their fathers. Access to property means that some women can be successful businesswomen. In Daikundi, women referred to as *aghes* can own hundreds of *jeribs* of land and become village leaders as a result. Since the «practical performance of institutions is shaped by the social context within which they operate<sup>27</sup>» it is not surprising that women with very little education are competent leaders in different parts of Daikundi and influence local politics. It is also not surprising that in areas where women can inherit land there tend to be more mixed CDCs and women in positions of leadership than in areas where women do not inherit.

27 Putnam et al. (1994)

## Section 3 & 4 Recommendations:

- Before any intervention which aims to encourage the participation of women a thorough gender analysis of the situation is needed in order to have an accurate, unbiased picture of opportunities and threats. This should be drawn up by the appropriate staff of NSP and FPs and used to develop a plan, indicators and goals.
- NSP and FPs must engage with women's existing roles within the community as starting points for soliciting women's participation.
- One size does not fit all in NSP and the programme management must consider options which allow FPs to handle different communities developing at different rates.
- If women are to be empowered, to participate in their own right and have influence then eventually FPs can suggest that they and their communities must agree to refer to them by a name which indicates their new role in public but does not reveal their private identity. If each CDC for example chooses a flower name then the women in committees or groups can be known as Yassaman One, Yassaman Two, etc. This links women's identities to the public project rather than retaining links to their family roles.
- A diploma study programme based on social organisation skills for NSP would improve access to institutional memory among SOs and provide better access to best practice. This can be done in cooperation with the Ministry of Higher Education and an Afghan university partnered up with an international university.
- FP and NSP male field staff feeling isolated in insecure and hostile provinces need more support to discuss gender relations with local communities, key actors and government.
- Collection of baseline information by monitoring and evaluation units on women's mobility, level of information provided to women's gatherings, the quality of women's gatherings, sense of ownership of community goods, women's access to and control of productive assets, etc. will provide some indicators to measure some aspects of progress in women's involvement in NSP.
- Women should feel a strong sense of access and control in relation to community goods created as a result of the NSP process. This can be facilitated by the FP by setting up formal agreements which can be arbitrated by a third party. NSP policy makers in cooperation with other government bodies must set up the legal framework within which this can happen.
- NSP policy makers need to determine what areas of Afghan women's status can realistically be addressed by the programme and to set goals accordingly.
- If the FP is not providing conflict resolution and/or peace building training it should ensure that the community is receiving such training from potential NGO partners working in the same area.

## 5. Influencing the Development Agenda – Level of Participation

### 5.1. Women's Participation

The NSP Operational Manual notes an emphasis on “the local-governance and capacity building aspects of the programme [rather than]... the potential block grant and subprojects alone”<sup>28</sup>. It is important to focus on other strategic aspects of programming with Afghan women which are tied to the wider development process and governance as well as involvement in projects. This section examines women's overall participation in NSP as well as issues to be considered when supporting women to influence the development agenda. In most communities, women still have some way to go to be involved in decision-making and representative local leadership. Women's participation in CDC consultative decision-making processes was examined through discussions on control of funding, information on budgets and expenditures, communication with men's CDCs, etc.

**Female FP Staff:** “Men refused to allow women to be heads of shuras and equal to men. They said we will not participate in the project and we will ensure that it is not successful. They said if our women become rebellious like you people and answer back at home we will kill them in a second.”

**Female FP Staff:** “Our male social staff always contact powerful people and give all the authority to them.”

**Female FP Staff:** “We are told to allow people to choose who is in the shura – of course they won't choose women!”

**Nangarhar Women:** “There is no shura here. It's a lie. Two women came here and told us to set up a shura. The head of the men's shura Iqbal Safi was with them and my brother-in-law Commander Abdullah and Abdul Zahir the deputy of the shura. They told me you are the head of the shura. They said make yourself a stamp and I did. Then one day they brought eight sewing machines and said find eight women and sew. My two brides, my two daughters and my three sister-in-laws, plus me. When the women came from the NGO we would sit in one room and sew and the rest of the time we sewed in our own homes. They paid me 1800 Afghanis per month as sewing teacher but whenever they felt like it, every two or three months... They did not tell us anything about NSP. The men in the shura never asked our opinion about anything.”

**Paktia Men:** “If democracy reaches the sky we do not want our women to have meetings. Not in the past and not now.”

**Paktia Women:** “In relation to spending the [project] money two women came and said: ‘You must choose a group head and a treasurer’, that was it and we did not understand anything since the women are all illiterate but the men accepted what they said.”

**Paktia Young Men:** “The women have no shura. Men are running their projects. Women are innocent and have no capacity to work on their own. They cannot go to the market, cannot get estimates, and cannot visit projects. Maybe they can do all these things but the culture of this area does not allow it.”

**Parwan Religious Leader:** “If we increase women's presence in society it means that we increase moral corruption and rape in society. Women overstep sharia limitations more quickly so if these women's shuras are placed under Islamic guidance it would be better.”

**Parwan Women:** “At first our husbands really disagreed with our involvement a great deal. But now they cooperate and my husband gives me advice.”

**(See Annex 2 for more quotes)**

This section uses Arnstein's *Ladder of Participation*<sup>29</sup>. As Arnstein explains, “There is a critical difference between going through the empty ritual of participation and having the real power needed to affect the outcome of the process”. A typology of eight levels of participation and non-participation may help in analysis of this issue. For illustrative purposes the eight types are arranged in a ladder pattern with each rung corresponding to the extent of power in determining the end outcome. This typology is limited as the levels are often indistinct and overlap. This ladder can be used to determine the level of participation

<sup>28</sup> NSP Operational Manual (2009)

<sup>29</sup> Arnstein (1969)

in NSP, in this case for women. As Table 2 below shows the different types of participation which women can have in a process such as NSP. To date, the involvement of women in NSP mostly seems to have stalled at the tokenism and non-participation end of the ladder with a small number showing strong female participation. In fact, in a small number of communities (5% of groups interviewed) there had been no mobilization and training of women whatsoever even though records indicated that there ought to be a women's group. Male leaders would gather women and present them to outsiders in order to receive the 'goodies'.

Local men (and sometimes women) often do not want women to participate and sufficient progress has not been made in changing this mostly because staff need more support in finding options for softening resistance. Men in CDCs block communication of information, they control funds and they largely ignore any input which women may want to make. Visiting the bank, purchasing, travelling to the provincial centre etc. are used as reasons why women should not be involved in NSP beyond tokenism. Women may resign from elected posts once they realise that family and community conditions do not allow them to fulfil such roles or they may be forced to resign. They may not even be asked to stand for election in the first place. On a positive note, women should be involved in finding ways to work around power structures dominated by men. UN Habitat staff gave a number of examples from Parwan and Panjshir on how women had worked around male conflicts to ensure not only that they participated but that CDCs did not fall apart.

The scale of the problem within the sample interviewed indicates that FPs, and by extension NSP, appear either to have been ignoring these tendencies or been ignorant of their existence. FPs may not be using effective methods for facilitation and mobilization of women and men or may require more time. There are exceptions where community men assist women to solve problems and to participate. Such communities must be rewarded as a form of encouragement for breaking the mould. Where change has come about as a result of FP facilitation rather than the nature of the community itself the FP should also be rewarded.



Table 2: Ladder of Participation for Women in NSP

Non-participation	Manipulation	Women are gathered by male leaders whenever FP or NSP staff arrive. If challenged they claim that women are not aware or educated enough to actually make an input into decision making. For the purposes of NSP women have 'participated'. Women are not allowed to control funds or even select their own interventions. Such an approach would be common in conservative communities.
	Therapy	Women are gathered as above but instead of being allowed to voice and deal with important issues such as violence against women, women may be given courses to build capacity rather than their life quality e.g. hygiene or bead weaving course. Those who gather women together focus on the therapeutic benefits of gathering in a group rather than what the group actually achieves. Such an approach would be taken by FPs with weak understanding of and commitment to gender mainstreaming. Such groups will exist in conservative areas where women are held in low esteem
Tokenism	Informing	Women are informed of their responsibility to form a group and are informed of their rights to choose their development priorities but men still dominate project selection and control project funding partly because women fail to understand their role.
	Consultation	Women are informed of their responsibility to form a group and are consulted about their choice of development priorities but men still dominate project selection and control project funding. Women's participation is window dressing – they are "participating in participation". This is one of the most common approaches seen during the research.
	Placation	Selected women from the group are allowed on a face to face regular basis with men leaders but mostly to receive instructions and to report whether the women's group has done what they were previously told. The women selected do not feel accountable to the group of women but to the men who have allowed them to emerge as leaders. Men still have the final word on projects and activities. This is another common approach seen during the research.
Empowerment	Partnership	Men and women's groups negotiate and share planning and decision-making responsibilities through such structures as joint policy boards, planning committees and mechanisms for resolving impasses. After the ground rules have been established through some form of give-and-take, they are not subject to unilateral change. There has to be an organized powerbase which shura leaders have to be accountable to.
	Delegated Power	Negotiations between women and public officials can also result in them achieving dominant decision-making authority over a particular plan or program. Women hold enough power to ensure programme accountability to them. To resolve difference, men need to start a bargaining process.
	Citizen Control	Here rhetoric should not be confused with intent. Women should be allowed to demand the degree of power (or control) which guarantees that participants can govern a programme or local resource, being fully in charge of policy and managerial aspects. They should be in a position to choose, implement and manage a project with full control of decision-making and funds.

The question for NSP and FPs to determine and plan for is what level of participation they want to achieve with women and how. Obviously all of these steps are prone to manipulation and domination from opportunistic individuals within the ranks of the vulnerable groups who become gatekeepers themselves. The process of participation is cyclical and iterative and should not be seen simply as women engaging in distinct phases of NSP e.g. project selection or for a set of meetings. FPs and NSP must constantly monitor the quality of participation. Similarly, it is no use simply asking women whether they agree with a decision or not as women will agree with what men have decided in public as part of the cultural expectation that they be obedient to their male relatives.

### 5.1.1. Using Funding for Leverage

Funding can be used as one form of leverage to increase women's participation. If people are encouraged to attend workshops and trainings when they are given a per diem then it is evident that money is a powerful incentive for action. Variations of this form of coercion are seen in Food For Education programmes. Such programmes do not reward individuals and communities for their efforts however and their results are not always sustainable.

**Sarepul DoWA<sup>30</sup>:** "NSP could have forced men to involve women in purchasing by threatening to withhold money. The men would have complied."

At one stage 10% of block grants were earmarked for women although this practice has now been dropped. Some FP staff seemed to think that the allocation still exists and believe that this amount should be increased to improve women's participation. Money is an important motivator. This is seen by the constant discussions about the impact of money e.g. the disappointment when the cash flow is less than perfect, conflicts over project spending, etc. It is completely viable then to reduce funding to communities with no women's participation using funding as leverage, if it is clear that there is no real obstacle to women's participation and men are simply being obstructionist. Evidently, such a move would have to take place in tandem with appropriate workshops to discuss the benefits of women's participation. The funding can be changed when the community finds a modality which will allow women to participate. It may start with women being at the manipulation end of the ladder of participation but it is a start.

Men are not always obstacles to women's empowerment and it is also worth recognising that some men already are playing a positive role. Some men are living already respect and care for the women and girls in their lives, and they reject traditional, sexist norms of manhood. NSP has the possibility to reward communities with such individuals. Evidently women should be the first recipients of any increased funding allocated to women's groups. CDC leaders who show a genuine interest in women's activities and wish to help women's groups participate as partners in the development process should be rewarded with extra funding, maybe in the form of prizes. When a community supports, promotes and protects women's projects, they should also be rewarded for their efforts and open-mindedness with extra funding - the higher the level and quality of women's participation the more the funding.

### 5.1.2. Communication between Men's and Women's Groups

"The FP must ensure that effective means of communication and coordination exist between the male and female representatives, irrespective of what option as presented above is selected by the community."<sup>31</sup> In NSP, men receive information first and it is expected that, together with female SOs, they will convey that information to women. Communication, however, is left very much to communities rather than guided by FPs but assumptions that shuras will communicate through family members of the opposite sex is not always a good one.

<sup>30</sup> Department of Women's Affairs (DoWA)  
<sup>31</sup> NSP Operational Manual (2009)



**Herat Women:** "Men said: 'So what if women don't know about the project? If they don't have meetings' ...The heads of the shura don't even let us talk to them... When women ask what's happening the men say 'It's not women's business.'"

**Jawzjan Men:** "In the first step we expect to build men and women's understanding so we can have joint meetings and to sit with women as in the old days, discuss our situations and engage in joint decision-making about our problems. We have solved this issue to a certain extent and we are working to improve it. Men and women are God's creation and have good opinions about their own situation. We don't know what women's problems are and vice versa but if we think about these problems together naturally we will have better results than if we decide in separate groups."

In some cases, men actively withhold information about the arrival of NSP in the community from women. It is only in cases where there are mobile and inquisitive women who can question the men that they can actually participate. The head of the women's group in Parwan, for example, knew that the NSP FP had come to the village to discuss projects so she went to the men and wanted to know why the women had not heard anything. The men were forced to involve women as a result. She is an example of locally available social capital. Lack of information about what is happening within the men's shura, with community level projects and with project funding keeps women in the dark about NSP and therefore disempowered. Good exchanges are also necessary to decrease hostility between male and female leaders within the CDC structure where they come from different families or factions. Women still get much of their information about village life through eavesdropping, omnipresent children relaying information and gossip. In some places men and women send each other letters to discuss CDC activities. In some areas, men can talk directly to older women. In some communities, the heads of shuras or other officers get together to exchange views directly, especially if they are all members of the same family in a number of cases but information exchange is often one sided with men passing instructions to women.

Figure 4 below shows that men thought that communications with women were good. Women were not so positive. Hazara and Uzbek groups had the best communication between men and women's groups, probably because of women's mobility and less conservatism about men and women sitting together. Pushtun groups, with lowest mobility among women, higher levels of conservatism and greater efforts by men to exclude women led to the worst levels of communication.

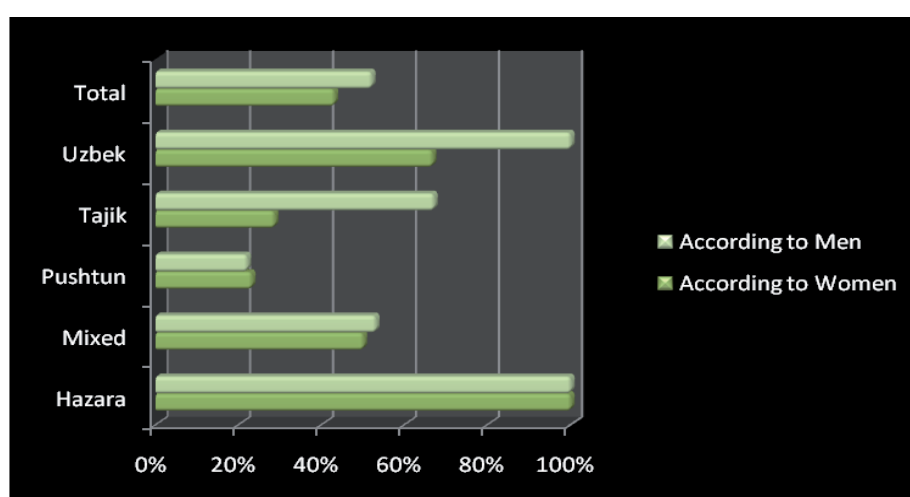


Figure 4: Perceptions of Effective Communication Between Women's Groups and Men's CDCs

Some men's CDCs only communicate with the women's groups until the stage when women select their project after which they lose interest. Good two-way communication is critical between men's and women's shuras. The FP also sets an example for communities in how they handle communication between the sexes. Female staff may be deterred from interacting with community males even though some contexts are permissive and female SOs are staff conducting their professional duties. In some places e.g. Paktia, it is clear that this would not be acceptable but in other places female SOs who know men and women in communities achieve better results. In cases where female SOs were encouraged to liaise with males in

CDCs the impact of NSP activities with women was better because men saw that communication between men and women is not limited to what happens within the CDCs. Men saw the female SOs as good role models and processes with women became more transparent.

Men dominate the public sphere while women dominate the private sphere but there are overlaps. Some men's CDCs have suggested men and women sitting together for shuras but others opposed this. Since in any community men and women are mostly related they interact a great deal and this should be captured in NSP group dynamics. In Kohsan, Herat men said that women can talk freely to male relatives and to neighbours – i.e. people who are well known to them in the community. Also, if women are already sitting with men to resolve conflicts and discuss community issues then they can be used for strategic communication between the men's and women's groups. FPs need to produce much more structured guidelines on communication between men and women's shuras. Good quality, two-way communication between men's and women's groups can be used as an indicator to monitor gender relations.

### 5.1.3. Control of Decision-Making and Project Funds

Women have a smaller share of opportunities for human development often because control of decision-making and access together with control of funds which impacts women's gender equitable access to a development process is beyond their reach. The quotes below show how women are blocked at many different levels from having access to project funding and deciding how it is spent within NSP. Almost all women's groups interviewed reported some sort of difficulty in accessing and managing project funds.

**Female FP Staff:** "In one village MRRD had given money for a livestock projects for the women. The men in the shura took the money in the name of the women but the women found these men and took their money back by force so they could implement their project."

**Female FP Staff:** "Our bosses told us to tell the people in the village not to take women to the bank with themselves."

**Herat Women:** "Women didn't trust each other for doing the project shopping and also they can't count."

**Herat Women:** "Women gave their opinion but since the money from the shura came in one block men spent it."

**Jawzjan Women:** "If a project is for women men should not be allowed to get involved at all."

**Nagarhar Women:** "We heard that they give money for the project but we don't know how much. My sister-in-law was introduced as treasurer and she gave them her thumb print at home. My brother-in-law took the paper and withdrew the money from the bank and spent it."

**Nangarhar DoWA Staff:** "In many cases we know from our staff that men never gave the money to women and said that it was stolen from them when they were coming from the bank."

**Nangarhar Men:** "Women have become very brave now and even ask about what the next project is."

**Nangarhar Women:** "There were no widows or disabled women in the sewing course because the men bought us 30 sewing machines and I gave them to my sister-in-laws, daughter-in-laws and nieces. They were very bad sewing machines and when I asked my brother-in-law why he bought such lousy machines he said the NSP staff<sup>32</sup> had spoken to the shopkeeper and told him which type to buy."

**Nangarhar Women:** "People in the bank in Jalalabad know that it is bad for women to go to the bank so they will hand over the money without women signatories being present."

**Paktia Men:** "Women's projects are introduced in the mosque and only implemented if men agree."

**Parwan Women:** "Women decide quickly over their own issues but over community issues they take a long time because they fear violence from the community."

Women do not have unencumbered access to any part of the NSP block grant, even if part of it is earmarked for them. Men will say that they decided together with women how to spend the money but this is misleading. When men are involved they are often dictators not partners. In most cases treasurers are male and they control funding for women's projects, not always being cooperative with the women they have been elected to serve. In some cases male treasurers end up running the women's shuras. This opens the door to accusations of corruption and arguments. They often do the purchasing for women's

32 I am assuming this means the FP staff

projects. In Sheberghan women are more used to business transactions and do the purchasing themselves. Men will say that under current security conditions it is difficult for women to transport the money from the bank and keep it safe but in the same interview they will also state that women look after money at home, better than banks and that they handle the money for large occasions such as weddings for which they do all the purchasing. They may even add that women go to the market and shop economically because they haggle better.

In spite of fear of the consequences and open threats in some cases, women were interested to take over project funds and processes in a number of groups across Afghanistan but the men in their communities prevented them and in a number of cases FPs thought it too risky to allow women to try, even though male staff admit that women spend money more honestly. Evidently men do not want women to control project funds as this would certainly shift the balance of power and affect gender relations. In one area the head of the women's group said that men should control the project money because it was bad for a woman to go to the bank. In many areas, especially the Pushtun ones, women had no clue how much money was allocated for women's activities. The men made all the decisions for women and spent the money. Even the FP female staff did not inform women of the financial arrangements. When a women's group in Parwan wanted to sell their sewing machines to spend money on another project, the men told them that the women have no right to do that. In another village men bought sickly animals for the women at low cost and they soon died. Female SOs in Parwan also recounted the story of how men stole the money allocated for a livestock project and how the head of the women's subcommittee turned up in the rain with a soaking wet *burqa* to claim the money back for the women's group. Some women may argue that a man should be involved in their groups like the women who selected a male leader in Parwan because they did not want to come to the FP's office and said it was their right to have a male leader. Such practices should be phased out as soon as women feel confident enough.

If men value the activities of women and are keen to see them advance then they manage their money well but this seems to be rare. The head of one women's group in Parwan got the men to deliver the funds to her so she could take widows to the animal market so that they could select their own animals. In one case in Sheberghan, women go to the bank themselves for the project money but they had to go to the FP's office on numerous occasions for certain pieces of paper which was a nuisance for them. Regular travel to an office is easier for men as they do not have to care for the basic every day needs of the family. In another case, a male treasurer was selected for a women's group even though the group wanted a woman and female FP staff tried to argue the case with the men that women should be allowed to control their own funding. In Sheberghan, women made sure they were part of the oversight committee which looked after the project funding. Women were all aware of the spending and NSP money.

Where competent women choose and run projects without interference from men they are generally more successful than those projects where men bully women into choosing something inappropriate. Women would like to choose projects and are usually committed to make them succeed once selected but it was clear that their choices were often heavily influenced by men. Women fear the consequences from men in some cases and in other cases are actively threatened by men. Although elsewhere in this report we argue against separate men's and women's projects as an endpoint, it is clear that in the initial phases when community women are less familiar with the concept of choosing and managing projects, processes should be kept separate while they build up confidence. Giving women the opportunity to handle small projects gives them greater confidence to become involved in the mainstream development process as their experience grows.

#### 5.1.4. Sustainability

**Daikundi Women:** "I collected information about women's problems and went to Kabul to Ehsan Zia to get something for the poor but the office of disaster preparedness here will not let me access assistance even though I have a letter from the minister. They are corrupt. The offices here are run by people who are not from Daikundi...There are a lot of poor women who turn up at MRRD for help here. Different sections of RRD should ask NSP CDCs to participate in their programmes but they don't. MRRD has never asked CDCs for their opinions."

**Daikundi Women:** "Who dares to ask NGOs for projects?"

**Paktia Women:** "NSP is finished and no more sewing machines are coming."

"In addition to the above-mentioned formal trainings, FPs are mandated to promote linkages between the CDCs and governmental and development actors in the area. The capacity of the CDCs must be built on how to establish such linkages and how to utilize them for other development initiatives in their respective communities."<sup>33</sup> Such linkages must be created as gender-sensitive partnerships between community representatives and local authorities, involving for example, support and training for community representatives to negotiate effectively for gender-sensitive services. It also includes providing gender awareness and analysis skills to local government staff, and providing information to marginalized groups about government obligations to provide service and resources. Women often feel powerless in relation to proactively sustaining momentum and continuing activities after NSP ends. Linkages to district and provincial level shuras lead by women are weak and such bodies cannot provide support. Often women heading those shuras have no accountability to the women they are meant to represent and serve. Communications are top down and they need to be mentored to link up with women's groups within CDCs for a more symbiotic relationship.

In Pushtun areas since men must appear to control most aspects of life women cannot demonstrate independent agency. As a result women's groups are not sustainable at present. In Jawzjan, Daikundi, Herat and Parwan, in some villages, women said that they would try to continue their work even without assistance from NSP but were unclear as to how they would do this. In Herat men said women are more enthusiastic to get projects than men are and try harder for them. In some places women do continue the practice of getting together and deciding how to address problems, even when they think the CDC and women's group is finished because the project component has ended. Lack of resources makes it difficult for them to put future plans into action. In order for CDCs and women's groups to continue functioning long after NSP has moved on, the level of commitment of the FP to promoting sustainability as well as the financial capability to support staff and CDCs to stay in touch for a period beyond the project timeframe are both critical. Some FPs felt that neither NSP nor MRRD were interested to make the quality of input needed to ensure CDC sustainability. Some SOs would unwittingly join interviewees in describing how corrupt and useless local government officials were which does not help.

