



Women in Government: Needing More Than Numbers

November 2017

Research Report

موسسه مطالعات عامه
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About ARM

Afghanistan Rights Monitor (ARM) is designed to meet the following objectives:

1. Regular monitoring of the current conditions of fundamental rights in Afghanistan using a set of indicators based on internationally recognized standards for monitoring Civic, Social and Economic rights.
2. Informed, pragmatic, and constructive advocacy messaging on fundamental rights needs, based on empirical data, and delivered by civil society actors.
3. Increased capacity and responsiveness of public institutions in attending to fundamental rights needs of Afghan citizens.

For more information on ARM, see: www.nac-pp.net

About APPRO

Afghanistan Public Policy Research Organization (APPRO) is an independent social research organization with a mandate to promote social and policy learning to benefit development and reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan and other less developed countries through conducting social scientific research, monitoring and evaluation, and training and mentoring. APPRO is registered with the Ministry of Economy in Afghanistan as a non-profit non-government organization and headquartered in Kabul, Afghanistan with offices in Mazar-e Sharif (north), Herat (west), Kandahar (south), Jalalabad (east), and Bamyan (center). APPRO is the founding member of APPRO-Europe, registered in Belgium.

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List of Abbreviations

AIHRC	Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission
APPRO	Afghanistan Public Policy Research Organization
ARM	Afghanistan Rights Monitor
CEDAW	Convention for the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women
DoE	Department of Education
DoWA	Directorate of Women's Affairs
KII	Key Informant Interview
FRU	Family Response Unit
MoI	Ministry of Interior
MoPH	Ministry of Public Health
MoWA	Ministry of Women's Affairs
NAC-PP	National Advocacy Committee for Public Policy
NAP	National Action Plan
NAP 1325	Afghanistan's National Action Plan for implementation of UNSCR 1325
UNSCR 1325	United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325

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Executive Summary

Following 2001, Afghanistan became the scene of the largest gender-focused interventions globally, with vast resources invested by the Afghan government and its international donors into promoting the emergence of women as independent actors in politics, business, decision-making and civil society. The government of Afghanistan has entered into a range of international and domestic commitments to advance the rights of women, including fostering the inclusion of women in post-conflict governance. For example, quotas have been created at national and sub-national levels for women's representation in government institutions. Such efforts have been bolstered by the development of Afghanistan's National Action Plan on UNSCR 1325 in June 2015. However, the numbers represent only part of the picture.

The research for this case study was conducted as part of APPRO's Afghanistan Rights Monitor (ARM) project, to support informed policy and action on fundamental rights protection and promotion in the country, through research, constructive advocacy, and increased capacity of public institutions. The case study explores opportunities for, and challenges to, the advancement of women's rights in three provinces of Afghanistan, including Balkh (Mazar-e Sharif), Herat (Herat City), and Kabul (Kabul City), specifically through their presence and participation in government. This research highlights pivotal questions regarding the quality and impact of such participation.

The research was conducted by APPRO researchers in each location between 1-15 June 2017, and draws on 33 qualitative, semi-structured key informant interviews (KIIs) with national and provincial level government actors, as well as relevant civil society and NGO representatives, consisting of 23 women and 10 men. The research examines the differences in working conditions for women as compared to men, the substantive involvement of women in internal decision-making and policy-making in government bodies, the ways in which gender considerations are incorporated into policy-making processes within government entities, and how women working in government positions are viewed by their own families and within their own communities. Finally, this research identifies potential pathways for interventions to improve the conditions of women in government employment.

The research found that working conditions for women, compared to those for men, were largely perceived to be inferior across all three provinces. Respondents highlighted that not only were there fewer women working in government, but that they also occupied lower positions than men. In all three provinces, key informants noted the ways in which deeply-rooted gender discrimination within Afghan society continued to not only exclude women in government from positions in which they were able to exercise decision- and policy-making power, but also to prevent women from entering these positions in the first place. Respondents spoke about many of the challenges facing women in terms of accessing positions, including lack of education, societal perceptions that women should not work in such positions, and the assigning of women to short-term projects and low positions. In Mazar-e Sharif and Herat, participants emphasized differences in women's access to basic facilities at work. Generally, women have inadequate sanitation facilities and toilets, less access to prayer rooms, transport, internet services, and computers. Some respondents also highlighted restrictions on women's ability to travel and access transportation, as well as challenges arising from Afghanistan's security situation. Key informants described an ongoing social and cultural climate of gender discrimination that continues to restrict meaningful opportunities for women.

The research also points to ongoing limitations in women's substantive involvement in internal decision-making within government. With some exceptions, respondents across all three provinces argued that women are mostly not involved in decision- and policy-making processes, and that, at present, their participation is largely symbolic. In Kabul, respondents noted that in the capital the situation might be somewhat better than elsewhere in the country, as women working in high-ranking positions do have some say in decision-making, though others pointed out that there are no women in important and strategic decision-making entities. Findings around policy-making were similar, with respondents across all three provinces noting that in general, and with some important exceptions, women were seldom effectively involved in government policy-making.