Additionally, women need a great deal more assistance to overcome resistance, get out and make strategic linkages. Even if women get permission to leave their village and head somewhere to solicit funding, there is the cost of transport to be considered. Men will only invest money in a woman to seek project funding if she has demonstrated the ability to get results otherwise it is too risky. There is also the issue of training counterparts. Those women in community groups who are making sure that they train younger women and take them for exposure trips so they learn the basics of leadership should be supported. Then there is the difficulty for women to succeed in an environment where there are so many bureaucratic hurdles before a project proposal is accepted, provided women can write one. There are also the bribes and gatekeepers to negotiate. Some men actually commented on how complicated the documentation for NSP is and how it is even difficult for educated men to deal with it at times.

There are women who are overcoming all the barriers and succeeding but the numbers are relatively low. Daikundi and Parwan were the only provinces where women leaders and in particular those from refugee and activist backgrounds had been able to attract funding from other organisations. This was because they had made themselves known to those in ministries and travelled frequently which meant spending money from their own pockets in a number of cases. The FP had been very helpful in putting women in touch with organisations but more activity is needed in this area. One woman had registered her group as a social organisation and had shown a great deal of initiative in contacting organisations to attract funding. She said this had encouraged other women to set up small organisations. In both provinces there were women who realised that NSP provided a legally sanctioned platform from which women could operate as a group, an extremely useful and empowering insight which must be made patently clear to all women's groups operating under the NSP umbrella.

### 5.1.5. Men's Projects versus Women's Projects

In order to involve women in NSP 10% of block grants were allocated to what were called 'women's projects' but this policy was abandoned<sup>34</sup>. Men consistently report that 'men's projects' are better than 'women's projects' because both men and women benefit from them. This reflects a rather artificial division where projects are allocated to specific sexes – a 'genderization' of sub-projects as one interviewee called it. Although women need insulation from male domination in order to gain experience in participating in the development process, they must eventually cooperate with men. Segregating projects by sex also acts as a disincentive for men to allow women to participate in the development process, especially where women's projects are perceived to have 'failed'. Only one men's CDC said that the women's group had achieved a great deal in a short time. Overall, inclusion in the NSP process does not appear to have impacted the esteem in which men hold women<sup>35</sup>.

**Nangarhar Women:** "At first we chose solar electricity but the FP told us it was too expensive and we didn't have enough money for it."

**Nangarhar Women:** "At first we used to tell the men about what we had decided and every time the FP NSP staff would tell us don't interfere in other matters. Just ask for sewing machines and focus on your own work. We saw that there is taking and eating (i.e. corruption) so we said bring our sewing machines and lots of young girls have learnt and the course is continuing."

**Parwan Religious Leader:** "In the women's project we bought calves for them so they could raise them and use the dairy produce and sell the remainder in the bazaar. But the men gave the calves to their relatives and the project failed."

There is an assumption that men have the best information and that they can plan well for everyone while women cannot but there are plenty of projects chosen, planned and implemented by men which have failed. Prioritisation is also unsuccessful. In Kohsan for example, men explained in one area that there are floods every year. In fact floods had swept away the women's sewing project funded by NSP but effective flood control was not part of the priority list. Although it is often claimed that men can speak on women's behalf, it is clear that they are not analysts or infallible in designing projects and their socialization makes them blind to gender roles, relations etc. As a result, they can never be a good substitute for women and claim that they can make selections or act on their behalf. Below is an interesting example, from many, of erroneous thought processes reported by a surveyor about a prominent village leader in a district of Paktia:

"Haji Saheb, the husband of the head of the women's group in Village A, said that he wants to build a school in the village so that all the girls can study to become doctors, teachers, engineers and so on. He said they also need a clinic in the village, so the next time he is in India he would take two of the women who live on the street, since they are all doctors in India, marry them so that they would have shelter and ensure that his village will have access to healthcare. He will also have performed a charitable act by putting a roof over the women's heads."

If this is the type of logic with which men plan then it is nothing less than irresponsible for FPs to assume that such men understand what is going on and allow them to handle funds and plan women's activities for them.

<sup>34</sup> In spite of this, the following quotes show that there is still confusion:

FP Staff field at HQ and in the field mentioned in more than one interview that only 10-15% of funds was to be allocated to activities with women. MRRD Staff mentioned that only 10% of the budget was to be spent in the interest of females in NSP. NSP field staff also mentioned the 10% allocation for women.

<sup>35</sup> Numerous interview comments have been listed in various sections of this report which directly or indirectly attest to this lack of esteem.



Segregated groups often lead to men only being involved in project design, to save time and money. When designing any project the important point to take into consideration is that men and women's perceptions, mobility and usage of the same resources differ because of their gender roles – in other words gender equitable user friendliness, something which engineers often seem to forget. For many years, for example, some organisations have been asking women to help select the sites for infrastructure such as wells since they are the main users in most communities. In Paktia, to save women from grinding wheat by hand at home the CDC selected a water mill. After the mill was built, women asked the men to install a turbine so they could generate electricity as well but there was no money left to do this. Also the impact of different infrastructure will vary on men and women. Often projects impact women most so it makes sense to involve them in project design. An example is water supply in Paktia where women in one area showed how they had completely lost their hair from carrying heavy containers on their heads so it was critical for them to have water points in the right places. All projects such as community halls, baths, drinking water supply, electricity, roads and mills can have very positive impacts on the lives of women provided they are also consulted on location, usage, some design aspects and affordability, and most critically if they have access to the end result.

Even when women head CDCs, however, the choice of project is what is best for the community e.g. improving the road in a village in Daikundi so that people could get their almonds to market or for lowering the price of transport and commodities. There are evidently differences between men and women's choices for projects based on their experiences. Women for example may be more prone to accept projects where goods are distributed to every household e.g. solar panels, while men prefer projects which involve shared public goods because they have no mobility or hejab restrictions. This 'genderization' loses sight of the overall goal of a development process and helping women participate in that process. Such an approach helps perpetuate gender segregation in NSP. The lesson learned should be that wise and experienced individuals can make good choices for the community, be they male or female.

Interestingly men would say in interviews with male surveyors that a project for women had failed, was inactive or had had no results whereas the women would be discussing with the female surveyor that the project had gone well. Men would use phrases such as 'it is crippled now', 'it led to nothing' and so on. Men and at times women explained failure as lack of a sustainable outcome, intervention not being long enough, having too few beneficiaries, not always transferring skills effectively, not generating an income, etc. Often, men decide and suggest what women should do. Women are put in a difficult situation where they cannot reject what has been said because their men would lose face in front of FP staff.

In an example from Parwan, men said that the women asked for a bakery which had failed while their road and culvert project was successful. They said that baking bread was indeed a heavy task which made women suffer because of lighting up a fire for the bread oven and so on. But in winter the oven has to be lit to warm the house and cook food so the demand for bread from the bakery dropped. The location chosen for the bakery was also quite far and people could not or would not go when it became dark. The men were running the financial and administration aspects of the bakery. Later it transpired during the interview that a local commander set the price for bread at this bakery and that it was considered too expensive by people. It would seem that interference from men who wanted to control the financial aspects of the project had led to complications and at several points in project design women's habits and people's opinion had not been checked.

There was a very interesting case of this, once again in Parwan. Men were convinced that all the projects handed over to women had failed. The woman in charge of these projects was competent and described the outcomes of the projects to the women in the team. What made it clear that the men were lying in this case was that the woman in question had been selected by many communities as the head of the district level cluster of seventy-four villages, hardly possible if she could not manage a livestock project. Allocating different activities to the sexes allows men to consistently hide any achievement which women have had and to thwart their progress, mostly so that they can discard the bothersome 'women's participation' clause in the process and continue to control all project funds themselves. Where organisations consistently send men to talk to men and report back on progress, they do not hear women's side of the story and may collude with this gender inequitable way of assessing women's achievements.

The perceived failure of women's activities in particular has another consequence since community men feel that it is an achievement in itself to gather women and get them to agree with each other. When the women's project does not live up to expectations there is less incentive to gather women again.

Communities are discouraged by what they perceive as endless broken promises especially in relation to activities with women. This can only be blamed on projects which by design can only be small and people's own lack of realism, believing that sewing machines or carpet looms, for example, will solve their economic problems. In some areas men talked of bad propaganda from 'enemies' which together with promises of assistance but no actual delivery have damaged women's interest in programmes. The enemy says to women: «They just want to open your eyes and make you shameless» rather than actually help. Distribution of sewing machines and other equipment at the end of projects has also led to conflict<sup>36</sup> which men then have to solve, adding to their impression that involving women creates problems.

In spite of a focus on process and capacity building, NSP as it is implemented, is focused on projects and success which can be measured quantifiably. Communities somehow expect women's groups to succeed in managing a project straightaway with their first attempt at project design and supervision, having been provided this opportunity by NSP for the first time. Everyone in the community seems to assume that women will fail and once they make a mistake or have a conflict the entire process is written off. Somehow, we forget that men have had hundreds of years to hone their leadership and management skills and that if it is a process then women have been invited in for the first time. This does not excuse women's mistakes and shoddy project design whether from communities, FPs or NSP.

Gender segregation of projects may lead to men trying to sabotage and control women's projects so that they can retain control of project funding. It leads to gender stereotyping i.e. sewing for women, irrigation for men. Gender segregation does not lead to team building between men and women and does not always improve gender relations. In fact, even though women are 'given' a project, often as passive recipients, such moves do not lead to gender equity as women are excluded from the community level development process. Furthermore, women's projects ghettoize women, which may be acceptable if a women's group suffers from lack of confidence and wishes to operate separately from the men in the community initially, but not where women wish to negotiate with men.

## 5.2. Mobilizing and reaching women

One of the main reasons cited for not involving women in NSP was lack of effective outreach to women. This was due to lack of female staff, conservative attitudes in an area, perceived insecurity, etc. – all factors which are discussed in various parts of this report. It was found that not all FPs invest the same time and effort in reaching women. FP head office may be keen but field staff may be quietly keen to jettison gender and in some cases show low perseverance in outreach to women. In one case the person in charge of NSP said he had no idea about women's involvement saying "We have a gender department – they deal with that". This was clearly not the case as the gender department had no field representation and was there in an advisory capacity to other departments in the organisation. In some NGOs, interviews with FP HQ staff revealed one attitude whereas policy in the field as revealed through interviews, activities and comments showed the complete opposite. This is clearly policy evaporation as we move towards the field and the only way to handle it is regular, effective monitoring within the FP.

There was only one case where men and women in the field office showed as much commitment and interest to gender issues and outreach to women as head office did. Low commitment to gender reveals itself in treatment of female staff. In some organisations, female staff may be allowed to operate but not to 'get out of hand'. They are usually the first to be dismissed once project funding runs out. Finally, commitment to gender issues must clearly be communicated and demonstrated from NSP staff at all levels. NSP provincial staff must regularly highlight the commitment to gender in regular interactions with FP field staff, discussing indicators, goals, successes, obstacles and seeking solutions.

36 A number of these cases were described in Nangarhar and Paktia



### 5.2.1. Building Women's Confidence

**Herat Men:** "If you dump women in Islam Qala<sup>37</sup> they could not find their way home...Their knowledge of most things is zero."

**Herat Men:** "We would like women to form sport teams like in Iran but then we look at our women and see that they can't even walk straight let alone do sports."

**Herat Men:** "Women are *nages-ul-aql*<sup>38</sup>. If women were smart why aren't they presidents. Women's brains don't work in many different situations. See for instance that Islam has put divorce in the hands of men. If it was in women's hands maybe we would see thousands of divorces a day."

**Herat Men:** "Women are very sensitive and can be lead astray very easily."

**Herat Women:** "We need a lot of encouragement because we have always been beaten down. My mother always said that girls shouldn't talk but only listen."

**Nangarhar Men:** "It will take a very long time for women to express their views and get things done by themselves."

**NSP HQ Female Staff:** "Women in rural areas are very illiterate - an illiterate woman can't decide or even tell us anything."

**Sarepul DoWA:** "[FP] staff do not build women's confidence and only talk with men."

Women will not mobilize if they do not feel confidence and support. In order to promote women's active role in decision-making at community level the quality as well as quantity of women's participation in committees and processes needs to be monitored and improved. Where women are not used to assuming positions of authority, considerable groundwork is needed to help them develop the self-confidence and assertiveness skills they need to deal with village authorities.

Afghan women are very much used to being told what to do by family and society. More accurately they are used to being told what not to do and warned of the dire consequences of their actions, often with violent punishments. Men revealed in their interviews that they believe women to be naive like children. They need to be heavily controlled, guided and kept away from potentially harmful external influence. In most places men said that information of a sad or shocking nature was withheld from women because they could not handle it and would be upset indicating that women were too weak to handle such upset.

Many men give women a very hard time for being non-literate, berate them and psychologically make them feel inferior at every opportunity. It is difficult for women to break out of their stereotypes without a great deal of support to make them start thinking positively about themselves. There is a well-established discourse which associates men with progress and modernity while women are linked to the traditional and backward. This discourse makes men agents of positive change and women passive repositories of culture. Such discourses have to be examined and challenged. Another step is to make communities see women as social capital because of their skills and experience. This has to come through not only in programming but also in interactions with women in communities, both from FPs, NSP and beyond.

Recently the Minister of Rural Rehabilitation visited Kohsan district in Herat to inaugurate some projects. Many women had also gathered but nobody paid any attention to them. The meetings and speeches were for the men and the 'men's' project was inaugurated. This sends a powerful message about the importance of women and their activities to the men in the community, in FPs, in NSP and in MRRD. There were women who could have met face to face with the minister and for those who could not, there could have been a separate meeting with the woman present in the minister's entourage. If time, money and effort is being spent to include women, then unless a nod to gender is just a donor hoop to jump through, oversights like this can be very damaging.

<sup>37</sup> Nearest town in Kohsan district, Herat province.

<sup>38</sup> Imperfect mental faculties.

### 5.2.2. Using the Media

**Herat Men:** "Women can talk about anything they like when they get together. Now they complain about us men that we do not buy them TVs. A few days ago a woman who is the wife of a friend of mine asked me to tell her husband to buy her a satellite dish."

**Herat Men:** "Women even know about politics. They tell us who to vote for and had agreed amongst themselves who to vote for"

**Herat Women:** "We are no longer frightened of government officials. We saw the district governor on TV. He is human like us»

**Nangarhar Men:** "Yesterday I heard one woman saying to another woman: 'Don't go to Kabul because the road is closed. The Taliban have come out in Tangi'. I didn't know that myself."

**Parwan Government Staff:** "Our media companies spread moral corruption in every field, with negative output and faulty advertising. They should be seriously controlled by their bosses. Today women's presence in every field is obvious and open but it does not have appropriate guidance and appears in a morally corrupt form in society and for the masses. This in itself creates a stronger footing for the enemy."

**Parwan Women:** "TV has educated people about women's rights so they do not show a big reaction if women want to leave the house."

**Sarepul Men:** "If there is no TV at night the women start screaming at us and telling us to get the TV fixed."

When the head of a women's group in Paktia said that democracy meant men had to accept what women said she was asked to explain democracy. She said: "Democracy means doing whatever you want." People need constant and unrelenting exposure to new concepts before they understand and become familiar with them. Media provides a cheap and efficient way to achieve this constant exposure and NSP can make advances by utilising the media to reach and educate women and men on the basic concepts of NSP. This will also accelerate outreach to women who are sometimes the last to hear about development projects in a community.

In many areas if men think that their womenfolk should not be involved in a project they will not tell them about it. They monopolise information coming into the house. Women may access such information through gossip but only if they are allowed to leave the house and talk to neighbours. Radio was always a powerful medium for outreach to rural Afghans but now TV is entering more and more living rooms even in remote areas. In Herat the men blame TV for making women brazen. They try to control which TV programmes women can watch. The positive aspects they described were that women have access to TV and radio all day long and sometimes when men come home women tell them about the news that was shown on TV. What is clear is that the media can play a critical role and that NSP is underutilizing it to reach women and men where FPs cannot.

TV and radio, where available, make a profound impression on women, especially where they deal with issues which women face and can relate to e.g. maternal mortality or conflict between mother-in-law and bride. Media outreach can help NSP prepare communities long before FPs get there, by introducing the basic concepts of NSP, either directly or in the form of a drama. TV and radio can broadcast what NSP does, showcase successful communities and explain the benefits of NSP. Broadcasts can take the form of public service broadcasts, mini-series or documentaries. They should be targeted at specific groups and aired at times when those target audiences will be watching TV.

### 5.2.3. Education and Adult Literacy

Educated women and men are social capital<sup>39</sup> and their presence affects NSP implementation in communities. As such NSP needs to collaborate with the MoE to ensure that there is a steady supply of high school graduates in areas where NSP expects to work with women in future. CDCs can soften community positions on girls receiving higher education and the MoE can ensure that communities who are enthusiastic and supportive receive assistance to educate their girls.

**Daikundi Men:** "Female teachers do not want to come to Daikundi and male teachers want a high salary and are not acceptable to people with daughters. Education is a key factor for development and progress but we feel that we are denied it because the government does not want to help Hazaras."

**Daikundi Men:** "The new girls' school in our village is our pride and joy."

**Daikundi Women:** "My father didn't want me to study because he thought I would become shameless but now he is proud - he didn't know where education would lead me<sup>40</sup>. My husband is happy that I can provide a service to the people."

**Daikundi Women:** "The poor will stay in poverty because they can't afford education and to better themselves."

**Herat Men:** "I argued with a Talib and asked: 'Is it better that a man vaccinates your wife or a woman?' He said women should be in contact with women not men. I asked: 'So why don't you let girls get an education?' He said if women become literate and come and go outside the house they will become shameless and society will become corrupt."

**Herat Men:** "In the past I had power over my wife and she never questioned anything I said but now my daughter has decided herself that she will go to school and she says: 'Dad, you don't understand, studying has a lot of benefits and all the girls in the village go so why can't I?'"

**Herat Men:** "You cannot make anything of a illiterate woman."

**Jawzjan Women:** "When I married, I left town and came to this village. When I came here my husband did not let me continue my teacher's profession. But when we went to Iran he realised that a literate person is very useful and when we came back he himself requested that I become a teacher."

**Parwan Men:** "Some time before, some enemies broadcast night letters saying there should be no girls' school here. The men and women's shuras together decided to take on the duty to find the culprits. We decided that we would defend the school in case anyone from our village or another decided to attack it. We started guarding it but thank God so far nothing has happened."

**Sarepul Religious Leader:** "Girls are only allowed to study up to class six and I tried to get high school permit from MoE to go to class twelve but they have not been helpful."

**(See Annex 2 for more quotes)**

Education gives women access to many opportunities and benefits which need not be listed here. It is clear that people now prioritise education for girls and that within the household women push for it because they know that it can change a woman's status. School girls in Daikundi are referred to as *maktabis* and seem to have greater freedom than their peers. Educated women married to non-literate men can end up advising their husbands and taking major household decisions, although some non-literate men can feel threatened. Educated young men in some provinces want educated wives. Education makes it easier for women and girls to participate in programmes such as NSP from which they are excluded based on men's notions that they are stupid because they are not literate.

Adult literacy is an important confidence building measure and should be a critical part of setting up women's groups. In some villages in Kohsan, the men were keen on adult literacy for their women and had allocated rooms but no organisations had been willing to help them. Many women's groups have adult literacy but the level of sustainability varies. There seem to be two kinds of adult literacy classes – those set up as an alternative to high schools where girls cannot attend and adult literacy for much older women.

<sup>39</sup> Not everyone sees educated girls as an asset. In communities where child labour is critical for family survival girls will only be sent to school if there is food for education otherwise girls are married off at an early age. Many families, communities and local authorities still see more of a future in educating boys rather than girls and have unwritten policies of deterring girls from education. In a number of provinces, head teachers and other local figures had tried to push for girls' higher education and had been deterred by provincial and district level officials both from the Ministry of Interior and the MoE.

<sup>40</sup> She is the head of one of the mixed CDCs in Shahrstan

Men see their shuras as replete with educated people whereas in many villages they complain that there is barely a literate woman in the village. In our survey we found the level of education in men's CDCs and women's groups was roughly on the same level. Many male CDC members are non- or barely literate. A number of women showed great leadership skills with little or no education and a number of educated girls who were placed in women's groups as leaders fell short of the task because they lacked experience. It is more probable that by 'educated' people mean experienced and aware of their community context. This distinction should be noted. This does not gainsay the need for education and the important role that educated women will play in community leadership in the coming generations. What is clear is that 'literacy' components for older women should include information on how to deal with scenarios they will encounter in the outside world rather than a simple case of learning to read and write.

There is a critical shortage of facilities for higher education for girls, especially arrangements that would make parents happy to allow girls to continue education. In Jawzjan, some wealthy families have sent daughters as far as Turkey and India to get higher education. In Nangarhar, boys and girls walk one hour to the nearest school. In Kohsan, Herat, men and women are keen for girls to study up to class 12 but there are no female teachers and although they have applied to ministries and offered to pay salaries they have not found women willing to move there: "The fundamental problem is that the violence of the past decades has left most of our women illiterate and before the war we did not let them study so now where are we going to find teachers?" More communities are realising that by denying education to girls they are entering a vicious circle of not having women to serve as teachers, health staff and so on within their own communities. This applies to the rural development sector, NSP and community leadership as well.

Some communities are engaged in activities which should be replicated. In Herat there is community policing, for example, when girls finish school and there groups of them going home. The police are also not allowed to bother girls going home from school and in Gawhar Shad recently the men had had problems with the police over this. The district governor defended them and police backed off. Such a model would be extremely useful where communities explain that girls are not allowed to go to school because young men might harass them verbally or otherwise while travelling to and from school.

### 5.3. Building A Women's Group

In NSP men head women's groups<sup>41</sup>, women run men's CDCs, there are joint CDCs with men and women and so on. Nowhere can gender relations and village hierarchies in action be seen more clearly than in the selection of women leaders and in the formation of women's groups. Men interfere a great deal in women's groups, directly or indirectly, and prominent families can ensure that they keep NSP affairs under control by having one of their women elected as head. Women's involvement in selecting candidates is likely to result in a higher and more dynamic level of women's participation in NSP. This was seen in CDCs in Parwan and Daikundi where there were existing women leaders before the NSP process started. These women were elected by other women and used NSP as a platform to continue their leadership.

**Herat Women explaining how men influenced the choice of the leader:** «They thought there might be a salary so they suggested this family because the mother is a widow and she is mobile and her daughter has some education.»

**Nangarhar DoWA:** "Belquis was a woman who argued a great deal about NSP projects with men. She complained about men's dishonesty. In the end the men in the shura had her killed at her house."

**Parwan Men:** "Women are not successful leaders – they can't go out at night, they can't travel far, they can't travel without mahram according to sharia. A woman can be a good leader but never as good as a man."

**Parwan Men:** "Women shouldn't talk about politics because they don't know about it and have no experience. Women can become leaders but you can't go anywhere without guns."

**Parwan Religious Leader:** "God help people whose leaders are women...If women have control better that you live under the ground than over it."

41 For example, Turkman village in Bagram.

“While NSP encourages the formation of a mixed-gender CDC wherever possible, communities now have three options on the CDC office-bearers structure and functioning:

- (a) formation of a gender-integrated CDC with a single group of four officers, this is the preferred and recommended option; OR
- (b) formation of Male and Female Subcommittees, each with their own four officers, combined with an Executive Coordination Committee comprised of two officers from each sub-committee; OR
- (c) in extremely orthodox communities where women will not be allowed to vote or participate as cluster representatives, a “women’s working group” may be formed. This should be a solution of last resort.”

### **5.3.1. Women Leaders**

The quality of leadership is critical and impacts not only the type of group which they will run under NSP but also the lives of women and girls in the community. Good leaders try to ensure that the women in their group and in the village understand better what is happening but to do that they need good information. They encourage women to negotiate with men and raise their voices about issues which matter to them. Women who become effective leaders are often enterprising. They have good public speaking skills – often a combination of storyteller, comedian and diplomat. Women leaders often gave many examples of their charitable works<sup>42</sup>. They have negotiation and conflict resolution skills. They provide advice and have the energy and drive to achieve results. They are inquisitive about their community, tenacious and quick to grab an opportunity when they see one. They actively train younger women to be future leaders and are aware that others can be trained to replace them. Women who do not somehow challenge gender roles do not perform their leadership roles as well as those who do. Whether selected by the women or the men in the village, in order for leaders to be able to influence and gain power they must be seen to attract funding and projects to their communities. People will not support them or their policies if they are not seen to produce tangible results.

Some women who emerge as leaders have been exposed to different ways of living and working. Some been exposed to an urban setting such as Kabul or cities in the country they went to as refugees. Even here there are differences. Some women had educated or open-minded families who let them experience the world outside their homes but some women were taken as ‘luggage’. Some women felt more modern because of the way they were able to dress, demonstrating urbanisation. In such cases, they feel that as urbanised women among rural women they should take the lead. Other women had been changed by the war. One took a very active role supporting Mujahideen troops by feeding them and hiding their weapons. Such women have the ability to take risks due to their socio-cultural status and this is an important point of leverage to negotiate for change in gender relations. Women whose husbands had status in the military or Mujahideen emerge as leaders since they have always had a certain cachet in the community. Motivated women, who no longer have small children to care for, because they have time and mobility, take on leadership roles.

In Daikundi, the concept of women taking an organising and leading role in their communities is not too unusual. One woman head, from a family of *arbabs*<sup>43</sup>, explained that her grandmother would make decisions for the household, entertain guests and manage the agricultural labour while her father was away. Women from poorer and landless families in Daikundi do not seem to enjoy the same privileges. However, overall, men are more willing to accept women’s leadership because there has been a longstanding tradition of it as a result of which a number of women feel confident about the quality of their leadership. In this area it is not education which puts women ahead – there was only a serious attempt to bring education to girls since the fall of the Taliban. Non-literate women are fearless and candidate themselves for the provincial shura. Even in Daikundi, however, men can underestimate women’s leadership: in one community fierce competition between male candidates had resulted in a woman surprisingly getting elected as CDC head because women had acted in solidarity to vote for her and men had not expected that. Women head a number of CDCs in Daikundi but the quality of interaction varies from group to group. The tendency in some communities is to choose educated women but some of these do not have other skills, cannot achieve tangible results and end up being disrespected by men in the community. One young woman leader bitterly announced: “Men are better leaders than women because men do not listen to women.”

42 Being charitable is a popular criterion of leadership in the Afghan context. Being charitable to those who are less well off is part of developing charismatic leadership and patrimonial networks but often has little to do with actual development as it sets up a hierarchy rather than developing horizontal linkages.

43 A type of village head



Where there were strong women leaders their leadership can take many different forms and not all are always beneficial. There are social workers or community activists who organise women around issues and look for project funding to better people's lives. There are charity workers who base their actions on principles of *sawab*<sup>44</sup> for the less fortunate in the community but do not base activities on any notion of challenging the status quo and only see women as victims. There are businesswomen looking for an opportunity to further their own enterprises and make a profit. There are performers and divas who like to be the centre of attention and 'perform' for visitors with entertaining anecdotes. They are jealous of the limelight and do not want other people to share it with them. There are puppets completely controlled by men and almost inanimate otherwise. There are leaders and managers who encompass many of the other characteristics and have a vision and goals which they pursue. They are usually older, not always literate and engage the services of younger literate women as secretaries and support staff.

Sometimes, the quality of women leaders was apparent from the behaviour of the groups they lead. The unwillingness or indifference of women to gather and to their behaviour once gathered provided clues. Some groups sat in silence and listened and were unable to articulate any opinions even when questioned directly. In some groups the absence of the head would initiate frenzied attempts to pass messages of corruption to the survey team. Some women used our interview process as an opportunity for quizzing and embarrassing women heads into answering questions they wished to ask but could not normally do so. Some groups were patently satisfied with their leaders. This also reflects in part on the quality of individual SOs and how regularly FP's monitor them.

Weak women leaders are in denial about conflicts and violence affecting women. They are not proactive, do not take any risks and miss many opportunities for themselves and the women they represent. They do exactly what the men tell them to. They see their roles as preserving community honour so they are economical with the truth about the status of women and girls in their area. They accept male views which restrict their mobility, decision making power and life choices. They are not even interested in gathering women together. A good example was the head of a women's group in Parwan who had last held a meeting one and a half years previously and was worried about the dangers of setting up a sewing course.

Women, given the choice, tend to choose women whom they consider courageous and whom they have seen negotiating successfully with men but in most areas men are making the choices. In spite of male manipulation, some women do manage to become leaders and become the first port of call when men are approached for activities with women. To do this they operate at different levels of the process of maintaining the patriarchal status quo, some managing to bring about positive change within the limitations imposed, others reinforcing gender stereotypes and doing a great deal of damage.

### **5.3.1.1. Women in Groups<sup>45</sup>**

In group formation, *qawmdari*<sup>46</sup> determines which women get elected. In a number of cases seen the CDC and women's group were entirely made up of one extended family complete with family conflicts. Women who are well known for their character, widows and/or extremely poor are also selected by men for women's groups, in case there is a handout or small salary, as it is considered *sawab* and a good public relations move for the men themselves. This happens in areas where the village hierarchy has enough wealth and NSP's contribution is negligible e.g. Kohsan where drug smuggling revenues are sizeable. Women's group membership seems to be predicated on men's interpretation of what NSP is and how they want to approach it. In some areas, the focus is on what might be distributed as a result of which male CDC heads will usually put their wives in the position of head of women's groups and heavily control the process themselves.

What women end up in groups and what they do frequently reflects men's control of women's time and labour, both within family and community. Women are portrayed as having nothing to do and therefore a burden thus men ask for income generation projects which take up the small amount of time when women are not busy with gender productive and reproductive roles. On the other hand men will say that only the poorest and most desperate women need employment thus indicating that women in their own families are well cared for and do not need to undergo the 'shame' of working. Women are evidently not allowed to have their own opinions about engaging in employment and how to spend their spare time. This is reflected in

44 Religious brownie points, benefits accrued in the next life.

45 See Annex 3 for descriptions of specific women leaders

46 Looking after one's extended family

some women's groups visited in Kohsan, in Herat where the standard format was a young educated woman from a poor or female headed family as head of the group. The rest of the group would be poorer widows. In one or two cases the women's group would be composed of combination of family members and poor women. This indicated that men in Herat generally wanted project outcomes to be handled properly and for benefits to go to poorer women of their choice. They did not want the women to have enough power make decisions in their own rights and to challenge men.

There do seem to be specific roles for types. Literate women are chosen by men as head of the women's group regardless of experience because they can handle the paperwork. Widows and older women tend to be go-between, messengers who gather people, gather information and wheeler deal to a certain extent. Since widows often have to be enterprising to survive and widowhood gives them more mobility in their own social milieu; they are a form of social capital. Often, women who were widowed, and had to work to keep the family going, become leaders because they are pushed into the public sphere. Traditional birth attendants are also chosen in more remote areas to join women's groups because they have attended many women's births and are considered to provide an important service to the community.

### **5.3.1.2. FP Interactions**

Regardless of whether the women found to head women's groups within NSP are strong or weak, the approach is the same. Groups with strong leadership are not given preferential treatment and weak groups are not pushed and/or supported better to improve performance. Male staff approach communities first and seem to frequently have very low expectations of finding leadership material among women in any area. In fact, if the only interaction is with men, it is easy to discount women's leadership altogether. Male staff from one FP described how community men had selected a woman leader for the women's sub-committee and how the woman who actually wanted to be leader shocked them by entering their room at 3 a.m. She forced them to go to the mosque, talk to the local men and take back the nomination of the other woman. When FP staff tolerate such goings on they are in collusion with the men in the community to deny women their rights to elect a leader. In cases where men are not successful in influencing the election process for women they try to disparage the woman's leadership or management skills. Men's arbitrary selection of the members of the women's group is hardly participatory or gender equitable in allowing women to choose who should represent them.

In the case of Sima Gul from Madad Khel, Parwan, for example, several male staff recollected that she had managed to diffuse a tense conflict between the men in the CDCs where there Kalashnikovs had been taken to the mosque but little more was explained about her extraordinary abilities. Interestingly the men in that community stated that they had very little conflict which they solved easily while women argued a great deal and were slow to reconcile because they were stuck at home, had low mental development and were slow to grasp issues. Under her leadership women still use the money they were given as a loan to set up microcredit by a grant programme but it is unclear what happened to the men's loan. Men saw this as a small achievement and failed to mention it. Another example was given of a woman selected to head a men's CDC in Kunduz. FP staff could shed no light on why she was selected. Where FPs had been successful in finding good women leaders they had not given much thought to why these women were good leaders and whether these qualities could be enhanced, supported or replicated. Male FP staff simply seemed pleasantly surprised in cases where strong women made an appearance.

In one FP, female staff felt that they should have explained better what sort of person to choose as leader for women's groups. They felt that in the first round of elections communities generally do not understand who to choose but that by the second round they do. It takes time to explain new concepts to women and to overcome existing taboos about social obligations pushed on them by powerful men. FP staff are undecided on how far they should interfere in elections and group formation. It may be useful for them to influence, on the men's, how they want women to be represented and to interact with the development process. On the women's side FPs can definitely provide more information, understanding of how the process works and understanding of rights and entitlements.

### **5.3.2. Space**

We have discussed mobility and women's possibility to gather. Another area which needs consideration is



space. Women cannot be mobile if men and older women do not agree with where they want to go. Women are having their NSP community meetings in all sorts of locations. Mostly people meet in the houses of wealthier or influential community members with large guest rooms but other locations are used e.g. mosques, rooms built in private compounds for adult literacy classes, etc.<sup>47</sup>.

**Paktia Women:** "At first there were no problems but then a difficulty arose. The person who initially placed their room at the disposal of the sewing course would not let anyone attend the course and would say 'Pay me some rent for this room and then come to the course.' This was a big problem."

**Parwan Women:** "At first when we wanted to have meetings, men were very aggressive especially my brother-in-law. Our house has two doors and my brother-in-law would insult the women and say: 'Go through the other door since that bad woman has invited you'. But I included his wife and daughter and after that he did not say anything else. Now men no longer interfere with our meetings."

Women's lack of their own space to meet can create problems. In one village in Gardez, men said that women are only allowed to go to the houses of trusted and honourable families and only when there is a training of some sort. There can presumably be protracted discussions between men and women on whether the family chosen has the right reputation or not. In Nangarhar, it was explained that in some cases poorer people fear sending daughters to the houses of wealthy and powerful people with sons because their daughters would be at risk of sexual assault.

Access to most spaces is controlled by men. This means women cannot meet at any time they want and certainly when meetings are held in the houses of wealthier people, not everyone feels welcome. The body language of poorer women attending focus groups was telling. They would squat on their heels away from the group, in the background, refusing refreshments saying they had just had tea or food. They would listen but not participate. This very much indicated that women were not comfortable in that space. Some interviewees explained that if projects are located outside the houses of wealthy people, the women feel it is below them to participate in the project, but the opposite course of action excludes poorer and more vulnerable groups as the wealthy will monopolise the project. In some cases when the house belonged to a widow who was well known in the community and her house was open to everyone, all sorts of women came and went with ease. In some places men said they would be building a space for women but the timescale was not specific.

### 5.3.3. Time

In most families, women, especially young newly married girls, are not in control of their own time and do not get time off for good behaviour. Extended family life means that household chores can be divided among women in the household but some women will always be excluded from community activities. It is important to know which groups are consistently excluded. Clearly, FPs have to be aware that they are not only facilitating and negotiating for greater mobility and space for women to meet but also for time.

**Parwan Women:** "Women do not have extra time because from morning to night they are busy baking bread, working in the orchard, looking after livestock, cleaning the house and helping with farming. But still if they can do more work they will go but they do not have permission to go for activities which do not involve payment."

If women are not in control of their own time they cannot easily participate in development processes. In many communities women's time is still not their own and this affects gender equitable access to all sorts of processes and services, including NSP. Even family tasks can create problems: in Herat, lack of basic clinic facilities mean women will spend the whole day to go and get their child vaccinated in the nearest town and their husband will get angry when they are not home on time. Some women recounted in Parwan that if they are late as a result of community meetings and activities, men beat their wives and tell them 'Why don't you stay home and look after your children?' In many cases, men are effectively taking advantage of women's unpaid labour at home and any spare time should be used to generate an income, not to attend

<sup>47</sup> In Kohsan, Herat, in one village, women have a special place in the mosque so they can attend Friday and Ramadan prayers.

meetings where the results are intangible.

Women can be assisted by interventions such as organising the provision of day care within a community. The head of one women's group in Parwan suggested to the Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) that they build a nursery for them because it would allow women to attend to their agricultural chores with peace of mind. The PRT accepted. Not only do day care facilities have an immediate impact in terms of allowing women to concentrate on the task at hand but they are not difficult to set up and can be an income earning opportunity. Other measures include helping women explain to families how their time at community meetings can contribute to family welfare and/or status.

### 5.3.4. Poor and Vulnerable Women

Although NSP is not a project for the poor, the OM does say that it lays the foundation for a sustainable form of inclusive local governance, rural reconstruction, and poverty alleviation. According to recent research “a significant number of Afghanistan's women fall within the category ‘chronically poor’ as defined by the MDG goal currently subscribed to by the GoA...[S]uch poverty is not necessarily an attribute of one category of women such as ‘female-headed’ households”<sup>48</sup>. There are no specific activities for the poor or for other vulnerable groups.

**Daikundi Women:** “I remember we voted but I was not sure for what. We thought NSP would distribute money to each family. Since the money has been spent on a road, a karez and carpet weaving training for about ten families it has not impacted me at all – I have no land, I do not leave the village and my daughter did not get carpet weaving - so I could not say whether NSP was good or not.”

**Herat Women:** «We hear that assistance comes but it doesn't reach everyone equally»

**Sarepul Women:** “The head of the CDC is one of our elders...I have not benefited at all from NSP... Everyone knows I am a widow and what a state I live in but the head of the shura did not do the smallest thing for me.”<sup>49</sup>

There were numerous accusations of elite capture and misappropriation of NSP funds which could not be verified because this was not the purpose of this research. Men most often seem to plan and advocate for the interests of the wealthier, landed segment but not for the poor. Even if the community is poor compared to other communities there will be a hierarchy of interests and the lowest will not be served. In every interview the response to questions on widows and the poor was either that nothing was done for them or that they had been selected for women's projects (untrue in most cases), or that they could expect charity from time to time. Poor families face many hardships and in many cases effectively sell their daughters<sup>50</sup>. Women and girls in poor and vulnerable households face different sets of problems which require different interventions. It cannot be assumed that there will be a trickle-down effect of benefits to such individuals and families from NSP activities.

The CDC may give a small share of the block grant to the poor indirectly through the women's project if wealthier sections of the community do not monopolise women's representation as well. Some of the women running the groups may actively try and get projects for the more vulnerable women in the community. This could be extended to cover men in vulnerable groups as well<sup>51</sup>. In fact, women participating in NSP who have the capacity can be given the responsibility of planning for the poorest and include a small stipend for themselves in doing this. This could be supported through a special fund within NSP or by another programme but it would be a way of improving women's capacities in managing community development. Historically, this is how many women's NGOs have started in the Afghan context.

<sup>48</sup> Banzet et al. (2008)

<sup>49</sup> In this interview, when the head of the women's group left the other women complained about the corruption of the male CDC head who is her husband.

<sup>50</sup> E.g. The case of the 85 year old shopkeeper in Sheberghan and 13 year old girl, where his constant supply of credit for groceries for the family made him feel entitled to the family's daughter.

<sup>51</sup> In one case the head of the women's group did mention that poor men come to her for assistance once they are turned away by the male-run CDC.

## 5.4. Security

Many men in FPs, NSP and the community will delay or avoid work with women due to security but probing this issue showed that security is not always the correct concern and that it is at times a very convenient excuse to exclude women. It is clear that when security is used as a reason to limit women's involvement it has to be unpacked. This section does not refer to high risk areas of Afghanistan where the level of insecurity makes work with communities almost impossible.

**FP Kabul:** "People came with guns and said 'You want to mislead our women'..."

**Jawzjan Men:** "Until our daughter gets back from Shiberghan we are thinking about her, that she doesn't come across a suicide bomber or face another problem. Many men worry about the current situation and are afraid to let women and girls out."

**Paktia Female Staff:** "The director of the DoWA is very lazy so she made security a big issue so she doesn't travel."

**Paktia Young Men:** "Women's projects do not create problems. In Bala Deh the girls' school created problems but thank God that has been solved. There are a few ignorant people who still work for others without realising the loss or gain for themselves who do bad things but it is a small matter..."

The issue of security and how it impacts work with women is an interesting one since it tests the ability to realistically assess risk of engaging with gender issues in a given context. Security is a very useful excuse for excluding people and local leaders are well aware of it. Khajeh Elias, a tribal elder, in Khajeh Abdullah village which is split between Zurmat and Gardez in Paktia believes that the head of NSP in Paktia has personal conflict with them so they have not been covered by NSP with the excuse that security is not good. He says: "Because half of our area is in Zurmat district the government and organisations do not work for us and they bring the excuse that security is not good. Now take our voice to your bosses that in Baba Abdullah village there is no problem. Come freely and work with our men and women. We will guarantee you and your workers that nobody will bother them. It is because of this that our people are unhappy with the government and organisations and we agreed amongst ourselves not to participate in the elections". Whether his perceptions are true or not was not verified but what is clear is that if security is assessed in an arbitrary manner it can be used as a powerful tool to exclude people.

During field research the team were warned off a certain district by an FP which believed that recent events had taken place due to a strong Taliban presence. In fact a little probing revealed that the trigger for events had been a conflict over the rape of a young woman, her removal before she could be killed by her father and his subsequent rampage to kill those who had dishonoured him. This did not impact the security of the research team although precautions were still taken. In another case FP staff explained that since female staff were killed in their area of operation they felt they could not push too hard. It turned out that the specific activities of those women had threatened the reputation and impunity of local armed power holders who decided to silence them.

Women do not have a say in the security situation in their village/environment. Many communities have some sort of community policing but this is not always sensitive to or beneficial to women and their activities. In Parwan, it was explained that night letters and security do impact how much girls go to school and women's involvement in activities. But sometimes communities themselves create a threatening environment for women. In some Pushtun areas men curtail women's mobility due to doshmani or vendettas where a woman may be raped or kidnapped which is tantamount to the same thing thereby dishonouring the family and clan. On a larger scale, in areas where disreputable commanders are still powerful, rule of law is weak and disarmament has not occurred women are wary of emerging in public and there may be more threats against them. Overall, as long as a community is invested in a project, whether it involves men, women or both, they will find a way to deal with the potential threat unless it is completely foreign (e.g. foreign Islamist fighters).

Men and women in almost every community interviewed said that security was excellent and that activities with women would not impact security with the caveat that activities should be acceptable within sharia law. They also said that bad security made work impossible not just with women but with men too. For programming with women, security is a critical multi-level issue related to extant notions of honour. Women

can bring dishonour to their family and knowledge of this issue must be kept within the boundaries of the community to avoid dishonouring and emasculating it. This usually involves killing the women and ensuring that sympathetic external bodies never hear of the crime. When men talk about 'security' they are warning external organisations e.g. FPs, that if they overstep an invisible boundary and incite women to act in a way which is perceived to bring dishonour, the women will be killed and the FP will have to be punished in order to disseminate the message that the honour of this community is not to be trifled with. The easiest way to maintain the unspoken agreement is not to programme with women. Unfortunately, if one half of the community are allowed to regularly visit appalling violence on the other half with impunity to maintain honour, the implications go far beyond gender and women's rights and should lead us to examine community attitudes to governance and rule of law.

#### **5.4.1. Violence Against Women**

While NSP is not tasked with social protection it is clear that where such issues hinder women's participation in the development process then there must be alliance building and the pursuit of shared goals to ensure that women and vulnerable groups can participate and benefit equitably from the positive impact of NSP. One issue which requires urgent consideration is intimidation of and violence against women. In most cases families and communities try to protect women and girls by limiting their movement and interaction with strangers. When families say it is dangerous for girls to go to Herat by bus for schooling, for example, they are politely saying that their daughters will probably be raped. Paradoxically, some say that violence against women is caused by men's frustration at having to support individuals they consider as freeloaders – a difficult conundrum in social settings which do not allow them to leave their homes and find employment. With the level of violence which women and girls can be subjected to it is probably difficult for them to focus on much and they can easily be intimidated. Similarly, any programme which is aiming to deal with women in any respect must have, at a minimum, discreet links to programmes and activities which aim to reduce violence against women.

"Mard-e ba ghazab, zan-e ba adab"<sup>52</sup> Afghan Saying

**Herat Men:** "Sometimes there is a great deal of pressure on women at home and in the region. Sometimes they run away. Some commit suicide, some set themselves on fire and some use opium to kill themselves. A certain number who are illiterate become drug addicts because they don't know anything. All these actions come from complete and wholesale lack of literacy in this area."

**Jawzjan NGO Staff:** "How can we hand women over to the government or police when we know that she will be used for their amusement?"

**Jawzjan Women:** "If we hear in our meeting that there has been violence against a woman or that this is a regular occurrence we take two women from the shura of each village and go to her house. We do not leave until we are sure that the violence will end and if we see that the man continues his violence we inform the police."

**Nangarhar AIHRC<sup>53</sup>:** "Women are harassed, insulted and generally not encouraged to work in government offices... Violence against and exploitation of women is very widespread... District level authorities do not want girls to study above class three and four."

**Nangarhar AIHRC:** "Women are sold – sometimes to many men, cutting off ears and noses, throwing women off the roof, incest (rape), police raping young girls, rape by others involved in cases of girls running away from home, forced marriage, running away from home, shaving women's heads, boiling water – as the years pass people report more of these crimes."

**Nangarhar women:** "Here the elders solve all conflicts by jirga and if murder is committed either someone is killed in retaliation or three females are handed over, a young girl, a woman and an infant."

**Paktia Men:** "If a woman does something wrong the whole region will get a bad name. No other reasoning will be accepted. Whoever she belongs to we will kill her and hang her in the village as an example to others."

**Paktia Women:** "The people of our village feel it is very shameful to take the affairs of the community to the district centre so any decision which the elders and shura heads make is accepted by people."

**Parwan Religious Leader:** "In Logar they shot school girls and people found the reason which was that girls were not wearing Islamic hejab. Everything has a reason."

**Parwan Women:** "A woman would not be beaten if she wasn't misbehaving somehow."

**Sarepul Religious Leader:** "A girl was caught with a man. Her brothers connected a generator to her feet and killed her. In Kohistanat, a man cut his young wife in pieces because her father sold her by force and she had gone to the government to try and get a divorce. Women and girls who take animals for grazing are abducted and raped. We recently dealt with the case of a 13 year old girl like this. A woman brought her daughter in and complained that her son-in-law was forcing his wife into prostitution dressed as a young boy. We got a divorce for the wife and now she lives in town and she is very happy. A woman killed her husband for having sexual relations with young boys. She gave herself up to the law. People complain that their husbands are bringing prostitutes to the house or gambling in the house."

**(See Annex 2 for more quotes)**

Every province seems to vie with the next for statistics on rape and acts of violence against women. Luckily not every family is afflicted but the number is still worryingly high. Three decades of war, militarisation and brutality together with impunity for militia, police and government personnel who are involved in violent acts have not helped. In the past, government and community did not get involved in other families' conflicts leaving female victims isolated but this has changed. Based on the number of cases of appalling violence which have started to haemorrhage from women and men interviewed in rural communities it is clear that women and girls are subject to a large number of attacks within their family and communities for a variety of reasons (e.g. impact of pornography), or for no reason at all. For them, external security threats are just one more in a long list of dangers they face. The threat of violence at home affects the way women behave, self-censor, plan their mobility, their speech, their dress and who they interact with. Even with the best laid plans women are still blamed and subjected to violence. Violence perpetuates violence where young boys are socialized into a culture which sees violence against women as the right of a man. Such a cultural paradigm cripples women, making it difficult to engage in public life, development processes and local governance.

In Herat, a man sets fire to his wife after they argue about what he had bought to feed guests. Small girls

<sup>52</sup> "An angry man, a demure woman."