The research also explored how gender considerations were incorporated into internal decision- and policy-making processes within government. Respondents in all three provinces largely perceived the incorporation of gender considerations into both internal decision-making and policy-making processes of government entities to be limited, but again, with some important exceptions. In Kabul, for example, some respondents highlighted the creation of gender departments within government ministries as a positive step in improving the incorporation of gender considerations into internal decision- and policy-making processes. However, the majority of respondents equated the incorporation of gender considerations into decision- and policy-making with issues of the numerical representation of women in such positions.

Views regarding how women working in government positions were perceived by their own families, and within their own communities were mixed. Some believed that people have a positive view of women working and women making a positive contribution to their families and society, while others noted that community members speak out negatively about women working in government positions – particularly in relation to women working in the military or the police. Some respondents reported that many community members still believed that women should work only in jobs traditionally considered suitable for women, such as teachers, nurses, and doctors. There are perceptions within some communities that women in decision-making or leadership positions in government obtain their positions illegally. In Kabul, the majority of respondents believed there had been an improvement in public perception, particularly among those under the age of 35, regarding women working in government. Despite some improvements, responses across all three provinces indicate that significant levels of societal and familial discrimination remain against women in positions of leadership and decision-making in government.

Finally, this research probed the question of what key informants felt could be done to strengthen women's roles in both internal decision- and policy-making processes in contemporary Afghanistan. In all three provinces respondents spoke about the urgent need to provide further support and build women's capacity. The suggestions include expanding the coverage of tertiary education for women through scholarships, ensuring the recruitment process is transparent and free of nepotism and bribery, encouraging capacity-building trips (nationally and internationally), encouraging training for men around working with women, and improving the work facilities for women (e.g. transportation, kindergarten, sanitation and toilets, internet services, offices, and equipment). Respondents highlighted the importance of ongoing advocacy and communication, and for women leaders to be able to be independent in their ability to represent their own vision, agenda and ideas. Importantly, respondents in all three provinces also highlighted the issue of the ineffective implementation of already existing laws, policies and international commitments, including NAP 1325. Some suggested this was connected to issues of inadequate political will and commitment, and to ongoing widespread issues of women's marginalization politically, socially and economically.

Recommendations

Government of Afghanistan

1. Conduct an exhaustive needs assessment of all governmental entities to establish women's most pressing needs in terms of basic facilities such as separate toilets, changing rooms, and prayer spaces, and develop an adequately resourced action plan to address them within a specific time span.
2. Develop a strategy for the professionalization of women working in government.
3. Raise awareness of girls about employment opportunities with the government through career coaching educational programs, bursaries, scholarships, and skills-building programs.
4. Develop a mentoring process, through which experienced and respected senior women can mentor younger, less experienced professional women and female students near graduation.
5. Develop and implement transparent recruitment processes for men and women.
6. Conduct a needs assessment in government departments to establish working women's most pressing workplace needs, and ensure these needs are met.
7. Set gender representational goals in various tashkeels that can be monitored and evaluated, including by human and women's rights non-government organizations.
8. Develop and implement training and coaching for men and women regarding professional engagement protocols.
9. Intensify recruitment of qualified women for government leadership positions.
10. Develop mechanisms to ensure women's participation in and contribution to decision- and policy-making.
11. Create a *best practices* forum, including periodic publications, that highlights successes by women, men's contributions to support women in high ranking positions, and engages the Afghan media to project positive images of women in leadership positions.
12. Establish and promote workplace mechanisms dedicated to addressing the harassment of women in the workplace.

Civil Society, Non-governmental Organizations, and Donors

1. Develop strategies and mechanisms to work with the Government of Afghanistan in addressing working women's most pressing needs, from basic workplace facilities to professionalization.
2. Develop programming initiatives for a gender-inclusive advocacy agenda to increase and strengthen women's involvement in decision- and policy-making positions within the government.
3. Engage religious leaders on the benefits of women's more active role in government.

Introduction

The Government of Afghanistan is signatory to numerous human rights conventions and treaties and continues to reaffirm the importance of institutionalizing and enforcing Afghanistan's constitutional commitment to fundamental rights.¹ While progress has been made towards meeting these international and national obligations, it is widely recognised that progress has been slow across areas such as violence against women, rights violations by security forces, limitations in freedom of speech and the persecution of dissent, and lack of accountability amongst formal authorities, amongst others.

Afghanistan is by no means alone amongst countries in its failure to meet its human rights obligations. In Afghanistan, some of challenges to doing so include weak mechanisms of governance, inadequate access to formal justice, corruption within the formal justice system and organisations of state, and inadequate institutionalisation and implementation of many of the protective laws and policies that do exist. Further, advances in rights protections are not always permanent. For example, amidst the recent resurgence of violence in many parts of country, advances that have been made in women's rights since the early 2000s are increasingly under threat.