<sup>53</sup> Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC)



have no say in their future and are damaged by marriage and sexual relations before their bodies are ready. There are many cases of female suicide and drug addiction because society provides no other options. In Paktia, women are not allowed to discuss sexual assault which has occurred within the community. If it becomes apparent that such an event has occurred in a family they are completely ostracised by the men and women in a community. Young girls run away from home to avoid forced marriages and end up facing great dangers, from police or from family and/or community members who take their lives to preserve honour. In many provinces girls are forced to marry their rapists if they are not honour killed. In places like Paktia, women are unhappy about bad but they feel powerless to stop it. In poorer communities women said that men only love money and cannot wait until their daughters are thirteen so they can marry them off and get money. The local authorities simply do not care in most cases which can make the entire project of linking women and girls to government appear a risible and cynical exercise.

In most places, women feel they have very little power to help each other within the community and will go to the head of the village or the local mullah. Such individuals having little choice themselves will opt for maintaining the status quo. The solutions arbitrated rarely benefit women. The hierarchy of problem solvers for women would appear to go from mullah to arbab to the local shura and finally the district governor as a final option. This option is avoided at all costs to avoid loss of community honour. Men in most villages denied any serious cases of violence against women but gave hypothetical examples instead. Some women's groups have decided to end this situation and take matters into their own hands. For example, in one community in Parwan at every monthly meeting women talk of problems of women in their area and the group decides how to solve the problems. They have tried negotiations on some tricky issues but it is clear that they need more support and guidance.

The positive impact of concerted effort between government and civil society together with an advocacy campaign is shown in the reduction of bad in many places. Most groups interviewed specifically mentioned the reduction of the exchange of girls. In many provinces notably the Pushtun and Tajik ones women have been receiving training and gathering in groups to abolish negative customs usually related to marriage. In many provinces there are now women's shelters. In the absence of shelters in places like Daikundi women are kept in prison where they are vulnerable to abuse. In Jawzjan women are sent to a shelter in Mazar-i Sharif but the DoWA is seeking funding to build a shelter. In Parwan and Herat there are shelters in the provincial centres. In Nangarhar and Gardez women may dare to apply to the AIHRC<sup>54</sup> for assistance. NSP and FP staff however were rarely aware and although women openly talked about cases of violence in meetings, they were never referred to those who could provide legal advice and other forms of assistance. The DoWAs provide advice and legal services for women. There are women police in more and more provinces (e.g. Sarepul, Nangarhar) but numbers are low. They need support to succeed in their work. The AIHRC was mentioned by men and women as a source of assistance. Men joked that they could no longer talk to women because they would rush off to the AIHRC at the slightest provocation. Women mentioned in a more serious note that men can no longer do as they want with women because there is a body to apply to.

## 5.5. Women's Development Priorities

"Gender equality and women's empowerment are inextricably linked. Women will only win equality when they are able to act on their own behalf, with a strong voice to ensure their views are heard and taken into account. This means recognising the right of women to define the objectives of development for themselves."<sup>55</sup> Many of the projects prioritized by men in NSP do benefit women from various socio-economic categories and some choices would be made by women themselves e.g. water supply or electricity projects. There are, however, certain development concerns which women cannot articulate easily and which cannot easily be dealt with by the limited range of interventions which programmes like NSP can offer.

54 The AIHRC often does courses on human rights, women's rights and so on. They can provide good information on the types of abuses against women in an area and on at risk groups. Similarly abuses which social organisers come across can be reported to them discreetly.

55 Derbyshire (2002)

### 5.5.1. Human Capital Development (HCD)

The vagaries of relying on agricultural produce and livestock in the face of drought and disease make alternative incomes important for men and women as a form of risk aversion for large households with numerous small children. NSP is weak on improving livelihoods for the landless or those who do not have access or control of income from land. This applies to both men and women. An assumption of trickle-down from improved agricultural production is not always realistic and even though improved quality of life is important people cannot always see the direct economic benefits. This is where income generation and capacity building projects become important.

A number of women are engaged in the NSP process via HCD projects which are seen as building capacity within communities. Based on comments made, most interviewees clearly perceived these projects as the income generation projects of old. Many men and women both in FPs and in CDCs talk of how women's lives would be improved by poultry and livestock projects, sewing or handicraft projects. There is actually very little evidence for any drastic changes in the lives of families or women as a result of short-term 'traditional' income generation or skills training activities apart from a modest increase of certain products for home consumption and more work for women. Usually these interventions are subtexts to the main narrative of development activity in the community. It is a gesture represented by the add-on sentence "and women got a sewing/embroidery/carpet weaving course".

Community men and FP staff continuously buy into the assumption that women have no skills whereas the problem statement is more often that women in specific age groups have skills but cannot use them profitably. 'Traditional' project designs focus on the introduction of new skills rather than assessing the market for existing or new products and services. In fact marketability of skills is rarely addressed in project design which is based on good intentions and assumptions. In communities where women are not mobile for example it is impossible for them to do a market assessment or to market their produce unless the project sets up a system for home based producers and female sales agents, a model which has been successful elsewhere in Afghanistan and should be introduced to NSP HCD projects.

Many rural women have skills and are too polite to tell people who come to their village that they already know how to do things. FP staff may enter villages thinking that this is a blank slate. When trainers came to a village in Parwan to teach them how to make tomato paste a woman there actually taught them a thing or two about tomato paste herself. In one part of Herat they mentioned specific embroidered collars which women make and which they sell across the border in Iran<sup>56</sup>. In another part of Herat women used NSP funding to change their horizontal looms for vertical looms – they were already skilled carpet weavers but wanted to make different types of carpet. It is important to assess existing skills bases and improve marketing, skills or business know-how as necessary. Linking women to markets in greater numbers:

- a) gives women the possibility of a sustainable income using their skills with possible benefits in terms of more influence at household level
- b) gives women with skills the option to be producers or businesswomen in their own rights
- c) makes men realise that women are part of the social capital within the community and not uneducated, unskilled beings waiting to be animated by outsiders, and
- d) deals in part with unemployment in the community.

In these training courses, women are trained for a maximum of six months and usually there is a hand out involved. A short skill training course is not always enough to teach a skill and without marketing it cannot generate an income unless the trainees are natural businesswomen. In such cases men are quick to write off these projects and say they have 'failed'. It is important to manage the often inflated hopes of the community about the impact of a project. If women are not considered viable social capital, 'failed' skills development and/or income generating projects only reinforce such views and lessen their chances of

<sup>56</sup> Also of interest for some activities are the following points. In some places e.g. Jawzjan and Daikundi it is possible to build small markets for women. They are often selling goods on the street but have no specific space for selling their items. People consider it shameful for women to be on the street peddling but for many women this is their only chance to make a livelihood and they should be assisted. Women in some parts of Daikundi are involved in the processing of almonds – in this case shelling – before almonds are sent to provincial and national markets. This sort of food processing activity is very common in agricultural communities across Afghanistan. Women are paid in cash or in kind for processing of different types of fruit and crops in season. Helping small groups of poor women work together can increase the quantity and quality of food processing they do. It may also help them negotiate for better wages since they are among the lowest paid agricultural labourers. Women's groups with competent leadership may be able to manage small projects that do this.



eventually having a say in community affairs.

In HCD projects numbers are quite small (less than twenty) since projects are based on the assumption that a new skill is being taught and the teacher-student ratio should facilitate efficient transfer of skills. Projects are located in people's houses where space limits the number of students who can attend. Such projects are rarely successful and do not address large scale unemployment or change gender relations, except in cases like Monara in Parwan where they had computer courses. Communities are rarely satisfied, either because their family is not included or because the women trained do not suddenly set up factories or successful businesses.

In a number of cases, HCD projects ran into problems because the trainers selected had little or no skills. Giving the job of trainer to unskilled relatives because there is a salary leads to project failure, a failure which cannot be afforded since success of women's projects impacts gender relations so profoundly. People who are hired to teach skills should be able to prove their skill levels with good references or samples. FPs should check the proficiency of would-be trainers. Beneficiaries selected for HCD projects can also be problematic. In Daikundi young girls selected to learn carpet weaving stopped when a school opened in the area and the girls started attending thus the skills acquired were never used.

Finally, in a village in Gardez women came to the sewing course because they were promised money by the male head of the CDC. This created conflict when the women demanded their money and further conflict when the sewing machines were distributed. In fact, there were conflicts over sewing machine distribution in a number of areas. Over a decade down the line from sewing machine distribution projects one would have thought that both the FP and communities would have moved on to more sophisticated projects for women but evidently the cliché sewing machine projects and attendant problems will continue reappearing for many years to come. Skills development is crucial and should go beyond small tokenistic projects for women, to include planning and design based on solid assessments of existing skills bases, local markets, expectation management and business plans.

### 5.5.2. Unemployment and Outmigration

It must be recognised that communities with larger numbers of young migrants have different gender dynamics. Old men left behind do not necessarily represent the development aspirations of all men and they certainly do not represent the aspirations of women. The priorities of households headed by women, with absentee male heads may not reach FPs at all if the inclusion of women is not handled effectively.

**Daikundi Women:** "Women do all the farming tasks because so many men are away in Iran."

Unemployment is a problem mentioned by men and women in every community. Not only does it create lower family incomes, lowering the quality of life for men and women but it results in a constant outmigration of young men in some communities, changing gender relations and roles, leaving women as household heads in charge of agricultural tasks. In areas such as Daikundi the women have to hire agricultural labour for ploughing and threshing or do it themselves. Sometimes migration for work can lead to abandoned wives and children when migrants set up new lives. Other times, foreign brides, usually from Iran, are brought home. In some areas, outmigration of young men has been occurring for many generations. In such areas women need employment so that they can have access to money for basic household costs while they wait for money from abroad. Some communities recognize that women need increased mobility to provide for their families but others do not making women isolated and vulnerable. In other areas, the situation is not so favourable. In Paktia, the researchers encountered one community where the young men were working abroad and the old men who stayed blocked women's mobility and participation in development.

### 5.5.3. Environmental Issues

Environmental issues require long term interventions which cannot be covered by NSP projects. Nevertheless they do feature in the development priorities of women, often alluded to indirectly, and some do need to be addressed. These are rural development issues which may impact women more than men and require long-term planning and organisation.

**Parwan Women:** "Once I was cooking for my father-in-law but because the family's income was not very good, I didn't have enough firewood to warm up the soup properly. So when I put the soup down in front of my father-in-law I quickly wanted to head back to the kitchen. My father-in-law threw the bowl at my head and said: 'Is this soup or cold water?' I did not talk to my father-in-law for a few months."

Interestingly some of the practical issues that affect the lives of women, children and poorer households are discussed in passing but do not make it on to the community lists of projects. They are invisible practical gender needs. Environmental concerns appear frequently in the list of community: in Herat, women and men mentioned the impact of flooding while elsewhere people complained of dust storms which clog up streets and fill houses, delay project work, and make travel difficult. Drinking water is already an issue for some communities and every year wells are dug deeper as water tables dry up.

Households need fuel for cooking, keeping the house warm, boiling water, etc. It is considered a woman's responsibility to manage household fuel. With dwindling supplies of bushes and trees used for fuel, women and children have to go further afield in search of bushes for fuel. This is especially problematic for poorer households who have to prioritise their children's labour. In other research there were a number of cases where children had lost limbs in minefields in search of fuel. In Parwan, men said that women's quality of life has not changed since they still have to deal with the labour intensive and unhygienic task of collecting dung and making cakes for fuel. In Daikundi, even well off households were concerned about dependency on imported gas and wood. Solar ovens are one solution which NSP uses but other solutions are required. In Sheberghan, for example, many villages can get access to natural gas which would provide fuel for some households.

### 5.5.4. The Impact of Drug Addiction

Women's development priorities are not always easy to address and women understanding that the range of interventions on offer will not solve their problems may not articulate them. NSP can do little about issues such drug addiction itself except to raise awareness in the relevant ministries and institutions that it is a serious and widespread problem which will affect community cohesion, law and order and governance in a variety of ways and needs urgent attention in many rural communities. FP staff may also brush off issues which are not within the remit of NSP. An old woman in Herat described how young men in a village smoke 'crystal' and how people are not willing to marry daughters to them, a profound form of exclusion from the community. A number of women in different villages across Afghanistan have to support their addicted sons with no support from anyone. The practice of giving babies opium to calm them so mothers can work is creating generations of addicts in northern Afghanistan. This challenges notions that the next generation will support their parents and throws the burden of livelihood generation on women, especially where addiction among older sons creates a female headed household.

### 5.5.5. Youth Issues

In almost every interview with women cases were presented. Increasingly girls cannot imagine the consequences and run away if their husband is much older or not attractive to them. In the worst cases, the girl is raped by police once caught and killed by her family. In some cases the boy abandons the girl once she is pregnant while in others they are forced to marry. This is a youth issue which needs to be addressed since many cases end up with women's groups and men's CDCs. They then have to solve the conflicts which these actions have created. One NSP Women's Group leader said she talks to young girls and encourages them to tell her if they like a young boy not approved of by the family. Forewarned, she feels

she can 'avert disaster' by talking the girl out of it or softening the family to the girl's case. This is a good variation on the usual warnings that a girl's actions can destroy the honour of the clan and that she must be punished. The same lady has worked on reducing bride price and instituted the practice of allowing young couples to meet before marriage by explaining to parents that not letting couples see each other may create problems later. The reason she gave for engaging in these activities which she undertakes in conjunction with the women's group, is that times had changed and that she has now been made aware that there are government rules providing guidance for such matters.

## Section 5 Recommendations

### Women's Participation

- To improve women's participation, NSP and FP staff at all levels must be willing to challenge traditional representation replicating itself within NSP. FPs and NSP must constantly monitor the quality of women's participation.
- NSP and FP, from management levels downwards, must adhere to a process of mainstreaming gender into all activities instead of having sex-segregated projects and activities. The more men and women have to share resources and negotiate, under supervision of an FP initially, the more they will learn to work more effectively as a team. Women can only effectively be included in the development process in this manner.
- NSP and FPs at every level must raise awareness among men and women that NSP provides a legally sanctioned platform from which women can become involved in the development process.
- The question for NSP and FPs to determine and plan for is what quality of participation they want to achieve with women in NSP and how.
- Communities and FPs that facilitate good quality women's participation should be rewarded by being given prizes or extra funding.
- FPs need to produce much more structured guidelines on communication between men and women's shuras. Good quality, two-way communication between men's and women's groups can be used as an indicator to monitor gender relations.
- Women who have access to male society and are CDC members should be used to improve communication between the CDC and its women's group. Female SOs should be encouraged to communicate and negotiate with men's CDCs where feasible to improve gender relations.
- FPs can experiment with giving responsibility to competent women's groups with setting up projects for the poor vulnerable in their communities. NSP can provide a specific budget for this.
- Where feasible women's groups should have a bank account and control their own money.
- Women's groups should be encouraged and assisted to seek assistance from other organisations through accompanied trips, building linkages, etc. This can be done by FPs and NSP at local level and by NSP management at national level. This can be done by putting small grants providers in touch with FPs who can introduce them to women's groups. It can also be done by encouraging other ministries to encourage and support the efforts of NSP women's groups to advocate and to make a change in their communities.
- Engineers and project designers must ensure that design of infrastructure and other projects is user friendly and gender equitable.

### Mobilizing and reaching women

- NSP provincial staff must regularly highlight the commitment to gender in regular interactions with FP field staff.
- An inventory of the 'resources' that women bring to a CDC should be made when elections take place. The message should be to stress women as existing or latent social capital. Men's CDCs should be encouraged to discuss girls' education and to value educated women as social capital. Education should be viewed as a long term investment.
- Steps must be taken to overcome the deference or muting of women's views in front of men. This can be done through training and awareness-raising.
- NSP and FPs must use every opportunity to encourage women and their communities about women's progress. This must be done in a constructive and responsible manner. Whenever an NSP or FP delegation comes to the community they must see women as well. Women's achievements must be mentioned at every opportunity since this is a strong motivating factor.
- Giving women an official title or certificate for skills they possess may improve their status as

individuals and lead to women being increasingly seen as social capital.

- ➔ Confidence, assertiveness and public speaking skills are very important if women are going to negotiate with the men in their families and communities.
- ➔ NSP media and communications staff must look for ways to improve the use of the media to reach women and communities, as training resources, for advocacy, outreach and as a powerful social engineering tool.

### Building A Women's Group

- ➔ Women representatives will need special training, in leadership skills, confidence building and communication. Similar training should be offered to men to avoid alienation.
- ➔ Active female and male leaders should be supported and encouraged with activities which have tangible results for women. Good leadership should be rewarded and weak leaders should be pushed to improve performance.
- ➔ Women need a working space which is free of associations with certain families and socioeconomic hierarchies and does not reinforce power differentials. In places where women have no distinct space to meet, it may be possible to initially use a tent<sup>57</sup> as a neutral space placed somewhere appropriate in the village so that women can gather there. The best solution would be to build a room or stress that a community hall should be put at women's disposal at specific times.

### Security

- ➔ The relevant individuals and groups within both NSP and FPs must assess the security situation correctly and clarify the exact nature of the security risk when using it as a reason to avoid or curtail outreach to women in a community.
- ➔ NSP and FPs should be aware of violence, threats, intimidation and illicit activities such as underage marriage or trafficking of women in their area of operations. NSP should support AIHRC and DoWA campaigns on violence against women – this does not have to be overt or direct. FPs should be informed about shelters and services in their area of operations and discreetly inform women if cases of violence and abuse are revealed

### Women's Development Priorities

- ➔ Skills development is crucial and should go beyond small tokenistic projects for women, to include planning and design based on solid assessments of existing skills bases, local markets, expectation management and business plans.
- ➔ HCD staff should experiment with market assessment and linkage-to-market type projects that can reach more beneficiaries and utilise existing skills and producers in communities. They should assess existing skills within the community and link women to markets in greater numbers.

57 Like the tents used as a temporary measure for schools.

## 6. Gender Equality in the Afghan Context

**“Where have other countries got to and we still can’t solve the woman issue.”<sup>58</sup>**

This section examines whether notions of culture, especially around gender relations, have changed over the past decades. This assessment is important as much resistance to outreach to women in the Afghan context is based on notions of ‘culture’ as immutable. The following statements from interviewees indicate that over the past decades men’s negative attitudes to women’s increased involvement in public life have often shifted once the benefits to the community, households, and women themselves have been demonstrated. It was clear that ‘tradition’ had varied over time as it was shaped by forces and factors beyond the control of groups and individuals interviewed.

**Herat Men:** “At the beginning of the 7 Saur Revolution<sup>59</sup> when Taraki came and announced that he will give identity cards for men and women, when they came to our village and said we must register our women and bring their photos we all ran away and went to Iran. Do you know what happened? The Iranian police, in order to give us relief aid, registered families and would take the names and photos of each family member for that purpose. We said take our names first. There, neither our honour nor manliness remained. Even though we ran away because our government wanted to take our wives’ photos, in Iran we were volunteering ourselves for that.”

**Herat Women:** “Women are free. When we invite the mothers they come to teachers’ day. They dress up and come and listen to the songs and poetry. They enjoy themselves.”

**Jawzjan Men:** “During Najibullah’s Presidency, I was the secretary of the women’s meetings. My wife came to one meeting where I was sitting at the head between two women. The woman sitting next to her pinched her and told her: ‘Your husband has married two government women’. My wife still reminisces about those times and how much freedom we had.”

**Paktia Elder:** “People’s expectations have changed by about 60%. Now we want our women to go to work like Kabuli women and help us with the household economy and to raise their standard of living. How long should men go out to work and women sit at home and eat what they bring home?”

**Paktia Young Men:** “When we see women in Gardez who work and get a 600 dollar salary and even have body guards, a vehicle and other things naturally we are human and we would like our women to have the same. The new generation wants even more than the old generation who stayed illiterate and cannot do anything.”

**Parwan Men** “Now social expectations for women have changed. For example, yesterday it was Dr. Abdullah’s campaign. Around 2000 women went from the villages of this district to participate. This means that women have woken up and we want women to be more active. In our village there is an increased interest in girls’ education.”

**Sarepul Religious Leader:** “These wars had one good point for our people and that was that they were forced to see different ways of life and now that they have returned to their villages they have brought those cultures and ways of life.”

**(See Annex 2 for more quotes)**

Discussions with staff of NSP and FPs often demonstrated a sense that rural communities had somehow stopped in a time warp and that rural people remained conservative and unwilling to change, especially when it comes to gender relations. Interview transcripts are peppered with phrases such as ‘our culture does not allow this’, ‘we cannot change our culture’, ‘uneducated people are backward’, ‘our women are uneducated’, ‘our people are not ready’, and so on. This may be true to a certain extent, but as an underlying assumption, it affects the way staff approach programming with women in these areas and how they evaluate their work. It also raises questions about staff perceptions of the nature of development and whether they realise that it involves inevitable social change. Although some communities do explain that they are trapped by customs and culture, everywhere there are indications of change.

As the comments, above show, Afghans have had profound life changing experiences, as refugees, displaced and migrants, which altered the chemistry of communities as well as the men and women within them. Women’s roles, mobility and participation in public life have changed. Other changes are generational: in certain group settings, for example, there were interesting discussions between older and

<sup>58</sup> Herat, Kohsan, Qudusabad Bandar-e Islam Qala CDC Men

<sup>59</sup> The beginning of the Communist regime in Afghanistan



younger men on whether husbands should help their wives with household chores or not. Older women complained that young brides have more control over husbands and can visit relatives more easily. Such debates and personal life histories make it very clear that when programming in these areas we are not starting from zero with issues such as changes in perceptions of gender roles. Individuals and communities are aware that they have witnessed change, some positive and some negative.

The range of changes is vast. In many areas women say men increasingly ask their opinion in day to day life. It was clear that the more educated the family, the more men and women shared decision making. Also very gradually young girls are being given a say in whom they marry rather than being given to the highest bidder. People's experience as refugees had taught them things such as how hygiene and cleanliness improve family life. Media has made men realise that women have a powerful and important role to play in helping to improve the quality of life and that they are not inanimate objects. In Sheberghan, Jawzjan, for example, a teacher noted how women who want to be candidates in the provincial shura now make posters of their photos with a telephone numbers attached so that hundreds of men and women call them. In Paktia, women were allowed to become involved with running women's voting stations. All this was unimaginable a decade ago.

Even if this is rhetoric from communities simply wishing to appear modern, people can be held to what they say, and in many cases it was clear that people were proud of the progress they felt they had made. It is important to encourage people to remember episodes of positive change in their lives, especially those involving women in their families and communities. There are a small number of programmes run by NGOs to change attitudes and customs and they have been successful in many provinces to reduce negative customs such as the exchange of girls for blood crimes. Recognising existing processes of change gives NSP and FP staff an opportunity to integrate their work into locally accepted processes of change. It reduces the risk of conflict and resistance.

NSP can claim many firsts in relation to programming with women but there are a number of activities with women ongoing in many provinces these days. Women who join CDCs are often engaged in other ongoing projects and trainings or may be related to women and men who are. No territory is completely untouched and assumptions that any FP is performing an absolute 'first' with women, unless this proves to be true under scrutiny, are often unfounded. Communities deny the existence of ongoing projects and projects in the past because they fear that they will lose assistance. The work of other organisations and institutions may provide useful information<sup>60</sup>, contacts and baseline information. FPs can find their point of departure from assessing the history what other organisations have achieved and lost in communities.

## 6.1. Key Actors and Social Capital

Every context has individuals, groups and processes who or which can be considered 'drivers of change'. NSP and FPs generally do take sensible steps to ensure that men support activities with women. They consult with men early in the process, particularly community leaders, and attempt to promote positive attitudes towards women's active participation usually using religious arguments. Where women are involved in separate activities or training, the potential advantages are explained to avoid misunderstandings and suspicion. Women can only influence the development agenda when they are involved in decision-making and when they have the support of those committed to promoting gender equity and equality. The key is to look for 'gender advocates' in government and civil society. It is a case of only seeing those who resist the involvement of women in a context or to see a balanced picture which includes allies who want to push for change. One area which both NSP and FPs have to exploit more efficiently is using drivers of change to facilitate the programme, especially in relation to changing gender relations.

<sup>60</sup> Nancy Hatch Dupree's vast collection of documents, books and other material, formerly housed within ACBAR and now in Kabul University, provides a ever-growing fund of information which can be mined to yield interesting results on the work of organisations all over Afghanistan since the seventies.