As in other parts of the world, the existing legislative framework in Afghanistan, though necessary, is not sufficient for protecting and promoting human rights and human rights defenders. To complement regulatory and legal provisions, and to help ensure that rights in law are translated into rights in practice, civil society and rights organisations must also engage through ongoing monitoring, public discourse, and advocacy. Against this background, the Afghanistan Rights Monitor (ARM) project was designed in 2015 to support informed policy and action on fundamental rights protection and promotion through research, constructive advocacy, and increased capacity of public institutions. As part of its work to support and advance informed policy and action, ARM also carries out and publishes monitoring and research, training and mentoring, and outreach and advocacy through the subcommittees of the National Advocacy Committee for Public Policy.²

In support of ARM's larger objectives, the case study presented here explores opportunities for, and challenges to, the advancement of women's rights in three provinces of Afghanistan, including Balkh, Kabul and Herat, specifically through their presence and participation in government.

Case Study Background

The advancement and protection of women's rights in Afghanistan must necessarily be at the heart of any efforts to advance and protect human rights in Afghanistan more broadly. Following 2001, Afghanistan became the scene of the largest gender-focused interventions globally, with vast resources invested by the Afghan government and its international donors into promoting the emergence of women as independent actors in politics, business, decision-making and civil society.

Although the history of women's involvement in Afghan government long predates 2001, a broad range of commitments and structural changes have been made over the past 16 years. In the Bonn Agreement

¹ See "About ARM", available from: <http://www.nac-pp.net/about-arm-sub-committee/>

² APPRO, 14 August 2017, Presentation of ARM Findings at NCCI, available from: <http://appro.org.af/2017/08/14/arm-presentation-nangarhar/>

of 2001, for example, Afghan leaders committed to fostering the inclusion of women in post-conflict governance, and the 2004 Constitution reserved 27% of the *Wolesi Jirga* (or Lower House) for women. One sixth of the *Meshrano Jirga* is also reserved for women, and quotas for women's representation have also been created at sub-national levels. Further, the Government of Afghanistan (GoA) established the Ministry of Women's Affairs in 2002, became signatory to the Convention for the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 2003, has appointed women to executive positions, and set up gender units and focal points within each ministry in 2004.

These efforts have been bolstered by the development of Afghanistan's National Action Plan on UNSCR 1325 – Women, Peace and Security (NAP 1325), developed in June 2015 under the leadership of the Ministry of Foreign affairs (MoFA). The development of NAP 1325 stemmed from Afghanistan's commitments to UNSCR 1325, released on October 31, 2000.³ In UNSCR 1325, the Security Council called on all stakeholders involved in peace negotiation and implementation to “adopt a gender perspective that included the special needs of women and girls during repatriation and resettlement, rehabilitation, reintegration and post-conflict reconstruction.”⁴ The Security Council recognized the impact of war on women as well as their central role in conflict management, conflict resolution, and maintaining peace. UNSCR 1325 supported local women's peace initiatives and indigenous processes for conflict resolution, and highlighted the importance of safeguarding the human rights of women and girls, especially in terms of the constitution, electoral system, judiciary, and police. Participation, defined as the inclusion of women and girls' interests in decision-making processes related to the prevention, management and resolution of conflicts, is one the four pillars of UNSCR 1325, along with prevention, protection, and relief and recovery.

With the formalization of Afghanistan's National Action Plan for the implementation of UNSCR 1325 and related resolutions in June 2015, the Afghan Government further committed to promote women's participation in decision-making and executive levels of the civil service, security, and peace and reintegration processes. The NAP 1325 acknowledged that in a post-conflict country men and women, with equal access to opportunities and resources, play a vital role in the country's development.

While women's participation in the formal economy, in government, security, and decision-making has been on the rise, they are still significantly outnumbered by men. According to the Central Statistical Office (CSO), women in Afghanistan represent 28.7% of parliamentarians in both houses, 21.2% of provincial council members, 32% of teachers, 21.9% of civil servants, 24.2% of the Public Health sector, 16.5% in The Independent Administrative Reform and Civil Service Commission, 11.2% of judges, 6.4% of the Elections Commission, 1.8% of the police, and 0.5% of the Afghan National Army.⁵

However, the numbers represent only part of the picture. Particularly with regards to women in positions within government, much of the focus from donors and government has centered on the quantitative presence of women within government institutions. As Hughes *et al.* (2015) highlight, quotas for women in politics number amongst the most significant political developments in the last

³ UN, Security Council, 31 October 2000, Resolution 1325, [http://undocs.org/S/RES/1325\(2000\)](http://undocs.org/S/RES/1325(2000))

⁴ UN, Security Council, 31 October 2000, Unanimously Adopting Resolution 1325 (2000), Calls for Broad Participation of Women in Peace-building, post-conflict Reconstruction, <http://www.un.org/press/en/2000/20001031.sc6942.doc.html>

⁵ CSO Statistical Yearbook 2015 – 2016, DOD 2016, MAIL (2015)

thirty years.⁶ Yet, there remains much debate globally around the quality and impact of such participation, particularly in terms of how such quotas translate (or not) into representation of gendered interests, transformed societal gender relations, and a fairer distribution of actual decision-making power. These questions challenge even some of the most established democracies, but are particularly difficult in the context of Afghanistan, in which women have historically been largely excluded from economic and political activity, and in which ongoing insecurity imposes further constraints on women’s mobility.⁷

This case study looks beyond the numbers to explore women’s participation in government in the three provinces of Balkh, Herat, and Kabul from a more qualitative perspective. The research supporting this case study draws on key informant interviews (KIIs) in these provinces to explore potential differences in working conditions for men and for women; the substantive involvement of women in internal decision-making and policy-making in government bodies; the ways in which gender considerations are actually incorporated into policy-making processes within government entities; and how women working in government positions are viewed by their own families and within their own communities. Finally, the research explores questions of how women’s roles in internal decision-making mechanisms and policy-making processes within government might be strengthened, moving forward. Through an exploration of these questions, this research aims to identify potential pathways for interventions to improve the conditions of women in government employment.

Methodology

Research for this case study was conducted by APPRO researchers in the provinces of Balkh (Mazar-i-Sharif) Herat (Herat City) and Kabul (Kabul City). The research was conducted in each location between 1-15 June 2017. These three provinces and cities were selected based on the high number of government employees, including female employees, in these three provinces. The selection of Kabul also allows for some reflection on potential differences between the role of women in government in positions at the national and sub-national (provincial) levels.

Qualitative data was collected through key informant interviews with 33 national or provincial level government actors, as well as relevant civil society and NGO representatives. Of these 23 interviews were held with women, and 10 with men. For the Interview Guide, see Appendix 2.

The following is the list of key informant interviews for each province:

Key Informants	Number of interviews	(Female/Male)	Location
Parliamentarians	2	1 F/1 M	1 Center
Upper House (Meshrano Jirga)	4	2 F/ 2 M	1 Center
Ministry of Women’s Affairs: Gender	2	1 F/1 M	1 Center

⁶ Hughes, M., Krook, ML, and Paxton, P. 2015. “Transnational Women’s Activism and the Global Diffusion of Gender Quotas.” *International Studies Quarterly*. 59: 357-372.

⁷ Beath, A., Fotini, C., and Enikolopov, R. “Empowering Women through Development Aid: Evidence from a Field Experiment in Afghanistan.” 2013. *American Political Science Review* 107 (3).

Unit, & Policy and Planning			
Ministry of Public Health: Gender Unit, & Policy and Planning	2	1 F/1 M	1 Center
Ministry of Education: Policy and Planning	1	1 M	1 Center
Ministry of Interior: Gender Unit, Policy and Planning and Provincial level FRUs	4	3 F/1 M	3 Centers
Department of Women's Affairs	3	3 F	1 Centers
Department of Education	3	3 F	3 Centers
Peace Council women members	4	2 F/ 2 M	2 Centers
AIHRC	3	3 F	3 Centers
NGOs	3	2 F/1 M	3 Centers
Human Rights Directorate, Department of Police	2	2 F	2 Centers
TOTAL	33	23 F/10 M	

Key Findings

Gender Differences in Working Conditions

While the numbers of women working in national and provincial government have increased considerably in Afghanistan since 2001, important questions remain regarding the quality of this participation, and women's own experiences within such positions. One of the key areas explored through key informant interviews in Mazar-e Sharif, Kabul and Herat was how men and women in government positions may experience differences in general working conditions. In all three provinces, respondents stated that not only are there less women working in government, but that they also occupy lower positions than men. Across all three provinces, respondents spoke about the ways in which deeply rooted patterns of gender discrimination continued to not only exclude women in government from positions of actual political and decision-making power, but also to restrict women from finding their ways into government positions in the first place.

Across all three provinces, key informants noted that where there were women in government positions, they typically held lower positions than men, and were seldom able to exercise decision-making power. Importantly, some respondents, especially in Kabul, noted that there were some differences between Kabul, the capital, and the surrounding districts, with more women in government positions within the capital.

Respondents spoke not only about the challenges women faced once they were in government positions, but also about the challenges of accessing those positions in the first place. For example, respondents spoke about the challenges women face in terms of recruitment processes in government institutions. Some argued that even qualified women are often not given the opportunity, due to a general perception that women are not able to work in government.⁸ Some respondents noted that in some cases the problem is that, in a context in which women have long been systematically excluded

⁸ KI-F-HER-NG-1, KI-F-HER-GO-5, KI-M-HER-GO-4, KI-F-HER-GO-5, KI-F-HER-GO-2, KI-F-HER-GO-6, KI-M-HER-GO-1

from educational and professional opportunities, women do not have the adequate capacity and qualifications. One respondent from the Department of Education in Kabul noted, “we have a job description, and whenever we decide to recruit a female teacher, we downgrade our criteria in order to be able to recruit them.”⁹