CDCs are enmeshed within the existing fabric of society which is still controlled by local power-holders, usually elders, commanders, businessmen, religious leaders and so on<sup>61</sup>. It is difficult to wrest local level decision making from such people in a post-conflict context and it would be unrealistic to imagine that they are not trying to influence events and processes directly or indirectly. These individuals are key actors who make decisions for people and negotiations on gender relations have to take place with them. This happens in some areas more than others. Getting women's participation in Pushtun areas, for example, may involve the male gatekeeper(s) e.g. village head requesting permission of each woman's family for her to participate in initial meetings. If the village head has no interest in social development, opposes change for women, only seeks personal benefit, does not have time or interest or is simply scared, women's participation will not happen. Tribal jirgas set limitations on women's mobility, education, ability to work and marriage choice, for example, and attorneys, courts and governor set their seal of approval to this because they can win support.

Social networks in Afghanistan are multi-faceted and ever changing. If putting positive pressure on one individual or group does not work there are other links in the chain which can be approached. Below are brief descriptions of some key actors and those parts of a community which can be considered social capital. There are others which have not been mentioned such as local leaders, business men and women and so on.

### Religious Leaders <sup>62</sup>

**FP Staff:** "We have good relations with a *maulavi*<sup>63</sup> here. He said to me: "When you first came we didn't trust the idea of men's and women's shuras. When you spoke of working with women, we felt very sorry for you thinking: 'How sad that these fine, young people will be killed in this area'. We are amazed at the miracle that there are women's shuras everywhere."

**Religious Leader Sarepul:** "I am a *maulavi* and I have to be very strict but believe me, my wife went to the bazaar alone and bought what I'm wearing...Two years ago I went to Kohistanat with some women [in an official capacity]. In some places people were happy that we went with the women but in some places some people said in amazement: 'Look at the *maulavi* - he has come with the women'."

**Sarepul, DoWA Staff:** "Mullahs influence the behaviour of men with women. If a particular mullah tells people not to accept food bought with money which a woman has earned outside the house men will comply. He will tell them that if they eat such food they will go to hell in the next life."

Religious leaders are approached by many FPs to facilitate access to women in communities since they seem to regulate to a certain extent how much 'freedom' people should have. Some mullahs are very supportive of development and since they enjoy a unique position they can liaise and deal with women according to the context and the individual concerned. Mullah Fazeli in Nili, Daikundi for example said that he has advertised everywhere that he supports women's rights based on Islam and God's law. He said: "Nobody has the right to beat or insult a woman and there are many ayat that support this. Islam does not oppose women working but only opposes '*bi-hejab*' (not having appropriate cover) and '*bi-bandobari*' (a loose way of living)." He listed a number of other rights such as a man not being able to force a woman to work if she is breast feeding and so on. In comparison a prominent mullah in Parwan was very disparaging about the type of men who allow their wives to leave the house and participate in projects. Interestingly both these mullahs had not been contacted by FPs working in their catchment areas and in fact a number of people suggested that there should be better communication with mullahs since they talk about NSP in some of their Friday sermons. Mullah Fazeli had been given a negative view of NSP by those attending his sermons and he had not enquired further.

61 Nangarhar Women: "There is a lot of pressure on the men in the shura from other people in the community."

Jawzjan Men: "The elders made the ultimate decision on what projects should be chosen."

Surveyor in Herat: "The head of village told head of CDC off during our interview and silenced him."

Surveyor in Jawzjan: "The head of the CDC is commander and he is armed."

Nangarhar Men: "The head of the CDC is very powerful in his tribe."

Parwan Men: "There is qomandan salary (rule of commanders) here. The NSP road was built to the commander's house."

Paktia Men: "All the power is in the hands of the men and men only listen to the head of the tribe."

Parwan Women: Accusation that head of men's shura collaborates to split all NSP assistance with a local commander.

62 Other religious groups to watch out for in any area are tablighis or preachers, usually coming from Pakistan, who are appearing in some areas where NSP operates. They may not have a positive influence and need to be dealt with by the relevant authorities.

63 Cleric who has studied at a religious institution.



## Women Leaders

**Daikundi Men:** "Women are better leaders because they are merciful and less likely to be corrupt. Look at the governor of Bamian and how hard she is trying and then look at our governor who is corrupt and useless."

**Nangarhar DoWA:** "I have witnessed...men who are directors in high government and other posts come to my office and say: 'Find me a good, beautiful, fashionable girl because I want to marry for the second time'. I am forced to be tough with them and say I am here to work for women's rights not to pimp out women for lustful men. Then they say that a woman without help cannot get anywhere and that if I want men to give me importance then I should do what they tell me."

**Nangarhar Men:** "We have women parliamentarians from our district and we are proud that they are vying with men at Nangarhar level and we hope they succeed."

**Parwan Men:** "We can take Commander Kaftar of Baghlan as an example. At the moment she is at the same level as General Dostum or Shahnewar Tani. Every time something happens in Nahrin they want her advice and without her view nothing can go ahead. So it is clear that women can be leaders as well."

In spite of sexual harassment, intimidation and cultural barriers there are increasing numbers of women who have influence at district and provincial level. These women can negotiate and work from within the cultural, social and political frameworks particular to the area. Samia Sadat, MP for Parwan for example mentioned women's increasing presence in politics and her success in negotiating land-grab disputes against local commanders. They are isolated at times and face regular opposition from religious leaders and so on but they are persevering. There are also women who run large businesses<sup>64</sup>. Maulavi Abdulghani, Elder and provincial council member from Sarepul mentioned a well-respected Arab woman who comes to his district and solves everyone's conflicts. He also mentioned a woman who owns and controls 200 jeribs of land and another woman who is so rich that she has built a bridge in her area. He also mentioned Gul Shirin head of the NSP women's group from Bagram who was brought up to Sarepul by the NGO, Cooperation Centre for Afghanistan, with other conflict resolution trainers. There are also more and more professional women in provincial centres working as teachers, lawyers, doctors, running NGOs and as businesswomen. They can also be mobilised where feasible to encourage men in communities to allow women to enter into development processes. Once again NSP and FPs are rarely aware of who these women are and their potential value as strategic allies as they are role models and local people respect them. FPs should be aware of who such women are and try to engage them as allies to support the implementation of NSP with women.

### Ministry of Education and Teachers

The Ministry of Education has a vast resource across most provinces and this resource has infiltrated many CDCs – teachers. And yet a number of people interviewed from different ministries including education did not have sufficient information about NSP even though they were keen to collaborate. Teachers have access to a great source of information about every family in their catchment area through the students in their class. Where male or female teachers take key roles in the CDCs they promote different types of support to education for boys and girls e.g. school building, computer courses for boys and girls, adult literacy for young girls who have been forced to drop out of school. In a country with high non-literacy rates, it is not just teachers but also the educated who are a valuable resource. Growing numbers of educated young women are being involved in community affairs because their families and communities realise that they are a valuable resource e.g. doing the paperwork for programmes such as NSP or teaching adult literacy courses.

### Ministry of Women's Affairs (MoWA)

In the provinces the MoWA has representative offices. Some are more active than others; all would benefit from contact with NSP activities and in some cases could provide useful information to FPs. DoWA in Jawzjan for example claims to call in all the qariadars every fifteen days to discuss women's issues with them. Not all DoWAs are well linked in to district level networks but some are. Many women apply to DoWAs for assistance with problems related to conflict, disputes and violence.

<sup>64</sup> For example, Haji Gul Jan is a big female trader in Sheberghan and owns several shops and houses there.

### Afghan Women's NGOs (AWNGOs)

A greater number of AWNGOs are working in many provinces now, some with more success and experience than others. They generally have access to women and can be used to assist FPs who cannot find female SOs, work in conservative areas and are generally finding it difficult to reach women. In fact, some established AWNGOs work on peace building, women's rights in Islam, conflict resolution, violence against women and other sensitive topics giving them good access to communities. Men and women in communities mentioned them during interviews. In one case a well known AWNGO offered assistance to a FP in a difficult province but this was refused. The impact of NSP's work on women in the districts covered by this FP left a great deal to be desired. It must be noted that AWNGOs tend to be monopolised by more affluent women and they may not represent the reality of poorer sections of the community but they are still a resource.. They may also have limited understanding of concepts such as gender mainstreaming and gender equality but they have good access to women and may find it useful to have their own gender capacity strengthened.

### Youth

**Nangarhar Young Women:** There is no specific change here. Everyone is illiterate and nobody is allowed to go to school. And everyone's children belong to the people (i.e. controlled by what other people say) and to stop other people getting upset, mothers and father play with their children's future.

Young people are social capital and the next generation of decision makers and actors. Over half of the Afghan population is estimated to be below the age of 19<sup>65</sup> making youth concerns critical to any national programme in Afghanistan. Young girls are heavily policed by families and communities in Afghanistan because they are most likely to dishonour the family through their conduct. They feel very frustrated because their ambitions are frustrated. They cannot make choices about if they study, how long they study, who they marry, where they go, when they have children and how many, whether they work or not. If they want change, without support and guidance, they are powerless to make it. Young men also have limitations but not to the same extent.

## 6.2. Gender and Masculinity

"Including men in gender work is necessary because gender inequality is intimately tied to men's practices and identities, men's participation in complex and diverse gender relations, and masculine discourses and culture. Fostering gender equality requires change in these same arenas, of men's lives and relations."<sup>66</sup> Studies in other parts of the world have shown that there are detrimental effects of male exclusion and positive effects of male inclusion when striving to achieve gender equality and equity. In Afghanistan male hostility and retaliation to 'gender' is already visible. Men feel anxiety and fear when they sense that 'traditional' masculinities are being undermined. The best way to handle this is with inclusive renegotiation of gender relations. Some FPs are aware that they have to negotiate masculinity by 'buying men off' but this is a short term solution.

Men are gendered beings who participate in gender relations but this has not come through in most studies of gender in the Afghan context to date. In response to requests from male staff in NSP and FPs to show how gender is not only about women but also an issue which affects men, the research team explored possible reasons why men resisted change in gender relations. To do this the research team examined masculinity, an issue which impacts male staff of organisations as much as it impacts beneficiaries. When negotiating access to women and for women's participation we are bargaining with public perceptions of men's masculinity. This is a new area and interviewees found it difficult to articulate their experiences and feelings with ease but as the box below shows much interesting material was generated. This is a very exciting, new area which can make positive contributions to discussions on gender in the Afghan context.

<sup>65</sup> The figure given was 59.33% in UNFPA Afghanistan – A Socioeconomic and Demographic Profile and Household Listing 2003-2005

<sup>66</sup> Flood (2005)

**Daikundi Men:** "Here, men don't show their manliness by beating up and restricting women."

**FP Female Staff:** "Since I got a job my husband and I have hidden it from everyone. I tell everyone that I am a teacher in the school next to my house. They don't know that I work here with men. If they find out even though I have seven children they will throw me out of the house. And my husband will not be able to hold up his head in his father's house."

**FP Staff:** "Farida Taraneh from Afghan Star is called a hero. Ismail Khan was hero but now this singer is a hero and this is a great shame for us...And people from Kabul say to people from Herat 'Where is Setareh<sup>67</sup> from?' This is just to make Herati people feel ashamed."

**Herat Men:** "If women leave the house for a short time because they need to, nobody will say anything to their husbands, but if the woman leaves the house every day with make-up and doesn't come back until it gets dark we call that man a pimp and Islam says the same."

**Herat Men:** "In the past a girl went and had her photo taken at a studio. Her brothers found out and because of this simple matter three people were killed – the girl, the photographer and one other."

**Herat Men:** "There was an educated girl from our tribe and she read the news on Herat TV. People insulted me that the Ishakzais have lost their honour because their women are on TV. I was patient and kept telling myself that these people are ignorant but the same person who used to bother me has his sister on TV now."

**Jawzjan Women:** "I was a teacher. I put make up on. Everyone especially my husband's family would say 'You married a loose woman who does not cover [herself]<sup>68</sup>. But my husband promised me that if I did my own thing he would deal with people. Eventually people came and told my husband we will pay you double your wife's salary if you are not man enough to earn a living but don't let your wife leave the house and earn a living. But now as time has passed others have learnt, especially the man who said this to my husband."

**Nangarhar Men:** "In the past, if someone beat his wife, beat his children and stopped talking to his wife he was a very good man but it is not like that anymore. Everyone loves their wives because they know that women are the honour of life."

**Nangarhar Women:** "I sent my daughter to English course secretly without my sons knowing and my two sons don't really listen to what people say. But people insulted my younger son so much that in the end he stood in the doorway and said he will shoot himself if I don't stop my daughter going to the course so I stopped her."

**Paktia Elder:** "Naturally men are under the influence of custom and culture of the area and they may even have been threatened about their behaviour with their wives through jirgas and elders in their area – it is obvious that they are under pressure and threat since all men behave the same way towards their women and this in itself shows that all men have no authority and matters are told to them from somewhere else. A number who live in town are separate but generally everyone lives under one set of cultural principles...We should work with the new generation to change this."

**Paktia Tribal Elder:** "No other region gives women their rights the way Paktia people do. Kabul people force their women to go to work, Zadran people force their women to bring wood from the hills and to do farming work. People living on the frontiers force their women to get involved in drug production and processing and use them in other ways but in our area women just do some work at home and bring up the children and have no other responsibility."

**Paktia Women:** "Men imitate each other in day to day life. If my husband sees that an influential man allows his wife to do something then he will let me do the same...But even these conservative people we emulate go to Kabul and hold their weddings in expensive wedding halls and take their wives shopping with no burqas on."

**Paktia Young Men:** "Mullahs say that if someone lets their wife go out there will be less light on them in paradise and others will curse them."

**Parwan DoWA:** "In some districts like Koh-e Safi families felt that girls are in danger of being harassed by young men on the way to school...The community decided that a father is a *mordegaw*<sup>69</sup> if he sends his daughters to school."

**Parwan Men:** "One day someone said to me: 'Your mother goes around with the foreigners' because my mother had gone with the PRT team to discuss the clinic. I said: 'My mother is worrying about your wife so she can give birth here rather than in Qara Bagh.' He blushed and didn't say anything else."

<sup>67</sup> Another female contestant on Afghan Star, a programme where singers compete for a prize.

<sup>68</sup> The phrase used was much more graphic

<sup>69</sup> Pimp

**Parwan MoE Staff:** "The office of X was giving loans to women. They had told one of my friends that this is a bad place and women are trained how to be prostitutes and to do other bad things. Without checking the truth of the matter my friend attacked the office to set fire to it. Unfortunately as a result he was killed while killing a guard from the office...Such events still occur and in my opinion eliminating such events requires transparency in activities."

**Sarepul FP Staff:** "Even now at government level in Afghanistan our masters do not attend to gender well. We see a university graduate not allow his wife to work in an organisation or in government while he enjoys having a few women in his own office from morning till night for pleasure."

**(See Annex 2 for more quotes)**

Masculinity is very much about the public performance of a gender role. This becomes clear when men behave in one way in Kabul and another in their village, for example, because there are different audiences with different expectations. Some Gardez men will allow their women to move around on their own in Kabul where the number of people affords anonymity but if their women are seen to be travelling alone in the village environment people will question the man's manliness so he will not allow it. A great deal is about the ability to control. The notion of *aberu* or 'face' extends from individuals to the community in that men will try to solve problems, including sexual crimes against women within the home, then the village, so that the government does not hear and that village does not become 'bad nam' or dishonourable. Interference from the government would indicate loss of control and emasculate the leaders of the community, making them lose face in front of other communities. In this sense notions of community masculinity mean that men will not yield to government control thereby impacting rule of law and good governance.

In everyday life, men put pressure on each other to perform their gender roles as men, especially in the way they related to women. People can use insulting terms such as *zan zada* and *zan chust*<sup>70</sup> if a woman has obvious decision-making authority and autonomy at home. In such cases men might refer to each other as women's dogs or women's servants. Even in FPs men joke with each other about being hen-pecked and dominated by their wives. In one discussion FP male staff discussed why their wives did not work. One said that the pressure of society stops him sending his wife to work again. Another asked how long this man's wife would have to wait but he did not answer.

Only strong women go against constructions of masculinity which in turn determine women's identities and roles. Sima Gul, a women's group head in Parwan, has a history of going against norms which expect her to acquiesce to male authority. She secretly attended a sewing course in Panjshir and only stopped when her son used other relatives to pressure her. He utilized shame saying that people would say: «*Madaresho posht-e dollar ravan kard*»<sup>71</sup>. When her son insisted that she stop being the head of the NSP women's group, however, and had tried to appeal to his older male relatives to put pressure on her to stop she gave him a bloody nose. It can be assumed that when her activities brought benefit to the family and community her male relatives were more reluctant to acquiesce to her son's demands and put pressure on her. When male surveyors were interviewing the men's group her son was present. At the end of the interview one young man said to him: "See, even people in Kabul organisations have heard of your mother." The son turned red and left.

There are positive sides to masculinity which present opportunities for change. Men follow role models and in some areas these can be men who are considered powerful, wealthy and successful. Peer education may be a particularly valuable strategy for men, given the evidence that men's attitudes and behaviour are shaped in powerful ways by their male peers. For example, in some areas when men are aware that other villages have women's groups, they also agree to the formation of a women's group. Men can be encouraged to develop and emulate positive role models such as a good father, a good husband or a good brother. Discussions can be initiated in workshop environments around questions such as "how would you like your daughter to see or remember you?" Any programme which aims to address masculinity must take place in space which is not 'traditional' such as a mosque or similar space. Effective programmes require length and depth to reach the right level of intensity. As mentioned, this is a new approach to gender relations in the Afghan context. Interventions such as workshops and discussions need to be planned judiciously and handled with care.

70 Variations on hen-pecked

71 "He sent his mother after dollars."

### 6.3. Operating in a Context of Conflict

There are numerous conflicts within families and communities in Afghanistan. Left unchecked such conflicts can proliferate, escalate and stall development, destabilize a community and lower the quality of life for each and every member of the community. The most serious are over land, water rights, pasture rights, inheritance and related issues. Everyone in a community is drawn into these conflicts. Women as part of families are involved in these conflicts and suffer from them – a good example was where a conflict over a spring was forcing women from one village to make a large detour to fetch water from another source. Outside the home women may be raped or killed as a result of conflict and within the home women are also subjected to violence and emotional abuse over other sets of conflicts with husbands, in-laws and so on. Not only does NSP inevitably operate in a landscape of conflicts but it may create conflicts as well e.g. over elections for leadership, distribution of resources, location of infrastructure, etc.. This is easy to do in an environment of petty rivalries and deep mistrust, especially among women. Recognizing and using conflict resolution mechanisms and resources in a community and ensuring that people have the tools to deal with conflict become critical to the smooth running of NSP and women's participation therein.

**Herat Pushtun Men:** "In the past people's culture was such that when two clans fought first the elders would go and take their turbans off and ask beg that the fighting would stop and would try to solve the conflict but if they couldn't a group of women and tie knots in the other women's chadors. Then the fighting would stop. We brought this culture from Kandahar but now being in a new place has affected us and these customs are forgotten..."

**Herat Women:** "People say that the shura ate everything. We try to tell people but they don't want to understand».

**Nangarhar Men:** "Our women sometimes even solve conflicts in other villages. In another village there was a conflict among the women. A family had given a girl to a man who did not have his manhood and she was adamant that she would not stay with him. He created a lot of hassle and our women got us to intervene and fixed it by forcing the man to go to the doctor and give us the result. When it turned out that the girl's claims were true we got her divorce and now she is living her life."

**Nangarhar Men:** "If there is serious fighting, women will bring the Quran and men from respect for women and the Quran will stop fighting."

**Paktia Tribal Elder:** "Once we had a problem with a village. At night the elders agreed amongst themselves that we would go and solve the issue. And we took arms and ammunition but on the way we don't know how the women from that area got wind of it and barred our way and asked forgiveness and said end this killing. Believe me when I said my entire body was shaking and because of respect to women we turned back half way and I told all the men in the area that if anyone goes towards their village he will die by my hand. These customs still exist among us Pushtuns."

**Paktia Young Men:** "Sometimes when men see that a problem is not being solved they say to the women if you can solve this problem I will buy you this or promise other things. The women then have to solve the problem and so in Mangal and Mirzakah it is still the custom that women take the Quran and go to the enemies' house and beg forgiveness and invite them to end the conflict".

Conflict resolution training may improve relations between the sexes and reduce violence against women. In Parwan, conflict resolution courses implemented by a woman's NGO reduced disputes over issues such as irrigation water, wedding costs and so on. The programme gave women the skills and awareness to negotiate without resorting to violence. Also, within NSP, women and men need conflict resolution to deal with those who resent their election to leadership positions, accusations of corruption and misappropriation of project funds, etc. It is clear that conflicts occur at different levels and the resolvers are chosen according to power. It is not enough to give women conflict resolution training – the more powerful women are the more likely it is that they will be asked to become involved in community affairs. Peace workshops for men and women, especially elders increase women's expectations and access to local conflict resolution mechanisms.

It was clear that women engage in numerous family conflicts and that some engage in resolving such conflicts as well (See Section 4.1.2). Older women are expected to engage in such activities as part of



their gender roles, women who are considered to give good advice are sought out for such activities and some women are encouraged to take part after receiving peace or conflict resolution training. In Parwan, for example men in one village conceded that women take a large role in conflict resolution and that with the help of the woman running the NSP Women's Group they had solved 241 conflicts. A woman named Shabnam was mentioned from Bili village in Nangarhar. She is famed for her conflict resolution skills and people come from distant places to take her to their villages to solve conflicts. In Gardez several women were mentioned including Maldara, a lame woman whose family are *pirs*<sup>72</sup>. In Herat the men said that there are elderly, well-respected women who can get involved with family and other disputes and because they are elders (*kalan-e qawm*) people respect their decisions but generally men solve conflicts which arise between themselves. But generally the mullah is approached, then the elders and then government officials. Some men feel that it is shameful for women to become involved in conflict resolution and the rise of Islamism since the end of the Zahir Shah era may well have created a push to end women's traditional role in conflict resolution.

## Section 6 Recommendations

- NSP management should invest in regular research which facilitates the identification of drivers of change e.g. key actors, processes, gatekeepers, etc. Both NSP and FP provincial staff should be trained in how to use drivers of change to forward NSP objectives.
- A list of resources for work with women should include local NGOs lead by and/or working with women. To overcome outreach problems with women FPs can partner with available Afghan women's NGOs.
- Masculinity and gender is an important area to explore and address through workshops at every level. It can include discussions with men about 'what people will say' and social pressure. Another way of addressing masculinity into workshops and trainings is by discussing peer pressure, including negative and positive role models for fathers, husbands, brothers, etc.
- Groundwork from FPs for setting up women's groups should include an assessment of ongoing and past activities with women together with a review of information available from other organisations and institutions working in the area. A basic list of who, what, when, where and how.

72 Local religious leaders usually linked to a local shrine.



## 7. Understanding of and Exposure to Gender

**NSP Staff:** “Gender is a word which surveys the activities of women and men. As far as ordinary people are concerned it is negative and they think that it means ridiculous freedoms. These people think that you should keep a wife at home like a cow and force her to do heavy work and then use her for your sexual needs at night and that’s all.”<sup>73</sup>

**Nangarhar Tribal Elder:** “Gender is equal rights between men and women.”

Overall, at every level there appears to be confusion between gender and women’s rights. Many interviewees referred to ‘*huquq gender*’<sup>74</sup> which clearly indicates this confusion. In addition, many men and women both within FPs and in communities confuse the concept of equality between the sexes as men and women being exactly the same but this is erroneous. It is strongly believed that based on physical and mental prowess, men and women are not equal and men consistently argue this issue. The point of gender equality and equity is to ensure that women have the same access as men to what NSP offers. Men and women need appropriate training on gender, including masculinity issues, on human and women’s rights. Educating women on their rights and giving them gender awareness can help with resistance to improving gender relations from women who feel ashamed or feel that they are betraying their cultural or religious identity by becoming involved in processes such as NSP and opting for change. Engaging men, in discussions on masculinity, helps them see that gender does not just equal women and includes them in the process of achieving gender equality.