However, even once in a position, several female respondents in Kabul argued that women are often simply assigned to short-term projects, which no-one believes will continue.¹⁰ One female key informant at the Department of Women’s Affairs in Kabul noted also that women often lacked the kind of political support of existing political networks that could help them achieve key positions, arguing that, “women are recruited in low ranking positions. If they are going to be recruited as a director, they need to have political support without which they cannot work in high ranking positions despite their qualifications.”¹¹ In Mazar-e Sharif, women also spoke about the lack of promotion for women as a key difference between the experiences of women and men in government.¹² Some respondents felt that the only directorate where women hold higher positions is in the Directorate of Women’s Affairs (DoWA),¹³ and that the only place that follows the law in terms of gender representation (in terms of numbers, at least) is the National Assembly.¹⁴

Female respondents in Mazar-e Sharif and Herat also emphasized differences in women’s access to facilities at work, for example, inadequate sanitation and restrooms, as well as access to prayer rooms, transport, internet services, and computers.¹⁵ In Mazar-e Sharif, women argued that men often get the better offices and equipment, and noted that while men have access to transportation, women do not.¹⁶ One female respondent from the Family Response Unit in Herat also noted that there are problems for women in areas like, “suitable office space, access to kindergarten facilities, mosque, and inadequate and poorly maintained sanitation and restrooms.”¹⁷ Interestingly, one male respondent in Herat, however, highlighted that there had been changes and that things had improved for women, noting that “legally there is no difference between men and women in our administration; women can work inside the office while not taking part in outside missions. There were some differences in the past, which do not exist anymore and female police are respected.”¹⁸ This raises important questions regarding potential differences in the perceptions of men and women around the role and experience of women in government positions, as female respondents in Herat did, in fact, highlight their inability to travel inside and outside of the country as an example of how women and men were not treated equally in government positions.¹⁹ The security situation further limits women’s safety and mobility, and their employment opportunities.²⁰

However, the most often cited barrier across all three provinces to women working in government is the influence of traditional society, in which many families do not feel comfortable with their female

⁹ KI-M-KAB-GO-5, KI-F-KAB-GO-10

¹⁰ KI-F-KAB-PI-1, KI-F-KAB-GO-2, KI-F-KAB-GO-11

¹¹ KI-F-KAB-GO-3

¹² KI-F-BAL-PI-1, KI-M-BAL-GO-1, KI-F-BAL-NG-1, KI-F-BAL-GO-6, KI-F-BAL-GO-3, KI-F-BAL-GO-4, KI-F-BAL-GO-2

¹³ KI-F-KAB-GO-2, KI-F-BAL-PI-1

¹⁴ KI-M-KAB-MJ-16, KI-M-KAB-MJ-17

¹⁵ KI-F-HER-NG-1, KI-F-HER-GO-5, KI-F-HER-GO-5, KI-F-HER-GO-2, KI-F-HER-GO-6, KI-F-BAL-GO-6

¹⁶ KI-F-BAL-PI-1, KI-F-BAL-NG-1, KI-F-BAL-GO-6, KI-F-BAL-GO-3

¹⁷ KI-F-HER-GO-6

¹⁸ KI-M-HER-GO-4

¹⁹ KI-F-HER-NG-1, KI-F-HER-GO-5, KI-F-HER-GO-5, KI-F-HER-GO-2, KI-F-HER-GO-6

²⁰ KI-M-KAB-MJ-16, KI-F-KAB-GO-3, KI-F-KAB-GO-10, KI-M-KAB-NG-22

members working in government institutions, especially institutions where the majority are men. As one female respondent from the Ministry of Public Health noted, “the reason behind that is our custom and traditions because women were not allowed to work at government institutions and the effect has lasted until now.”²¹ As a result, women work mostly in professions where they interact mostly with other women, for example, teachers, doctors, and nurses. This issue is even more pronounced in the provincial districts.²² Respondents reported that deeply ingrained gender discrimination at all levels of society also permeated and shaped women’s experiences in government. In Herat, for example, female respondents noted that there was sexual discrimination carried out by male directors.²³ In Mazar-e Sharif, some respondents reported that, “gender discrimination is excessive in governmental entities.”²⁴

Across all three provinces, women reported fewer opportunities to work within government, an ongoing culture of discrimination and exclusion from resources, facilities and amenities, and from positions of decision-making power in government positions. Key informants described an ongoing social and cultural climate of gender discrimination that continues to restrict meaningful opportunities for women.

Women’s Involvement in Internal Decision- and Policy-making

This section explores the extent to which women are involved in the internal decision- and policy-making of the government entity in which they work. With some exceptions, respondents across all three provinces argued that women are mostly not involved in decision-making processes, and that, at present, their participation is largely symbolic.²⁵

As the previous section highlighted, respondents noted that many women occupy lower positions in government, and work under male directors, whose opinions are given more weight.²⁶ Some key informants noted that women’s views were not taken seriously and at times were even ridiculed. As one female Peace Council member in Mazar-e Sharif noted, “women participate in decision-makings but their ideas and comments are not respected or acted upon, and, in some cases, they are even ridiculed because men think that women have less ability, talent, and wisdom.”²⁷ One key informant in Mazar-e Sharif made the point that community customs and cultural views were carried over into the workplace; throughout their lives, from children into adulthood, women “stand second” to men, and “even though a woman is the head, still, an administrative manager who is a man has more influence than her.”²⁸

Key informants also believed that women were only invited to give input into what are what are considered as women-specific issues (such as how to celebrate teacher’s day at female schools).²⁹ In Herat, a female key informant from the Department of Education illustrated this point:

The Directorate of Education has 5 departments, which are entirely ruled by men and there is just one woman in a management position. Mostly women are managers at female

²¹ KI-F-KAB-GO-11

²² KI-F-KAB-GO-1, KI-F-KAB-GO-6, KI-F-KAB-MJ-18, KI-M-KAB-MJ-17

²³ KI-F-HER-GO-5

²⁴ KI-F-BAL-PI-1

²⁵ KI-F-BAL-PI-1, KI-M-KAB-MJ-16

²⁶ KI-F-BAL-PI-1, KI-F-BAL-GO-6, KI-F-BAL-GO-3, KI-F-BAL-GO-4, KI-F-BAL-GO-2

²⁷ KI-F-BAL-GO-4

²⁸ KI-F-BAL-GO-2

²⁹ KI-F-HER-PI-1, KI-F-HER-GO-4, KI-F-HER-NG-1

schools, otherwise these positions would be occupied by men as well. People do not believe in women's abilities and they are not allowed to play significant roles in decision-making, therefore women's opinion regarding administration are not considered. Whereas, women have impressive abilities, but unfortunately opportunities are not provided for them.³⁰

In Kabul, respondents noted that in the capital the situation might be somewhat better than elsewhere in the country, as women working in high-ranking positions do have some say in decision-making. For example, one female key informant from the Ministry of Public Health said,

In our ministry, women who occupy decision-making or high-ranking positions are involved in internal decision making of the entity. When a new policy or strategy is developed in the ministry, those with high ranking position can express their ideas. Rarely, they ask for opinions of women who occupy low ranking positions.³¹

However, importantly, some participants in Kabul also highlighted that there are no women in important and strategic decision-making entities, for example in security, defense or in essential economic committees.³² As one female Member of Parliament, for example, explained, "we expect to have women in economic, political, and policy making committees. We cannot compare a female minister with her male peers; the authority of female ministers is limited. We can see obvious discrimination, and women have not been engaged in decision-making the way we want them to be."³³

This research explored not only women's involvement in decision-making, but also in policy-making. The findings were similar, with respondents across all three provinces noting that in general, and with some important exceptions, women were seldom involved in government policy-making. In Mazar-e Sharif, key informants from within both government entities and the NGO sector spoke about women's role as being symbolic, rather than substantive. One key informant from the Family Response Unit in Mazar-e Sharif noted that, "men still think that women do not have the ability of making a plan, or expressing their ideas; they even announced it through holding a policy making workshop, that women do not have the ability of policy-making."³⁴ In Mazar-e Sharif and Kabul, key informants noted that policy-making is considered an area that requires experience and skills which women are not perceived to have, while in Herat, key informants highlighted that women were not involved in policy making because policies were made at the central level.³⁵ Said one female NGO representative, "besides, no one believes in women's ability in this province."³⁶

Despite this general view, some respondents did provide examples of women's involvement in policy-making. In Herat, one male Peace Council member noted that, "we take advice from the well-known women at the city."³⁷ Another male key government informant from Kabul stated, "when we want to design a plan in our administration, women's opinions and advice are definitely considered."³⁸ In Kabul, other respondents also noted that women in high-ranking positions are involved in policy-making, but

³⁰ KI-F-HER-GO-7

³¹ KI-F-KAB-GO-11

³² KI-F-KAB-PM-14, KI-F-KAB-GO-6, KI-M-KAB-NG-22, KI-F-KAB-GO-3

³³ KI-F-KAB-PM-14

³⁴ KI-F-BAL-GO-6

³⁵ KI-F-HER-NG-1, KI-M-HER-GO-1

³⁶ KI-F-HER-NG-1

³⁷ KI-M-HER-GO-1

³⁸ KI-M-HER-GO-4

that their number is very limited. In the MoE, a respondent noted that, “policies, strategies and decisions are made in consent with women. We have a gender department in MoE which was involved in the development of all policies so far.”³⁹ Some respondents also made the point that women’s role in policy-making was difficult to comment on at the provincial level because most policy is being developed at the central level.⁴⁰

Gender Considerations in Internal Decision- and Policy-making Processes

Along with exploring women’s participation in decision- and policy-making processes, this research also explored how gender considerations were incorporated in internal decision- and policy-making processes of the government entity. For respondents in all three provinces, the incorporation of gender considerations into both internal decision-making and policy-making processes of government entities was largely perceived to be limited, with some important exceptions.