### 7.1. Gender in NSP

NSP must be commended for its commitment to addressing gender issues on a national scale in Afghanistan. Gender as a concept is not new in the Afghanistan development context. The concept was introduced around fourteen years ago and many people in the NGO sector have probably had workshops of varying qualities on the subject at this stage. Gender, women’s and human rights trainings held by a number of NGOs started shortly before the arrival of the Taliban and covered various regions. NGOs tried to involve and engage women in all sorts of ways all over Afghanistan; some went down the path of income generation while others tried to set up women’s groups, savings groups, healthy baby groups and so on<sup>75</sup>. In the absence of a legitimate central government, programming was inevitably scattered and numerous organisations worked independently in different provinces of Afghanistan. What is new is increasing pressure to mainstream it into national programmes on the scale of NSP and to acknowledge that it is an issue which has to be addressed.

Technical staff need awareness and guidance. The comment from the NSP engineering component was that they were ‘too busy’ for ‘external’ factors such as gender. Within technical departments there was little interest in gender – e.g. on water supply staff had no idea who collected water and whom their intervention would benefit, they did not feel it important to ask women about project design, even if women were the main end users. Engineers talk to men and assume that they are representing women. It is a common assumption among such departments that non-literate rural women cannot contribute to design and planning and that gender is something dealt with by other departments. With no empirical evidence they also assumed that women were universally happy with whatever they had been given. The usual add-on comment which is presented to end the ‘gender discussion’ is that there is a female engineer somewhere in the department.

Gender is an emotive issue since it involves changes in control and power in relations but it is also a very technical issue in that it requires people who understand this exchange of power and who can design and implement projects around such dynamics. Gender positions in organisations need to be taken seriously and filled responsibly by people who have the relevant technical knowledge and background. A gender professional has to facilitate the smooth inclusion of 50% of any community into a process or project while trying to reduce the potentials for conflict. In dealing with gender, adopting a position which opts for cultural

<sup>73</sup> This was the only interviewee who did not say that gender meant equality between men and women.

<sup>74</sup> ‘Gender rights’

<sup>75</sup> This information is based on the work of the lead researcher who has been engaged with gender programming in Afghanistan for the last 15 years.

relativism and a softly, softly approach which accepts endless excuses, grinds the process to a halt and is as damaging as a confrontational approach based on radical and culturally inappropriate positions. At the same time, gender should not be mystified or ghettoized to the extent that other staff are too alienated to get involved.

Both MRRD and NSP need adequate and effective support in addressing gender issues more effectively. The MRRD has a gender unit and a draft gender policy. There is no focal point for gender within NSP. The head of the Directorate of Planning which houses the gender unit acknowledges that this unit cannot provide support to other units yet. NSP has tried to guide FPs in the operational manual in how to include women. There is now a gender working group for NSP and FPs. All of this indicates a commitment which must be applauded. Although commitment seems to be there, interviews with NSP management level staff and field staff indicate that a sound technical understanding of gender leading to the capacity to effectively mainstream it in activities, thus impacting gender relations needs to be built up and strengthened both within MRRD and NSP. Actions speak louder than words and activities still seem to be focused on 'adding women' which is a good preliminary step but never enough in itself. The quantity of women is not always an effective indicator of gender equality and equity while measuring the quality of activities and outcomes is. Some FP staff stated that women's presence in village representation has been set as a goal by NSP but that no other clear goals with women have been set or insisted on. One FP felt that more guidance on what sort of gender equity results were expected would be helpful.

Overall, NSP tries to be an equal opportunities employer and to encourage FPs to take gender into consideration but there is still a dearth of people in management, be they male or female, who can ensure that programmes lead to gender equitable outcomes. Sound gender analysis is still lacking from much of the programme. At this stage, one can argue that in a difficult context such as Afghanistan with its current security regime any possibility to work with women deserves applause and leave it there. On the other hand one can argue that a programme with as much geographical coverage, resources and publicity as NSP should strive for excellence in every sector and set standards for other national programmes to follow, particularly in critical areas such as gender.

## 7.2. Supporting FPs in Gender Mainstreaming within NSP

Changing gender relations is not one of the stated goals of NSP but it is an assumed outcome of programme activities since expecting women to participate means that men must allow it. Expectations that women will participate in NSP, form groups and engage in activities all require shifts in gender relations which need to be planned, step by step. This in turn requires gender mainstreaming which is an organisational strategy to promote gender equality, depends on the skills, knowledge and commitment of the staff involved in management and implementation. "Evaporation" of policy commitments to gender equality is widespread in Afghanistan. Developing appropriate understanding, commitment and capacity, as well as addressing issues of gender inequality within development organisations themselves, is a long-term process of organisational change which requires funding and oversight. Appropriate capacity-building activities need to be explicitly included in policy and project documents and frameworks, backed up with staff and budgets, and monitored and reviewed through appropriate indicators of change.<sup>76</sup>

It is clear that NSP has come as far as it has through the tireless efforts of SOs, male and female, who form the core of NSP, and who have used opportunities and faced threats to involve and engage women but the road is long. In terms of gender mainstreaming leading to equitable distributions of development it should be considered the responsibility of all staff to:

- understand the different roles, responsibilities, and experiences of women and men in relation to the issue being addressed
- seek out opportunities to actively involve women as well as men in consultation and decision-making processes
- act on women's as well as men's priority concerns
- seek out ways to promote benefit for women as well as men
- be personally informed about gender issues and gender mainstreaming, and seek out ways of promoting this understanding and commitment amongst colleagues and partner organisations
- be aware of personal attitudes and behavior and the ways in which these affect communication with women and men and understanding of development and change.

Without good guidance on gender mainstreaming in NSP some FP staff find the prospect daunting. Male-staff appeared half-hearted and reluctant to address gender issues in anything more than a tokenistic manner in some FPs. FP staff often do not challenge the status quo, traditional representation and existing gender relations and may propagate existing gender stereotypes as a result. In fact, in a number of situations with male FP staff in the field the most palpable emotion was fear related to the real and imagined consequences of addressing gender issues. In spite of the plethora of gender awareness courses some FP and NSP staff denied receiving gender awareness training as did the majority of men and women in CDCs<sup>77</sup>. For FP staff, there seems to be a strong perception (or hope) that dealing with gender issues, altering gender relations and involving women is somehow optional<sup>78</sup> or not to be taken seriously and that it can be discarded using excuses such as security.

For those FPs who do not have a long-term commitment to gender equality and equity their capacity and staff are already stretched by financial and contractual issues related to NSP and all the other programmes they run to survive. Some FP SOs complained that the push for quantity of communities absorbed by NSP jeopardises the quality of interaction and can weaken the basis of other interventions and programmes implemented by the same organisation in the same area: FP FSO: "Without a NSP shura it is difficult to access people and implement projects. NSP is a foundation. It is the mother of all our projects." A focus on ever-growing quantitative targets, leaves less time for the hierarchy of programmatic issues in which gender is never a priority. Some FP staff in fact appear not to set gender goals in case it is perceived as culturally insensitive for communities and may 'create problems' which only increase the amount of staff time and money which has to be spent.

Organisational cultures should support male staff to approach gender positively based on professionalism and commitment rather than punished for what may be perceived as an inappropriate interest to go against Afghan culture to include women. As development professionals male and female staff must show equal interest in the activities of colleagues as well as status and progress of male and female beneficiaries. A number of FP male staff, social organisers in particular can be prevailed upon by female colleagues to negotiate with men in a community when programme activities reach an impasse. Many male (and female) field staff bring their own prejudices and thoughts to a programme and rarely try to assess the situation on the ground in a neutral manner. This can only be altered with constant trainings and discussions. To provide some examples, some male staff may think that showing interest in women's activities is culturally inappropriate or none of their business.

Last but not least, monitoring and evaluating gender equity and equality in NSP can be done from a project delivery angle or from a social engineering angle. The latter approach would require indicators which reflect behavioural change and social change. A focus on quantitative indicators can lead to false perceptions of achievement. The extreme difficulty male staff displayed in NSP and FPs in articulating advancements for women as a result of NSP during interviews, beyond a limited set of phrases<sup>79</sup>, may indicate that they are not used to being asked questions about gender beyond 'how many women?' and 'were they happy?'. They may not have been paying attention to such developments or they have not been assisted to develop indicators which can help them describe the qualitative changes more effectively. At present, within the NSP monitoring system, it is difficult to identify exactly which indicators demonstrate changes in gender relations.

<sup>77</sup> Most telling in this respect is a recent meeting on NSP in high risk areas. As the external security interlocutor who was attending the meeting recounted, when it was explained that FPs would not have to deal with women in such areas, many men gathered asked why they could not jettison gender all together. When this possibility was refused men asked what the criteria for high risk area was in the hope that by claiming to be in a high risk area they could avoid having to deal with women's issue.

<sup>78</sup> One interviewee explained that the lack of a comprehensive gender training and guidance package from NSP indicates that gender is 'optional'.

<sup>79</sup> The following phrases were endlessly repeated as indicative of changes in gender relations as a result of NSP: 'Women do not have the problem of collecting water anymore'; 'Better roads mean women in labour can be taken to clinics', etc.

### 7.3. Female Staff in FPs and NSP

**Female surveyor in Behsud, Nangarhar:** “When we asked male [FP] staff whether female social organisers had explained the programme to women or not they became aggressive and said with anger that the limitations of women in Islam are clear and that men provide food and water for them. They said Kabuli women want to lead local women astray.”

A cadre of well informed, trained and experienced female staff is critical for the success of any project which includes a gender component. Support of male staff to female staff is also a key factor. Having women in senior management does not mean that gender will be ‘fixed’ but it does give a strong signal as to the commitment of NSP to gender equality and equity. Since for many gender equals women it is often left almost entirely up to female staff to optimize women’s participation in the NSP development process. It has to be added that male staff in some FPs are supportive of female staff and thoughtful on how to include women. In one case, a woman was elected treasurer but did not have an identity card. The head of NSP in the FP wanted to support the participation of women so he approached the provincial governor and sent a mobile team up to the community to register people and issue identity cards.

Women cannot perform miracles in outreach to women and may face the same difficulties as men in dealing with conservative communities. Interviewees highlighted the following issues as factors influencing the difficulty to employ competent female staff in NSP:

- Not all FPs provide attractive salaries for female staff and this can act as a deterrent. Women feel that they are underpaid and overworked in comparison to male counterparts.
- Local perceptions of women working in offices are still negative. The DOWA head in Nangarhar explained that some men think that women have only been employed in offices for their use and pleasure. AIHRC is recording cases of sexual harassment and assault in government and non-government offices.
- Even in FPs with the best intentions women still have difficulty accessing office equipment and transport facilities.
- Women are disadvantaged by culture in building up rapport with male superiors and similarly male support of female staff can be portrayed negatively. Similarly it is inappropriate for male staff to show interest in the advancement of competent female staff.
- Families put pressure on women not to work and many women still have the burden of housework in addition to their responsibilities in the office. Women cannot work if they do not have family support especially from husbands who may help with housework and child care. Some women cannot work because of the lack of childcare facilities.
- Female staff should be allowed and encouraged to participate and inform themselves about projects and activities of an organisation. Office layouts e.g. putting women in small offices away from spaces where main decision-making and management takes place, may marginalize female staff at work.
- Lack of respect and interest shown by male staff in work and contribution of female colleagues can be discouraging.
- Women hired for competency rather than fact that they are female. In the latter case female staff will be hired but discouraged from voicing opinions or trying to achieve goals. They are window dressing.

Female SOs in particular are critical for reaching, mobilising, training and informing women in communities but face many problems. Female SOs take huge risks physically and otherwise, sometimes travelling narrow paths on foot and taking risks in entering hostile communities with guard dogs in remote places. They may have to be hired from other provinces or districts due to lack of educated or experienced women in an area of operation. Although female SOs, like their male counterparts, can often build up a vast amount of institutional memory about the social fabric of communities, they would appear to be the first casualties of funding loss for an FP. It is self-evident that in order to improve outreach to women the number of FSOs has to be increased. The quality of FSOs also needs attention. At times it would seem that for some FPs any literate woman will do while in others FSOs are extremely competent, well-trained and supported.

## Section 7 Recommendations

- Gender needs to be recognised as a pertinent technical issue, which requires expertise. Filling gender roles within institutions need to be taken more seriously than they are at present. Young, inexperienced women with English and computer skills may not be the best candidates for filling such roles which involve both understanding of concepts and the ability to negotiate for results.
- FPs need support and guidance to mainstream gender within NSP activities so that they prioritise gender and are not daunted by the prospect of including women in the NSP process.
- There is a need for gender awareness courses for NSP staff and FPs which are tailor-made to their activities. Such courses should include the basic building blocks of the concept of gender but then follow on with specific technical inputs which inform the relevant sectors.
- NSP needs professionals who can help with the process of gender mainstreaming within the institution, programme and process.
- Both NSP and FP staff need assistance to help them develop indicators which can help them measure and describe changes in gender relations more effectively.
- Deterrents for professional females must be taken into consideration and addressed within NSP and FPs if more positions are to be filled by women.

## 8. Conclusions

NSP has achieved unprecedented, widespread involvement of women in rural Afghanistan's community decision-making apparatus with interesting and exciting changes albeit on a modest scale which can be built up with appropriate interventions. NSP has provided a unique opportunity for women to participate in the development process from a government-sanctioned platform, allowing women to gather and discuss their development priorities within a formal framework for the first time and have their concerns taken seriously. This has had profound impact on certain individuals and communities. NSP has also provided many women with the possibility to learn skills or become literate. Infrastructure projects have changed the quality of life for women and men in communities across Afghanistan. Gender inequality within any development programme, however, represents a huge loss of human potential, with costs for men as well as for women and NSP is no exception. This is a lesson which has reached policy makers and project implementers in the Afghan context but much more can be done.

The main determinants of gender inequity in CDCs include a range of issues. Women's low status together with FP and community lack of recognition of their roles and abilities reinforce gender stereotypes about the importance of men and the subordinate and minor role of women. Overall, pressure for men to be masculine in performing gender roles limits women's mobility, decreases their confidence, limits information, denies them control of funds and leads to interference in women's activities. These all hinder the achievement of gender equity in NSP. Women often lack experience and need much more time and training to be improve their capacity to engage with and manage the development process in their community. The threat of violence or abuse is also an indirect but ever present factor, limiting women's voice, mobility and ability to be proactive. Lack of appropriate spaces and inability to control their own time and labour are also contributing factors. There are variations in gender relations according to the predominant ethnic groups in the region creating modalities in approaches which should be taken.

Gender segregation at various stages of the development process does not lead to team building between men and women and does not always improve gender relations. In fact, even though women are 'given' a project, often as passive recipients, such moves do not lead to gender equity as women are excluded from the community level development process. Women may be involved in the NSP process to choose a project and so on but may not have access to and control of the outcome. There are ways to try and ensure that women, especially those from vulnerable categories do not get denied access to community goods. Elite capture also contributes to gender inequity. Many women in communities are poor and their views not represented in groups effectively formed by men. In terms of quantity NSP and FPs have tried to achieve goals for women's participation. The quality of women's participation in CDC consultative decision-making processes has been low until now. High quality participation is better for ensuring sustainability of results than quantity alone. The quality of participation has been impacted by men in CDCs blocking information, lack of structured, two-way communication between men and women's groups, men controlling project funds and largely ignoring any input which women may want to make. Lack of women's confidence and confidence in women also block progress on gender equity. Men interfere a great deal in women's groups, directly or indirectly which coupled with FP inability to identify and support good women leaders leads to weak women's groups.

NSP is implemented in a wide array of settings, with men in communities at different places along the continuum from passive indifference to active intervention on gender relations. Catering for such a range of outlooks and expectations requires technical capacity for gender analytical assessment to critically assess starting points for promoting women's involvement and organisational commitment to respond to the situation on the ground with appropriate interventions, back by appropriate policy and programme options. Misunderstanding of gender as a women's issue has meant that gender programming has been condensed down to a number of small capacity development projects and women's participation in meetings at during discrete phases of the NSP process, a good first step but not the endpoint of the journey to gender equity.

One of the main reasons cited for not involving women in NSP was lack of effective outreach to women. This was due to lack of female staff, conservative attitudes in an area, perceived insecurity, etc. It was found that not all FPs invest the same time and effort in reaching women. There is a dearth of good female staff in the field and both NSPs and FPs at times need to examine any reluctance to field female staff or to give them full support in the field. NSP provincial staff must regularly highlight the commitment to gender in regular interactions with FP field staff, discussing indicators, goals, successes, obstacles and seeking



solutions. Overall, at every level within NSP there appears to be confusion between gender and women's rights. Educating women on their rights and giving them gender awareness can help with resistance to improving gender relations from women who feel ashamed or feel that they are betraying their cultural or religious identity by becoming involved in processes such as NSP and opting for change. Engaging men, in discussions on masculinity, helps them see that gender does not just equal women and includes them in the process of achieving gender equality.

NSP must be commended for its commitment to addressing gender issues on a national scale in Afghanistan. Both MRRD and NSP need adequate and effective support in addressing gender issues more effectively. NSP tries to be an equal opportunities employer and to encourage FPs to take gender into consideration but there is still a dearth of people in management, be they male or female, who can ensure that programmes lead to gender equitable outcomes. Sound gender analysis is still lacking from much of the programme. For those FPs who do not have a long-term commitment to gender equality and equity their capacity and staff are already stretched by financial and contractual issues related to NSP and all the other programmes they run to survive. Without good guidance on gender mainstreaming in NSP some FP staff find the prospect daunting.

A cadre of well informed, trained and experienced female staff is critical for the success of any project which includes a gender component. Support of male staff to female staff is also a key factor. Female SOs in particular are critical for reaching, mobilising, training and informing women in communities but face many problems. The encyclopaedic knowledge of SOs needs to be downloaded, analysed and used to improve gender equity within NSP. One way to keep SOs engaged with NSP and to download their enormous store of information in a coherent manner to be used for lessons learned, baseline data etc. is as part of a long term endeavour linked to an academic establishment such as a diploma study programme.

NSP policy to encourage the inclusion of women, various expressions of FP commitment to gender equality and most importantly community willingness to push women into programmes all contribute to women's involvement in NSP. In most communities, however, women still have some way to go to be involved in decision-making and representative local leadership. In order to increase women's meaningful participation in NSP it is necessary to insulate them from the influence of men rather than to segregate or isolate them. Insulation here means awareness of negative influences and steps to counter them. Women's independent choice in selecting candidates to run women's groups, for example, is likely to result in a higher and more dynamic level of women's participation in NSP.

Women need to be informed about NSP processes and attend meetings which provide a forum in which they can actively participate. Women's participation in programmes like NSP will only be meaningful if their contribution is valued and they are recognised as social capital by all stakeholders. Women will not mobilize if they do not feel confidence and support, especially where there are high levels of intimidation of and violence against women and girls. Where women are not used to assuming positions of authority, considerable groundwork is needed to help them develop the self-confidence and assertiveness skills they need to deal with village authorities. Where there is violence alliances must be built with those who work to eliminate such behavior.

Gender equality and equity cannot be achieved without a recognition that men's behaviours and attitudes need to change. There needs to be a clear realization that men have a role and a stake in fostering gender equality and equity, this applies to NSP management all the way down to men in communities. Funding can be used as one form of leverage to increase women's participation, reducing funding to communities with no women's participation using funding as leverage, in tandem with appropriate workshops to discuss the benefits of women's participation. Similarly, CDC leaders, communities, FPs who show a genuine interest in women's activities and wish to help women's groups participate as partners in the development process should be rewarded with extra funding, maybe in the form of prizes. Drivers for change which can be more effectively utilised to facilitate women's participation can also include 'gender advocates' in government and civil society. Recognising existing processes of change gives NSP and FP staff an opportunity to integrate their work into locally accepted processes of change, reducing the risk of conflict and resistance.

Currently CDCs reflect and further women's development priorities as men from specific socio-economic groups see them. The interests of different socioeconomic groups of women and men (younger women, poor women, disabled women, female headed households, landless households, etc.) are not always represented. Inputs do change the quality of women's lives and skills are transferred using HCD projects

but the impact of NSP could be much better. Community men and FP staff continuously buy into the assumption that women have no skills whereas the problem statement is more often that women in specific age groups have skills but cannot use them profitably. Marketing projects which use existing skills, for example, can be cost-effective and high impact ways of addressing women's concerns about unemployment and livelihood.

NSP has generally improved mobility for women, giving them somewhere legitimate to go on a regular basis, uniting women with a singular purpose for the first time. Some CDCs agree that NSP training has familiarized women with issues that enable them to participate more effectively in community life by meeting and discussing. Where active women in communities were looking for an opportunity to take some sort of leadership role and handle projects in the community, NSP unwittingly gave them this opportunity and the FP helped them build a platform. When men and women say that women are involved in decision-making as a result of NSP one has to be aware that there are different levels of access and control and that women's status may only have changed in a few cases. The focus of involving women in NSP CDCs and the development process must be on improving gender relations rather than 'adding' women. The question for NSP and FP management to determine and plan for is what level of participation they want to achieve with women and how.