When responding to the question of how gender considerations were incorporated into internal decision-making processes in government entities, most respondents in Kabul linked the incorporation of gender considerations with the issue of representation, in terms of the numbers of women in government positions. For example, the majority of key informants noted that it was because of consideration of gender that women now have 25% representation in Parliament, and thus have the opportunity to be involved in decision- and policy-making, and the passing of laws. In Mazar-e Sharif, one female key informant from the AIHRC noted that in recent years, plans have been undertaken to improve the incorporation of women into decision-making processes in which men and women have equal rights and privileges; she also noted that these plans call for women to be able to participate in educational scholarships and capacity-building programs.⁴¹

Some respondents in Kabul identified the MoE as a Ministry in which gender considerations in both decision- and policy-making were successfully being incorporated, noting:

In the mission of ministry of education, all decisions are taken into account with the gender unit. The survey finding shows that 33% of our teachers are female. One of the third strategies to be implemented in the next five years is that teachers in remote areas should be employed and if there is not teachers that are graduated from 14 or 12 grade the education department they should hire from class 9 as a teacher for schools.⁴²

In Mazar-e Sharif, one female respondent from the AIHRC noted that, “we are witnessing gender considerations in internal decision-making processes in the last two years.”⁴³ In Mazar-e Sharif and Herat, the MoWA was singled out as an example of where gender considerations are most evident in decision- and policy making.

In Kabul, respondents also highlighted the creation of gender departments as a positive step in improving the incorporation of gender considerations into internal decision-making and policy-making processes in government. Respondents stated that the role of gender departments in government

³⁹ KI-M- KAB-GO-5

⁴⁰ KI-F-BAL-GO-6, KI-F-BAL-GO-3

⁴¹ KI-F-BAL-PI-1

⁴² KI-M-KAB-GO-5

⁴³ KI-F-BAL-PI-1

entities is to ensure that gender is incorporated into decision- and policy making. Participants noted that with the support of the UNDP, the main responsibility of the gender departments was to thoroughly evaluate each policy in terms of gender.⁴⁴

However, despite the positive examples of the incorporation of gender considerations into both internal decision-making and policy-making processes, many respondents stated that they remained unaware of any specific gender considerations, and that many women still felt afraid to voice their opinions.⁴⁵

Community and Family Perceptions

This research also explored questions of how women who are working as leaders or decision-makers in government are viewed by their families and within their communities. Generally, key informants' responses around community perceptions of these women are mixed. Some respondents believed people have a positive view when they see a woman working and making a positive contribution to her family and society, while other respondents noted that community members will speak out negatively about women working in government positions.

In Mazar-e Sharif, the majority of respondents noted a negative perception of women working as leaders or decision-makers in government, especially in the military or police. One female respondent from the AIHRC in Mazar-e Sharif noted the perception that women in the police, for example, were being abused, and the belief that women should only work as teachers.⁴⁶ Another female NGO respondent noted that some people believe women in leadership positions have attained those positions through illegal methods, even though such perceptions fail to acknowledge that these women have been appointed based on their education, experience and skills.⁴⁷

In Herat, respondents noted mixed reactions from within the community, also highlighting the belief among some that women in leadership and decision-making positions in government have acquired their positions illegally, through bribery or other illegal relations. Participants in Herat also noted that the more popular or well known a woman became in a community, the more people would speak out against her.⁴⁸ While some women can withstand this community criticism, others have been forced to quit their posts.⁴⁹ One respondent in Herat cited the security sector as a particularly problematic area in which to work. She shared,

One day when I got out from the headquarters, I took a taxi and the driver asked me if I worked in the police. Due to a security issue, I said that I did not work in the police. He then replied that women should not work in the police because women should stay at home or if they want to work; they should become teachers.⁵⁰

In Kabul, the majority of respondents stated that there has been an improvement in public perception regarding women working in government, noting that younger generations under the age of 35 tend to

⁴⁴ KI-F-KAB-GO-2, KI-F-KAB-GO-1

⁴⁵ KI-M-BAL-GO-1, KI-F-BAL-GO-6, KI-F-BAL-NG-1, KI-F-BAL-GO-2, KI-F-BAL-GO-2, KI-F-BAL-GO-6

⁴⁶ KI-F-BAL-PI-1

⁴⁷ KI-F-BAL-NG-1

⁴⁸ KI-F-HER-NG-1, KI-M-HER-GO-3

⁴⁹ KI-F-HER-GO-5, KI-F-HER-NG-1, KI-F-HER-PI-1, KI-M-HER-GO-1, KI- KI-M-HER-GO-3

⁵⁰ KI-F-HER-GO-5

have a more positive view of women working.⁵¹ Respondents argued that literacy also contributes to more positive perceptions. One female respondent from the MoWA stated, “if we divide the community into literates and illiterates, the illiterates have the most negative view against women who work. Women are humiliated and their opinions are not considered, but literate people respect women and their behavior is getting better.”⁵² Respondents in Kabul also noted that in cities and places with higher levels of literacy the perception about women who work in government had improved.⁵³ They noted that initially people living in rural areas were more negative towards women working in government but that now these same people were asking these women to assist them in government-related issues. As one respondent noted, “if we can put strong women in executive levels in our society, they can prove themselves.”⁵⁴