## Annex (1) Interviewees

### CDC and non-CDC members

Province	District	Village	Ethnic Group	Comment	Women	Men
Daikundi	Nili	Kitijik	Hazara	Mixed Shura	3	0
Daikundi	Nili	Shamak	Hazara	Mixed Shura	4	4
Daikundi	Nili	Surkhbedak	Hazara	Mixed Shura	1	0
Daikundi	Shahristan	Siahnaqur	Hazara	Mixed Shura	8	5
Herat	Kohsan	Gawhar Shad	Tajik		12	6
Herat	Kohsan	Islamqalaye Junubi	Mixed		5	5
Herat	Kohsan	Kelate Ghazi Sufla + Olia	Tajik, Pushtun		5	4
Herat	Kohsan	Qalai Nawak	Tajik, Pushtun, Baluch		7	4
Herat	Kohsan	Qudusabad	Baluch, Pushtun		3	6
Herat	Kohsan	Sarerig	Tajik		8	6
Jawzjan	Sheberghan	Jalalabade Bala + Poyin	Mixed	No women's shura	5	8
Jawzjan	Sheberghan	Misirabad Shuraye Wasat	Uzbek		5	8
Jawzjan	Sheberghan	Misirabad-e Bala + Poyin	Uzbek		5	3
Jawzjan	Sheberghan	Sufi Qale	Uzbek		9	0
Nangarhar	Behsud	Nahr Shahi Qalai Ishaq	Pushtun, Tajik, Other		1	5
Nangarhar	Behsud	Ada	Pushtun		6	1
Nangarhar	Behsud	Ahmadzai	Pushtun		0	8
Nangarhar	Behsud	Ghundi Maqam Khan	Pushtun		3	0
Nangarhar	Behsud	Khuskum bet	Pushtun, Tajik, Arab		5	0
Nangarhar	Behsud	Majburabad Nahie Chahr	Pushtun, Tajik		1	3
Nangarhar	Behsud	Payenda Koli	Pushtun, Tajik, Arab		0	6
Nangarhar	Behsud	Sarache Ali Khan	Pushtun, Tajik, Arab	No Shura	0	3
Nangarhar	Surkhrud	Naghrak-e Poyin	Pushtun, Tajik		3	5
Nangarhar	Surkhrud	Sultanpur-e Sufla	Pushtun, Tajik		1	5
Paktia	Ahmadaba	Bala Deh	Pushtun			4
Paktia	Ahmadaba	Mangalbad	Pushtun		2	5
Paktia	Ahmadaba	Raishkel	Pushtun		1	3

Paktia	Ahmadaba	Salam Khel	Pushtun		3	5
Paktia	Ahmadaba	Shamshirabad	Pushtun		6	4
Paktia	Ahmadaba	Yargulkhel	Pushtun		4	5
Paktia		Habib Qala Fatehkhel	Pushtun		1	0
Parwan	Bagram	Ghulam Ali	Tajik		6	14
Parwan	Jabul Saraj	Monara	Tajik		8	5
Parwan	Jabul Seraj	Madadkhel	Tajik		10	12
Parwan	Said Khel	Adin Khel	Pushtun		5	3
Parwan	Said Khel	Shaikh Ali	Tajik, Pushtun	3	5	
Parwan		Dasht-i Rubat	Tajik		6	1
Sarepul	Sarepul	Baghwicheye Khord	Mixed	Mixed Shura	5	0
Sarepul	Sarepul	Sailbur	Mixed	Mixed Shura	4	1
Sarepul	Sarepul	Yekab Dasht	Mixed	Mixed Shura	4	3
Total:					168	165

## NSP – MRRD Staff

Maxwell Stamp	Xavier Bardou	NSP Advisor to the Director of Operations
MRRD – NSP	Engineer Zaki Ahmad	NSP Provincial Manager Parwan
MRRD – NSP	Abdul Rahman Ayubi	NSP Director of Operations
MRRD – NSP	Engineer Jamila	Engineering
MRRD – NSP	Meena Azizi	Human Capital Development
MRRD – NSP	Engineer Ahmadzai	Head of Monitoring and Evaluation Department
MRRD - NSP	4 male staff members	Social organizers Nangarhar
MRRD - NSP	Engineer Roshan	Daikundi
MRRD – NSP	Engineer Karimullah	NSP Provincial Manager Paktia

## NSP – FP Staff

AKF HQ	Danny Cuthrell	
BRAC - Nangarhar	6 male staff	NSP Social Organisers Behsud
BRAC - Nangarhar	2 female staff members	NSP Social Organisers Behsud
BRAC HQ	Mujib Rahman	NSP Project Manager
CARE HQ	Mohamad Wakil	
CARE - Paktia	Male staff, 1 female staff member	NSP Social Organisers, provincial staff
CHA - Herat	5 male staff members, 1 female staff member	NSP Social Organisers and engineers Kohsan
CHA - Herat	3 male staff members	Herat Office
CHA HQ	3 staff members	NSP, Programme Manager
CHA HQ	Mir Shamsuddin Feroz	Education Sector
DACAAR HQ		NSP
GRSP HQ		Director
GRSP HQ		NSP
Oxfam - Daikundi		Provincial Manager
Oxfam - Daikundi	3 male staff members	NSP social organisers, advocacy
Oxfam - HQ	Engineer Juma	
UN Habitat - Parwan	5 female staff members	NSP Social organisers
UN Habitat - Parwan	5 male staff members	NSP Social organisers, engineers
UN Habitat - Parwan	Engineer Hassan	Provincial Manager
UN Habitat HQ	Engineer Rahimi	
PIN HQ	Ahmadzai	
ZoA HQ	Cor Verduijn	Programme Manager North
ZoA Jawzjan	Engineer Parwaneh	
ZoA Jawzjan	3 male staff members	NSP social organisers
ZoA Sarepul	3 male staff members, 1 female staff member	NSP social organisers

## Other – Afghan Government and Related

AIHRC - Nangarhar	Mirwais Ahmadzai	Director Nangarhar
AIHRC - Nangarhar	Hashema	
AIHRC Paktia	Dr Bedar	Director
AWEC - Paktia	Mahera	
MoE - Parwan		Head of DoE
MoWA - Daikundi	Hawa Rezai	Head of DoWA
MoWA - Jawzjan	Latifa Saidzadeh	Legal Advisor
MoWA - Jawzjan	Fazele Niazi	Gender Advisor
MoWA - Jawzjan	Ziba Hamkar	Information and Advocacy
MoWA - Nangarhar	Pohanyar Sheila Babari	Head of DoWA
MoWA - Paktia	Halima Khazan	Head of DoWA
MoWA - Parwan	Shahjan	Head of Dowa
MoWA - Sarepul	2 female staff members	
MRRD	Haidari	
MRRD - Paktia	Nazir Mangal	
MRRD	Wahid Hamidi	
Parwan	Samia Sadat	Member of Parliament

## Other

Daikundi	Mullah Fazeli	Religious Leader
Parwan	3 men	Members of Dasht-i Rubat agricultural cooperative
Herat, Kohsan	Mawlawi Arbab Ghulam Faruq	Religious Leader
Herat, Kohsan, Mirza Mustafa Beg village	Arbab Alef Khan,	Local leader
Jawzjan	Qadise	Head teacher, Sheberghan High School
Jawzjan	Nazira	Female commander, Sheberghan
Paktia	Haji Hassan Khan	Tribal elder of Fathullahkhel
Paktia	Khajeh Elias	Tribal elder
Paktia	Arefeh	Well known conflict resolver in village cluster
Erja Women's Shelter - Parwan	Maria Samimi	Director
Parwan	Maulavi Shah Agha	Head of Ulema Shura in Parwan

## Other – NGO/UN

AHRO Jawzjan	Carol Le Duc	Gender Expert
AHRO Jawzjan	Maghferat Samimi	
UNDP	Diba	
AREU	Palwasha Kakar	
AREU	Paula Kantor	Director
AREU	Epifania Amu-Adare	
World Bank	Hamish Nixon	Subnational Governance and Service Delivery Specialist



## Annex (2) Interviewee Comments

### Context

**Jawzjan Women:** "People used to run away when a car came to the village. Now they gather round to see what is happening."

**Herat Women:** "If you went to the district in the old days they wouldn't even let you back in the house."

**Parwan Women:** "We all heard about the American women pilots bombing the Taliban so tell me why Afghan women should sit around waiting at home for something to happen?"

**Parwan Women:** "In the beginning our husbands put a lot of restrictions on us but now they cooperate with us and advise me. When I was pregnant for the first time I almost died but my father-in-law didn't let me go to the doctor and said: 'It is not necessary that we give the doctor an opportunity to enjoy himself just to keep you alive.' This happened 37 years ago but now my father-in-law has two other brides who can leave the house with no problems. When my husband's nephew was getting married my father-in-law sent seven men with me when I went shopping but now a girl can go shopping with two women."

**Parwan Men:** "Women didn't have banks before and if men did not give them money they had no other source of income. This has changed. Security has improved so women are more mobile. They can go to work and visit. Forced marriage and bad have largely finished. There are many programmes which raise men and women's awareness on different issues."

**Daikundi, Religious Leader:** "Women's rights have improved and people understand more. Before, there was an ignorant sense of shame. People didn't know about their religious rights."

**Parwan Women:** "In the old days if a woman tried too obviously to influence her husband and family life he would marry another woman to teach her a lesson or she would be beaten. It is not the same nowadays."

**Sarepul Religious Leader:** "When I used to tell people that in Iran and Pakistan men and women sit next to each other people would say Maulavi Ghani is lying but now they sit next to women themselves and hold meetings and chat."

**Herat Men:** "I even have to ask my wife for money for cigarettes and snuff sometimes. She nags me about the impact of smoking on my health. We cannot do anything without our wives commenting nowadays and they know about everything."

**Paktia Men:** "We have seen ourselves that when a boy marries he has taken his wife and left his mother and father and gone. His poor father works as a labourer and the son has taken his wife to Kabul."

**Herat Men:** "In the past we were illiterate and we grew up chasing our cows and sheep. We gave girls in exchange for blood crimes and other issues but in these final years especially after coming back from Iran these types of customs have decreased a great deal."

**NSP staff:** "People's expectations have changed...I know people who could no longer bear to live in their villages after they became refugees...They sold everything and went to town."

**Paktia Women:** "In our village before we became refugees we did not go to each other's houses but since we came back from Pakistan we always get together and talk about the problems of the village to find solutions. We then discuss with the men. In our house there are always all kinds of projects from NGOs for women and girls and everyone in the village allow their womenfolk to come to our house."

**Nangarhar Men:** "We have gone back 200 years since Doctor Najib's time. I used to be able to go to town and travel around with my wife. Now she has to wear a burqa and people still insult me for taking her out of the house."

**Parwan Men:** "40 years ago the district governorate was here but we did not cooperate with the district governor or the government. Now we know that that was a mistake. We have managed to get a school and tarmac on our road here with great difficulty. Now we have plans to build a hospital."

## Inheritance

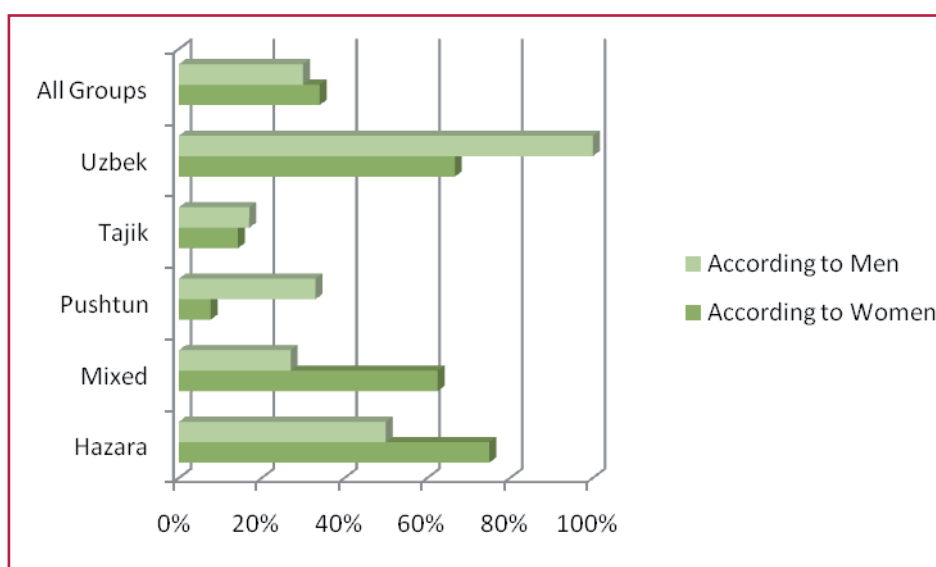


Figure 5: % of Women Receiving Inheritance

**Parwan Women:** "It is shameful for a woman to want the inheritance her father has left her. And if a woman asks for her dowry she is asking for a divorce."

**Pushtun man, Herat:** "Tajiks give inheritance - not us."

**Sarepul Women:** "For inheritance, fathers must give while they are alive otherwise brothers will never hand it over after the father is dead."

**Parwan Women:** "In our village it is shameful for a woman to want inheritance from her father's house. The dowry should be given to a woman when she gets divorced – if she asks for that money she is asking for divorce. No woman has rights over her property. All of her property is in the hands of the man and she cannot sell or give away one bangle of her own accord."

**Herat Women:** «If a husband is good he won't beat up his wife to go get her inheritance».

**Paktia Tribal Elder:** "It is not our custom to give inheritance to women. I have 300 jeribs of land and I have never thought about giving any of it to my daughters."

**Paktia Men:** "Yes according to sharia principles women have the right to receive inheritance but we have not given it to them. Such things are shameful among us, to take our wives' inheritance. Everyone has the same opinion."

**Sarepul FP Staff:** "Only the Pushtuns don't give women an inheritance – women get inheritance and the whole family lives on it but if the husband takes another wife he loses access to the first wife's inheritance and only her children can access it."

**Daikundi Women:** "Women would inherit land and land is kept in the family by blood not marriage if there are no heirs."

**NSP staff Sheberghan:** "Recently a man died and his daughters inherited 45000 USD each. This building we are in is rented from a woman who inherited it."

**Nangarhar Men:** "Brothers pay funeral costs for their sisters so women don't inherit. If they insist on inheritance their bodies will remain unburied."

**Paktia Women:** "We give inheritance to my sister-in-law because she has a son and she has the right over us. We cannot marry her because of her son and we don't have a young man in our family to marry her to. If she marries her son will belong to us. It is not our custom to marry her to a stranger."

**Jawzjan Men:** "Inheritance is a right according to sharia and if someone does not give women their inheritance their men will say 'Go and get it!'. Right now there are men who live off their wife's inheritance. Next door to us the land was inherited by the wife and the man cultivates it."

**Paktia Women:** "Women in our village have never received inheritance and it is not our custom and if someone has a daughter but no son his property and his daughter will be inherited by his brothers".

## Education

**Parwan Men:** "Even until four or five years ago girls studied until class seven or eight. When they reached puberty their fathers considered it shameful to send them to school. In every class there were five to twelve students. But now girls finish class twelve but there is no provision for them to continue; we have no university. Girls have become very interested in education and in every class there are now forty or fifty students. Girls show more aptitude than boys. And luckily all of their educational issues are well within the confines of Islamic doctrine...In the past we were told not to study at university because we would become pagans but now I hope that my children will complete their higher education".

**Paktia Women:** "My daughter studied a little while we were refugees and now she reads anything written. She cries and asks me why we came back to a place where there is no school."

**Paktia Men:** "At first I took 30 girls in the school and people were upset with me because they did not like the idea. The culture and context didn't allow it but three years have passed and now people bring their daughters willingly which is why we now need a separate school for the girls. If you go to Chamkani, they have had girls' schools for years because they are on the border, they have seen Pakistan and been influenced by their culture. In our villages it is difficult because our women and girls have only seen the four walls of their houses and what men say has a great influence on families. Now people say if nothing at least their women and girls should be able to read the Quran. There is a huge difference between a literate person and an illiterate one."

**Jawzjan NSP Staff:** "Educated women take their children to work with themselves whereas uneducated women give their opium to put them to sleep."

**Nangarhar Men:** "This is the story of my family. When I was the commander of the ghund and I had 400 soldiers under me I used to tell my youngest daughter when you grow up I will send you to school and I will drive you to school myself. Now I encourage my nieces the same way and we are all trying to ensure that in the next generation our women and girls are educated because only women can solve women's problems."

## Level of Participation

**Jawzjan Women:** "We didn't know too much about the project. People came from NSP and said what would you like to build? And you have this much money."

**Paktia Women:** "When we women had a meeting we agreed that we need to build a clinic because women and children become sick a lot but until men are free nobody can take them to the hospital. But when we talked to the men's shura the head of the shura said that it would be better to build a community hall because when there was a funeral in someone's house, it would get dusty and muddy and anyone would be able to use this hall for wedding and funeral ceremonies and their houses would remain clean. The women agreed and when the hall was built everyone contributed the necessary items."

**Nangarhar Men:** "We do not allow women to participate in all sorts of matters but in NSP we were forced to consult with them...Nobody cares about women's opinions."

**Nangarhar DOWA Staff:** "Women have not been given the right to decide anything in NSP...When we go for monitoring in the districts we ask the women why do you only choose sewing projects. They verify that the men buy the machines and bring them and say this is the only thing you can do."

## Violence Against Women

### Violence:

**Sarepul Women:** "I am a woman who has seen a lot of sadness because my husband beat me a lot. He always beat me until I was bloodied because he wanted to take another wife and in the end he did. In these past years he has separated us and does not pay our living costs. I have a son and three daughters and he has disinherited us. At the moment my son is in class 12 and after school he works in the bazaar doing heavy labour for 100 to 200 Afs a day and that is what we live on."

**Jawzjan NGO Staff:** "Men beat, starve and burn their wives to ensure they weave carpets faster... Men have three or four wives each so they don't care if they die in childbirth."

**Gardez NGO Staff:** "Women are being beaten to get wood but this is not against their rights but because of necessity."

**Nangarhar AIHRC Staff:** "Dr Nazi is a young and capable doctor and some time back with a great deal of trouble she agreed to marry a young suitor. He has threatened her and told her that if she continues her profession he will kill her. Since she is no longer safe at home and she has applied to us we are keeping her in a shelter."

### Shelter:

**Parwan Shelter Staff:** "People still have a very negative attitude towards the setting up of this shelter because they do not understand the value of such a place. They say since we started this shelter crimes against women have increased a great deal... We have been threatened by the police in some cases such as when a twenty year old man raped an eleven year old girl. The police wanted to hide this but we made the matter official so the police spread a lot of bad press about us."

### Children:

**Sarepul DoWA Staff:** "Men set their eyes in pre-pubescent girls here and many girls are married before they become adolescents... Girls have been exchanged for blood crimes and to exact revenge we have cases where men have slept with five year old girls."

**Nangarhar AIHRC Staff:** "Parents marry their girls at 13 and when they have difficulty or die in childbirth they take the doctors to court and accuse them of not knowing anything."

### Government and Leaders:

**Sarepul DoWA:** "Many men go to Iran for work and leave their wives alone. Powerful people force their way in and rape those women at night. Not just once but many times. Sometimes the police are involved. They involve them so they cannot be arrested... We have cases of powerful people killing their wives or killing women they were involved in gang raping."

**Nangarhar AIHRC:** "Two policemen under the pretext that they were asking for a girl's hand in marriage for their brother took a 16 year old girl school girl took her home and raped her. This came to us and we followed it to the prison and saw that they had been freed. When we asked the directors why they said that the chief of police has ordered them that they were innocent. We sent a delegation but nobody paid attention. They had paid a bribe to the chief of police and walked off scott free. The interesting thing is that the poor girl spent one and half months in prison until she paid 5000 USD in bribes and free herself. You tell me where this girl should go and who she should get help from?"

**Parwan Women:** "The problem is that we women can solve small conflicts and issues but if the matter is big and complicated and powerful people are involved we cannot do anything and there is no other place locally for women to apply to solve their problem. This causes a woman to run away or commit suicide. People have a dim view of applying to government offices and often people who work there are linked to this village. So they force the woman to go home again. When she comes home she is either beaten by family members or killed because she has besmirched family honour."

**Herat Men:** "I am the mullah in the area. Women contact me in relation to different issues and tell me their problems. I try to fix their problems according to sharia law. If the problem is not solved they can go to the whitebeards or the elders and great men of our people. There is also a women's shura in the district centre. They can contact them freely and tell them their problems. Sometimes women discuss these issues in their own shuras as well."

**Forced Marriage:**

**Jawzjan DoWA Staff:** "A bad habit we have here is that when a child is born before she is cut from her mother they say it's a girl I am giving her to her youngest cousin. This makes a lot of girls run away in this province. We had a situation like this and when the girl grew up she saw they had promised her to a crazy shepherd. So she ran away with a boy and when she is caught in Mazar she is raped by the police. Then they threw the boy and the girl in jail accusing him of rape. They said they had caught them in the act of adultery."

**Parwan Women:** "There was a girl who had become pregnant from a boy but her family had promised her to a boy in Wardak. She was caught running away with the first boy. For one week she was suspended from the ceiling of a room in her house by her family. I called the entire shura together, men and women and we solved this issue. Me and some women went and broke the door down. We took the girl away, cleaned her and fed her. We talked to her parents. The girl married the first boy. The male and female shura in this village have instituted a rule which prevents people from exchanging their daughters for blood crimes. Anyone who does this will have to pay a heavy fine."

**Adultery:**

**Parwan Women:** "A boy from Kabul befriended a girl here. They've been together for eight months but his mother says throw her out of the house so he can marry his cousin. The boy threw the girl out even though she is eight months pregnant. When we discussed it with them both the boy and his mother said if we care about her so much we should take her to our own houses. When she went to the district centre all the men who are from the village and work in the district centre made fun of her saying that her love affair ended so she should run away with another boy and not to destroy their honour in the district. We don't know what to do for her. She ran away with the boy of her own accord so if she goes home they will kill her."

**Jawzjan Men:** "If a woman does something bad, the community and elders gather and decide according to culture. We solved a problem a few days ago. A woman whose husband had been killed in the war was pregnant and had killed her baby from fear of what people would say. When women found out they told the shura and we decided that she should marry the father of the child but he had run away to Iran. In the end the elders said she should marry his cousin and they live together and are happy."

**Parwan Religious Leader:** "Most of the time women are to blame for family problems. Increasingly men have been killed...because of women or more precisely their lovers. If women are not prevented from having this freedom we will have a grim future for you, me and society. I have told the government about this on many occasions but either they don't listen or they don't care."

**Nangarhar DoWA:** "In villages when a woman wears clean clothes and tidies herself up they say she has prepared herself for other men. This forces women not to care about personal appearance and the opposite occurs. When men see literate, educated women they decide to get married for a second or third time...Men think it is part of manliness to take several wives. Like our governor here who recently took his fifth wife, a 17 year old air hostess."

**Rape:**

**Parwan Women:** "Another man lives in our village and has eight children. When there was a lot of fighting in Charikar a family was displaced and came to stay in his house. After a while he raped the fifteen year old daughter of the family. After six months passed everyone knew that the girl was pregnant. The girl was placed under investigation and she told them that the man had raped her. The shura and the local heads decided to buy a house for the family of the girl and he married the girl."

**Paktia Women:** "We can talk about anything related to our community but not about rape of women in the village because our men will never allow us to visit the family of that woman and her family can never visit us".

**Trafficking:**

**Nangarhar DoWA and AIHRC Staff:** "In Shinwar there are markets for selling women. They bring women to the market. Throw big chadors on their heads and just show the woman's hands and like animals they are bought and sold. There are cases where a woman was sold with her five children or cases where if a man killed someone he has to send his wife to his enemy's house that night. They have a saying that we pimped out our wife or someone who has lived with his wife for 30 years using the excuse that she was seen with this or that young boy in the bazaar is sold in the (woman) market on the pretext that she has cast our Afghaniyat to the ground. Even though the poor wife or daughter has no clue she is sold over and over again. The markets are called Shadal and Pikheh."



**Nangarhar AIHRC:** "A woman was sold to five different people and returned back to the original man who sold her. He said: 'I will never get rid of you' and he killed the poor woman. The district governor, security commander and bigwigs are involved so they agreed that the man should give the woman's family 50000 Rupees...A government person is involved in the case of a woman who has been sold several times from Nangarhar to Kunduz to Kabul back to Nangarhar again."

#### **Incest:**

**Nangarhar AIHRC:** "A woman complained that her father-in-law forced her to have sex with him and warned her that she would be killed if she revealed it. When we called her husband in he said – for God's sake he's my father, what can I do?...There's a man in the border guards who has raped his own sister and is now wandering round freely and he has to protect the borders of our country."

**Paktia AIHRC:** "We had a case where a grandfather had raped his granddaughter and his son was forced to kill his father and his daughter to regain his honour."

#### **Honour:**

**Paktia Elder:** "If a woman gets caught in a situation there is no other way to end it. She will be killed whatever her crime is. Our honour does not allow us to be insulted because of a woman's crime and for others to insult us that the women of that village has committed a crime and is wandering around alive and well."

**Sarepul Religious Leader:** "Whatever a woman does, a man will not stand up to her according to culture of this area. Men think it is shameful to do that but if a woman is part of the conflict, the people whose daughter has done this say you have shamed us and thrown our lungi to the ground. I will give you an example. Last month two girls ran away from a village and their families killed them. In such matters elders try to ensure that the matter does not reach anyone and that it gets solved. If the matter reaches the government or the law they will lose their good name."

## **Masculinity**

**Nangarhar Men:** "When a man is out with his wife we do not even greet him because he will be ashamed – we don't even want to come face to face with him."

**Paktia Men:** "If men want to behave in ways which do not agree with the culture of our area we won't let them. There is pressure, there are insults and maybe even the threat of death."

**Parwan Men:** "A person who has tolerance and patience for people gossiping will let his wife become involved in activities outside the house. A person who doesn't want to hear stories about his wife will not let her leave the house. A man with strong faith will not let his wife out of the house at all."

**Parwan Men:** "Men are criticised a great deal. For example, people used to complain about me but never to my face. At first we ourselves used to criticise and say so and so's wife is working in this or that place but now we have stopped that. People make jokes but it is no longer serious."

**Parwan Men:** "In political matters women do not have experience and knowledge so they cannot express any views and if they do, they are worthless. But in teaching and education we mustn't ignore their views because women are mothers as well and they have positive views about the education of their children and the nation. If women become politicised they will dominate men and men will become their servants."

**Paktia Women:** "God has punished men. If they allowed women to learn all sorts of things then like Kabuli men they would be free from responsibilities tied to women. In Kabul women take children to the doctor, do the shopping and go to work and men do not have to do all of these things instead."

**Herat Men:** "In the past if you told a man put make up on your wife and bring her so we can see her the canals would be full of blood and how many people would get killed! Now come and see in weddings - he lets his wife put on plenty of make-up and takes her all over town so everyone can see his wife but there is no problem. Maybe in 10 or 15 years these discussions about women and segregation will end."

**Parwan MoE Staff:** "In our society it's all about imitation and not based on reflection and thought. We present the situation as if we thought about it but inside something else is going on. Men will say, based on knowledge and religion, that a woman should not hold certain posts but once a woman gets herself somewhere hundreds of men surround her for their own benefit. So we can say that conservatism against women in our society is not based on thought but on imitation."



**Paktia Elder:** "Sometimes there are men whose wife works in the government but they harass other women in the village. One day we witnessed such a story when someone said in the mosque not to allow women to get involved with the election campaigns but at that moment the mullah in the mosque said that if women shouldn't work in the election campaigns then he should tell his daughters not to come in the mosque with glittery clothes. Fighting almost broke out. I gave this as an example of people who don't even realise themselves why they resist the women's issue."

**Sarepul Men:** "The maulavi sahebs here tell us that men are the playthings of women and women are the playthings of the devil so even a little freedom for women will lead to leading astray and corruption."

Some men who accept the pressure it is because maybe the man cannot work and has a problem and we are not against such work if his family needs it and would be desperate so when the woman works not only is it not shameful but it is a point of pride that she finds a decent living but those who go everyday and their husbands are healthy and rich, we don't know how they can accept this pressure. Either they have no manly honour or they are pimps."

**Parwan DoWA Staff:** "When I first became head people told my brother that it was bad for a young woman to sit among men. My brother made lots of problems for me at home. I took my young sister and my brother asked why I was leading her astray. I was very upset. I have an uncle who was a mawlawi and he talked to my brother and told him he should be proud. He told him that he should support me but he didn't."

**Nangarhar Men:** "This issue of being pressured to behave in a certain way by other men is old fashioned...Our women can go around with a burqa or with faces uncovered. They go around courageously...We work together with our women in offices and other places and low down men can say cheap things but we have a saying that the river does not become dirty just because a dog laps water from it."

**Parwan Men** "In Deh Bala, Saidkhel and Miyanehgozar there were literate women and slowly their knowledge increased to the extent that they started competing with their husbands. Eventually the men lost patience because the women's comings and goings increased and extended beyond the confines of the village to the provincial centre. Eventually all these cases led to divorce and separation. But this has not happened in our village yet because we do not allow our women to leave the village, or join a men's shura. Within the village we are all related or close and it doesn't matter."

**Sarepul Men:** "Whatever we hear we tell our women. We are not like people in the South with guns hanging from our necks and hiding stuff from our women. We discuss with our women before doing things and do not hide anything."

**Parwan Religious Leader:** "There are men who are thieves and criminals and happy with their lives. Maybe men who give their women freedom are the same."

**Nangarhar Men:** "Culture has changed –reaction to seeing women alone in town have changed. We have changed, we'll change some more"

**NSP Staff:** "Fathers punish sons for being nice to their wives."

**Parwan Men:** "A woman beat up her husband. He was so ashamed he went to Iran and has not returned yet."

**Parwan Men:** "It is difficult to shut people's mouths."

## Annex (3) Women Leaders in NSP

### Daikundi, Nili, Kitijik - Fatima

Daikundi, Nili, Kitijik: "If anyone listens, I have a lot of plans - we have a few secondary roads which need to be fixed". Fatima is the head of a mixed shura. 23 years ago she went to Iran and she studied up to class 8 in Iran. She has been a teacher in the village. According to the people she has become shahr-dideh (seen the city) and donya-dideh (seen the world). Since she is literate people expect that she understands more than they do. They have land and her husband is a farmer. Her house is small, pokey and filthy. She came back in the nineties but organisations did not give women a role in the shuras as NSP does. Women were not encouraged to leave the village in those days. Men listen to her as head of the CDC. She speaks her mind and listens to their complaints. Men say she should represent them because people respect women more. Every time an organisation comes to the village the head says, 'Go and get so and so's mother!' Her parents are still in Iran. Her father did not want her to study because he thought she would become shameless but now he is proud - he did not know where education would lead her. Her husband is happy that she can provide a service to the people. People agreed that they needed a road - they grow almonds and need to take them to the province centre. There are plenty of female headed households here because many men are in Iran. She has managed to get help from several organisations and her experience counts for a lot. They know her so they invite her to workshops. She goes whenever there is need and pays her own transport costs. She can write proposals and she is involved in purchasing. She does not deal with conflict between men because she says she does not understand men's work. She is called upon to solve domestic disputes between husbands and wives however. Young girls are encouraged to get an education because she is a role model. Of course people are envious but many people say: 'What would we have done if you hadn't come back from Iran?'

### Daikundi, Nili, Shamak - Delafuz

Delafuz, the head of shura appears to be in her late fifties or sixties. When we have lunch she stands to attention while we sit and waits to be ordered around by the men. She has a very traditional outlook. She comes from a landowning family but they are not arbabs. She is not literate. She is the traditional birth attendant to women so many people in the village were delivered by her which gives her an important role. She explains that has been very kind and charitable to people. She says she is the head of the village but the attitude of the men in our interviews does not reflect this. The treasurer in the CDC, who is male, dealt with the road project. It is unclear how aware she was of the accounting and the money spent. She says men in the shura listen to her but she says the shura decides whatever is the engineer sahebs tell them. There are educated people in the village but not many. All children go to school but she is not sure up to what class. She repeatedly says that because she is nice and never says a cross word she was chosen as leader. She is very vague on plans for the future and her attitude reveals a heavy handout mentality. She has no interest in running the shura but rather attracting income generation for women. The treasurer later explains that people are smarter about voting now. He explains that three men were competing for the votes as head of the CDC and they never expected women to vote. In the meantime, women snuck in, got the vote because they were united and selected Delafuz.

### Daikundi, Nili, Surkhbedak - Roshan Ekhtiari

Roshan is a soft spoken woman in her fifties who speaks clearly. Roshan's husband was assassinated. He was a Mujahideen commander and they were both very active in the community. Her husband was educated and helped her with everything. He has been dead for 14 years. She is the head of NSP CDC and head of an Islamic women's shura in Daikundi. She is non-literate. Her grandmother would make household decisions. She was from an arab family and used to go to the fields to manage the farm labour. She knows all the NSP CDCs in the vicinity because she travels and takes a very active interest. They formed a cluster of CDCs and she is the deputy leader of the group. She can travel all over the province of Daikundi and she can travel anywhere if her business requires her to. She travels without a mahram and with her face uncovered.

She explains that men tried to put women under pressure about not being able to have votes. She understands representation. She registered her shura and contacted organisations to get assistance for women. She went to the Red Crescent and a number of other organisations, showing a great deal of initiative. The women in her shura made a collection box. Her shura has encouraged other women to set up organisations. She collected information on women's needs and went to Kabul to the former Minister of RRD to get assistance for the poor but, at the time of interviewing, the office of Disaster Preparedness in Daikundi was not letting her access the assistance even though she had a letter.

## **Herat, Kohsan, Qudusabad Hawza 2 – Sima Afghanyar**

"I studied up to Class 8 and spent time in Iran. I opened some courses for sewing entirely through my own efforts because nobody else was helping us. Sitting at home has no benefit. We now have five tailoring courses, and two adult literacy ones. I teach one myself. I took some requests to important women but there was no result and they didn't help us. The courses have been set up by us and paid for by ourselves – but we are hoping that there will be government assistance at some stage. We women got together and thought we should get going with something otherwise we will get left behind. I have been working for a long time setting up organisations for women and youth. My husband is educated and one of the elders. My son is a policeman. I always felt I had leadership skills but the NSP shura made me feel like I have more social responsibility. I go and sit with the male shura members and I know them. When there is conflict people tend to go to the key men including my husband. People trust me. People in Qudusabad are against each other and I try to encourage community spirit."

The other women in the meeting explain that she is very active and a dynamic force. They say that women are more enthusiastic about their rights and understand more than they did in the past. They say that now that there is a group with a leader, women come to them to defend themselves. In a separate meeting the men described her as educated, kind, conscientious and hard working. They said all women go to her to solve their problems and that the women's group meets twice a month. She says: "I would really like to do something about our school which is shameful. There is no drinking water and no toilets. The district governor is useless. Women and men feel that we have an uncaring govt which does not even respond when people show initiative to change things themselves."

## **Parwan, Bagram, Ghulam Ali – Gul Shirin**

Gul Shirin is a mild mannered woman in her sixties with education up to class 3 at school. At 16 she was married and she had twelve children, nine of whom are still alive. She has been selected by 74 villages at district level to represent them and make lists of beneficiaries in relation to different problems. She has been doing this for free for 5 years. At the district gatherings her brothers have to sit behind her but it is not shameful for them because they respect her. She has some small businesses which she runs. She has a small office in the district governorate. She has brought a number of income generating projects for the community where she lives. "The government has given us equality of rights. It was announced. NSP has allowed women to come out and form groups. Men learnt that women can solve family problems".

When she became widowed she went to Kabul to find work. She sent her sons to Iran. "Under the Taliban I was very afraid so I married off all my daughters. When I was free of the worries of my own household I realised how poor and vulnerable the people of my community were. I decided to do something for them". After the Taliban fell, two women came to our village from an organisation and I gathered 500 women for them. These 500 women voted for me and selected me as their representative. Then as their representative I went to the Loya Jirga tent and told the men I met there about the problems of my people. I also went to the presidential palace and conveyed my people's suggestions there. I organised a free adult literacy course for the women and from the savings of the people in the village I managed to get electricity for them – I wanted that because I wanted people to watch TV and see the outside world. The next time I took some widows to the livestock market so they could choose their own calves with project money. Every woman in the village saves twenty Afghanis in the savings bank and anyone can do something with than money and then repay the loan. Since LCEP came I was able to set up 54 other literacy courses".

"I also try to solve people's conflicts – I have solved some issues related to killings. I use mullahs and elders in the provincial council to help me in this. When men and women have domestic disputes I invite them to sit together and solve the conflict. Even though I am not literate I have tried hard to get girls out of the house so they can get an education. I am also in the team of local midwives. I have nine children and have delivered more than 300 babies. I have also identified and taken tuberculosis patients for treatment".

"My husband was a baker and I have three elder brothers. I started coming out of my house because I felt I should work for people. The first time I learnt how to do injections from my cousin and I would do it for women in the village. I know a lot of different skills so when trainers came to teach women how to make tomato paste I taught them a few things and everyone was amazed. My brother-in-laws were very violent towards me to stop me but I always continued my work until I reached where I am today. One brother-in-law was a Mujahideen commander so I used to hide a lot of Mujahedin weapons from the Russians, and later the Taliban, in orchards and other places. They could never find them and we were always nervous when

they would come to the houses to search. I would cook secretly for Mujahideen groups who would sneak in to the village at night. I had to make sure the Russians didn't see the fire from the smoke in the middle of the night."

"At one point when we were running away from the Taliban, leaving Shamali, I met a woman who had lost her husband and she was in a bad way - heavily pregnant and on her own. I saw that she was about to deliver so we found a place and I helped her. Then with tears in her eyes she said she has nothing and that she would have to kill the baby. I took the baby home with me and now he is at school. I raised him like my own. Sometimes I wonder whether his mother is still alive but he is part of our family and we all love him."

"I try to train young girls to be good future leaders for the village. I discuss the qualities of a good leader in women's shuras so they know what to do to be successful. I have eight other women with me who can work in my place if I'm not around. In my work with the people in this community I have been able to abolish bride price and to institute the practice of allowing a young couple to meet before they marry. I told people: 'If you want your children to feel relaxed in the future let them see each other right at the beginning so they do not hate each other in the future'. I taught people to consult with their daughters when they want to marry them. If the girl is willing they should speak to the father and not allow men to exchange girls for any reason and destroy their daughter's life. This is what the government laws are saying. If I cannot solve an issue in the community I refer it to the provincial shura so it can be solve. There was a girl who was pregnant but her family had engaged her to a boy in Wardak. She was caught trying to elope with her boyfriend. For one week they had suspended her from the ceiling in one room with no food or water. I called the shura and with the cooperation of the male and female shura we solved this problem and the girl was married to her boyfriend."

"When I went to the loya jirga and the presidential palace I asked them to build a school, a road, a clinic and a mosque. All of these have been built. When the PRT came to our village they met me and I suggested they build a hospital, a community hall and kindergarten. They said: 'You are village people and all sitting at home. Why do you need a kindergarten?' I answered that all of these people have work to do – they go to their fields and orchards to harvest and collect fruit so there is nobody to look after their children so that mothers can do their agricultural tasks with peace of mind. They accepted our view and said they would build the kindergarten for us. A great number of people are unemployed and feel forced to go to Iran and become addicted to drugs there. A lot of young men from our village are drug addicts and their mothers have to support them. I want one part of the hospital which the PRT will build to deal with this issue."

## **Parwan, Jabul Seraj, Madad Khel – Sima Gul**

Sima Gul is not literate. Her husband was a security commander. She respected her husband: "For one year after he died I saluted his hat every day." He took her all over Afghanistan and allowed her to wear fashionable clothes and have a fashionable hair style. She smokes and explains through puffing on her cigarette that after seeing all of Afghanistan she is not willing to spend her old age sitting in the corner of her house doing nothing. Sima Gul first became inquisitive when NSP had not come to her village so she decided to follow up with the local men as to reasons why they had not tried to get projects. Later when NSP did arrive and there were problems in the men's CDC she fixed it. After three years, a war started among the men when they started fighting over the funding but once again Sima Gul intervened and solved the conflict. It is clear that she is a well known resolver of conflicts who is much sought. She tells stories of being dragged away to solve conflicts with dough from bread making still on her fingers. She is also a matchmaker.

Sima Gul has encouraged saving among women in the village. At one stage she made Kuchi dresses, which a relative started selling in Tajikistan. She also said while she was working at the hospital in Panjshir and she looked around the canteen at the men and women, locals and foreigners sitting together, she thought, «This is good; this is how it should be.» She ensures that other women in the village understand what is happening in relation to projects. When someone contacts the head of the CDC in relation to activities with women, he calls Sima Gul and shortly after men will be telling their wives to attend the project. She has impressed the men in the village and when they see a woman who can get things done, they are encouraged. She gives example of American women pilots and asks why Afghan women are sitting around at home waiting.

She secretly attended a sewing course in Panjshir and only stopped when her son used other relatives to pressure her. He utilized shame saying that people would say: «Madaresho posht-e dollar ravan kard» .

When her son insisted that she stop being the head of the NSP women's group, however, and had tried to appeal to his older male relatives to put pressure on her to stop she gave him a bloody nose. When male surveyors were interviewing the men's group her son was present. At the end of the interview one young man said to him: "See, even people in Kabul organisations have heard of your mother." The son turned red and left.

Other women explained that she talks well, teaches them new things, gives good advice and she is energetic. She knows about politics and the outside world. She is charitable and her house is open to everyone. There have been night letters about women's activities but she tells women not to be afraid. She has a wicked sense of humour and is skilled at the art of storytelling with many anecdotes which reveal much about the difficulties she has had to overcome. She says: «Girls go to Ahmad Zaher 's grave and scream, will they come to my grave?»



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## Annex (5) Interview Checklists

Before starting each interview, please explain the purpose of the study and obtain oral consent. Explain that the process is entirely voluntary and confidential, there is no obligation to answer any of the questions, and while a public report will be issued, no reference will be made to specific interviewees. Should you wish to be able to use a particular statement for attribution, please obtain the interviewee's specific permission to be quoted by name. It is preferable to do this during the interview to avoid having to double back and secure permission later on.

### Semi-Structured Interview Checklist – CDC and Non-CDC Members

Date of interview:	Location:			Name of interviewer:	
Age of interviewee:	under 18	18-24	25-34	35-49	50+
Gender:	Male	Female			
Education:	none	some primary	secondary	university	

*[Note: for focus groups, collect the above info for all participants]*

#### General

1. Have you heard of the term gender? Where? How?
2. What sort of community roles do women have in your area? What activities do/did women perform in groups? What about men?
3. Do you have information on the status of most women in your community? How do you collect this information? How do you use it?
4. What type of women have seen most benefit from projects implemented in your community in recent years?
5. How have changes in women and girls' lives in the past years changed things for men in the family? In the community? Specific examples.
6. Have community expectations for women and girls' lives/situation changed in recent years? How? Why?

#### Time, Space and Mobility

7. Do women have time to perform additional activities in addition to their household work?
8. Which women have more time available to become involved in meetings related to projects, NGO work, etc.?
9. Can women go to public spaces such as markets? If not, why not?
10. How does lack of mobility prevent women from being active in community affairs?
11. How would women having greater mobility affect life in the community?
12. Was the coming together of women as a group difficult in the past? Has this changed? Why/not?
13. What are the benefits to be gained from women gathering in groups?

#### Security

14. How does the security situation affect women's projects? Examples
15. Does having projects with women create security problems? How? Why?
16. What steps can you take or have you taken in the past to solve such problems?

#### Voice and Power

17. What issues can women discuss in public? Which issues should they not discuss?
18. Are there women who have become powerful or influential in the community? How did they do this?

#### Information

19. What kind of information do women access and exchange the most?

20. What sort of information do only men get and withhold from women?

### **Funds**

21. Do women inherit or manage property in this community? Examples

22. Do women handle funds in the family or community? If not why not?

### **Community Goods**

23. Who owns/controls community goods in your village? Are they responsible for repair and maintenance of these goods?

24. Do women own any community goods in your village? What kind of community goods could women own or control?

### **Conflict resolution**

25. 25. Are women traditionally involved in conflict resolution? E.g. throwing their chador down

26. 26. Are conflicts involving women solved according to sharia law, local custom or other method?

27. 27. Have any recent project activities given women more of a role in conflict resolution at family or community level?

### **NSP**

28. Where do women meet for NSP meetings?

29. Has women's mobility improved as a result of NSP?

30. How has women's access to information about community life changed as a result of NSP activities?

31. How do men and women's groups communicate in programmes like NSP?

32. Which CDC or committee has had better results, men's or women's? Why?

33. Which CDC has made better decisions for the community – men's or women's? How? (Examples)

34. Which CDC has had more conflict among group members – men's or women's?

35. How can women's CDCs be helped to achieve more? How about men's CDCs?

36. What do the men's or women's CDCs do for very poor women, disabled women or widows?

37. How have relations between men and women changed as a result of NSP?

38. Do women have more say in family and/or community matters as a result of NSP?

39. Do women have information about NSP funding?

40. Do women have direct access to NSP funding? If not, why not?

41. Can women control NSP funding without male interference? Who guides women in the use of NSP funds?

42. Do women feel confident using NSP funding?

43. What sort of projects did men choose as part of NSP how did they impact community life?

44. What sort of projects did women choose as part of NSP how did they impact community life?

45. Was the leader of the women's CDC/committee a leader before NSP? Why did you vote for her?

46. Do you feel your interests were represented during the NSP process? If not, why not?

### **Gender Dynamics for Men**

47. Are men influenced by the community, family etc. in how they treat their womenfolk?

48. How are they influenced?

49. What sort of people instigate such behavior and why?

50. How much pressure do men feel to treat their female relatives a certain way in public?

51. Why do some men accept social pressure while some do not?
52. Is there any way of changing this?

## Semi-Structured Interview Checklist – NSP and FP Staff

<b>Date of interview:</b>	<b>Location:</b>				<b>Name of interviewer:</b>
<b>Age of interviewee:</b>	18-24	25-34	35-49	50+	
<b>Gender:</b>	Male	Female			
<b>Education:</b>	secondary		university		

*[Note: for focus groups, collect the above info for all participants]*

### General

1. Have you heard of the term gender? Where? How?
2. What sort of community roles do women have in your project area? What activities do/did women perform in groups? What about men?
3. Do you have information on the status of most women in your project area? How do you collect this information? How do you use it?
4. What type of women have seen most benefit from external projects in recent years?
5. How have changes in women's lives in the past years changed things for men in families? In the communities? Specific examples.
6. Have community expectations for women and girls' lives/situation changed in recent years? How? Why?

### Time, Space and Mobility

7. Do women have time to perform additional activities in addition to their household work?
8. Which women have more time available to become involved in meetings related to external projects?
9. Can women go to public spaces such as markets? If not, why not?
10. How does lack of mobility prevent women from being active in community affairs?
11. Was the coming together of women as a group difficult in the past? Has this changed? Why?
12. Are there any benefits to be gained from women gathering in groups?

### Security

13. How does the security situation affect women's projects? Examples
14. Does having projects with women create security problems? How? Why?
15. What steps can you take or have you taken in the past to solve such problems?

### Voice and Power

16. Are there women who have become powerful or influential in the community? How did they do this?

### Funds

17. Do women inherit or manage property in this community? Examples
18. Do women handle funds in the family or community? If not why not?

### Conflict resolution

19. Are women traditionally involved in conflict resolution? E.g. throwing their chador down
20. Are conflicts involving women solved according to sharia law, local custom or other method?
21. Have any recent project activities given women more of a role in conflict resolution at family or community level?

### Gender Dynamics – Men

22. Are men influenced by the community, family etc. in how they treat their womenfolk?
23. How are they influenced?
24. What sort of people instigate such behavior and why?
25. How much pressure do men feel to treat their female relatives a certain way in public?

26. Why do some men accept social pressure while some do not?
27. Is there any way of changing this?

### NSP

28. Do you think gender is an essential part of NSP activities? Why?
29. How does NSP encourage your organisation to ensure that gender is mainstreamed in NSP activities?
30. How do you try to reach women as part of NSP? What sort of opportunities and constraints have you faced?
31. How do you deal with gender relations as part of NSP?
32. Do male and female staff have equitable access to information, equipment, logistical facilities, etc.?
33. Where do women meet for NSP meetings?
34. Has women's mobility improved as a result of NSP?
35. How has women's access to information about community life changed as a result of NSP activities?
36. How do men and women's groups communicate in programmes like NSP?
37. Which CDC or committee has had better results, men's or women's? Why?
38. Which CDC has made better decisions for the community – men's or women's? How? (Examples)
39. Which CDC has had more conflict among group members – men's or women's?
40. How can women's CDCs be helped to achieve more? How about men's CDCs?
41. What do the men's or women's CDCs do for very poor women, disabled women or widows?
42. How have relations between men and women changed as a result of NSP?
43. How has NSP worked to increase women's voice in community and/or family affairs?
44. Do women have information about NSP funding?
45. Do women have direct access to NSP funding? If not, why not?
46. Can women control NSP funding without male interference? Who guides women in the use of NSP funds?
47. Do women feel confident using NSP funding?
48. What sort of projects did men choose as part of NSP how did they impact community life?
49. What sort of projects did women choose as part of NSP how did they impact community life?

## Semi-Structures Interview Checklist – Key Informants

<b>Date of interview:</b>	<b>Location:</b>				<b>Name of interviewer:</b>
<b>Age of interviewee:</b>	under 18	18-24	25-34	35-49	50+
<b>Gender:</b>	Male	Female			
<b>Education:</b>	none	some primary	secondary	university	

*[Note: for focus groups, collect the above info for all participants]*

### General

1. Have you heard of the term gender? Where? How?
2. What sort of community roles do women have in your area? What activities do/did women perform in groups? What about men?
3. Do you have information on the status of most women in your community? How do you collect this information? How do you use it?
4. How have changes in women's lives in the past years changed things for men in the family? In the community? Specific examples.
5. Have community expectations for women and girls' lives/situation changed in recent years? How? Why?

### Group dynamics

6. Was the coming together of women in groups difficult in the past? Has this changed? Why?
7. Are there any benefits to be gained from women gathering in groups?

**Space and Mobility**

8. Can women go to public spaces such as markets? If not, why not?
9. How would women having greater mobility affect life in the community?
10. How does women's involvement in activities outside the home and family impact family life?

**Security**

11. How does the security situation affect women's projects? Examples
12. Does having projects with women create security problems? How? Why?
13. What steps can you take or have you taken in the past to solve these problems?

**Voice and Power**

14. What issues can women discuss in public? Which issues should they not discuss?
15. 15. Are there women who have become powerful or influential in the community? How did they do this?

**Funds**

16. Do women inherit or manage property in this community? Examples
17. Do women handle funds in the family or community? If not why not?

**Conflict resolution**

18. Are women traditionally involved in conflict resolution? E.g. throwing their chador down
19. Are conflicts involving women solved according to sharia law, local custom or other method?
20. Have any recent project activities given women more of a role in conflict resolution at family or community level?

**Gender Dynamics – Men**

21. Are men influenced by the community, family etc. in how they treat their womenfolk?
22. How are they influenced?
23. What sort of people instigate such behavior and why?
24. How much pressure do men feel to treat their female relatives a certain way in public?
25. Why do some men accept social pressure while some do not?
26. Is there any way of changing this?

**NSP**

27. What is your opinion of NSP activities in this area?
28. What sort of results have men's CDCs achieved that you are aware of?
29. What sort of results have women's CDCs achieved that you are aware of?
30. How have relations between men and women changed as a result of NSP?
31. Which CDC or committee has had better results, men's or women's? Why?
32. Which CDC has made better decisions for the community – men's or women's? How? (Examples)
33. Which CDC has had more conflict among group members – men's or women's?
34. What changes in NSP would improve the impact for communities and women in particular?