In Kabul, one female key informant from the MoI felt that the AIHRC and the MoI had played a role in improving public perceptions:

People’s view about women who work in leadership or decision-making levels is positive. But, there is discrimination against women who work in the police force, and due to this discrimination women’s presence in the police force is weak in 11 provinces. But, in the capital and some central provinces, as a result of awareness programs from Human Rights Commission as well as the support of Ministry of Interior Affairs authorities, this perception about women who occupy leadership positions is positive.⁵⁵

Despite improvements, key informant responses across all three provinces indicate that significant levels of discrimination remain against women in positions of leadership and decision-making in government.

Strengthening Women’s Roles in Decision- and Policy-making

Finally, this research explored the question of what could be done to strengthen women’s roles in internal decision- and policy-making mechanisms of government entities. Many respondents across all three provinces spoke about the urgent need to provide further support and build women’s capacity, in terms of both internal decision-making and policymaking processes. These suggestions include expanding the coverage of tertiary education for women through scholarships; ensuring the recruitment process is transparent and free of nepotism and bribery; encouraging capacity-building trips (nationally and internationally); encouraging training for men around working with women, and improving the work facilities for women (e.g. transportation, kindergarten, sanitation and restrooms, internet services, offices, and equipment).⁵⁶

⁵¹ KI-M-KAB-MJ-17, KI-F-KAB-GO-11, KI-F-KAB-PM-14, KI-F-KAB-PI-1, KI-F-KAB-GO-2, KI-F-KAB-GO-6, KI-F-KAB-MJ-19, KI-M-KAB-GO-5, KI-M-KAB-NG-22, KI-M-KAB-GO-8, KI-F-KAB-GO-3, KI-M-KAB-PM-12, KI-F-KAB-MJ-18

⁵² KI-F-KAB-GO-2

⁵³ KI-F-KAB-PM-14

⁵⁴ KI-M-KAB-MJ-17

⁵⁵ KI-F-KAB-PM-14

⁵⁶ KI-F-HER-NG-1, KI-F-HER-GO-5, KI-F-HER-PI-1, KI-M-HER-GO-1, KI-M-HER-GO-4, KI-F-HER-GO-7, KI-F-HER-GO-2, KI-F-HER-GO-5, KI-F-BAL-NG-1, KI-F-KAB-PM-14, KI-F-KAB-GO-10, KI-F-KAB-GO-6, KI-F-BAL-GO-5

Respondents pointed to a number of important obstacles for women in attaining and retaining meaningful government positions, with negative impacts for their roles in both internal decision-making and policy-making processes. In Herat, for example, one NGO respondent noted that corruption in the process of attaining government posts remained a hurdle for women, suggesting that, “corruption should be eliminated in the employment process until women can be employed based on their qualifications. When there is a vacancy, men can go to the capital and they spend money to grab the position, while women are not able to do such things.”⁵⁷ Several respondents in Kabul also believed that government should improve the opportunities for women and show trust in their ability to perform the necessary functions.⁵⁸ As a sign of this required commitment, there was a call for a, “strong woman to be appointed to the Supreme Court.”⁵⁹

Respondents in Kabul also noted the importance of advocacy and coordination in improving women’s involvement.⁶⁰ One female respondent from the MoWA argued that this Ministry played a key role in this regard, noting that such work was needed over the long-term:

In order to consider gender and engage women in policy- and decision-making processes, there is the need for continuous advocacy which the MoWA has worked on. They have tried to see the needs and the gaps of women, and then based their plan on this. In order to fill such gaps, the ministry held a women’s empowerment symposium in the northern zone. They are trying to hold similar symposiums in other zones as well. The advocacy process is a long process and its results will be revealed in long run.⁶¹

Women’s lack of financial independence and their political and tribal ties were identified in this research as barriers. One female Member of the Mesrhano Jirga believed that some women who do become members of parliament do not bring their own vision and do not represent the needs of Afghan women because they are tied, financially and socially, to warlords and tribal leaders:

Those who succeed in becoming parliament members should be individuals who have their own vision and ideas, not women whom anyone can trick to be a spokesperson for their ideas. For instance, the majority of women are tied with warlords or former parties, and this is a reality. One of the main challenges is that women do not have the financial independence to make their own political decisions. For example, a tribal leader helped a weak woman to succeed in becoming a parliament member after which he used her seat to further his own agenda and ideas.⁶²

A common theme in the interviews, across all three provinces, was the need to address what respondents believed was the ineffective implementation of existing laws, policies and commitments concerning women’s involvement in decision- and policy-making.⁶³ For example, in Herat, one respondent said, “I think it has been specified that women’s presence should be increased up to 30% in all government entities; therefore, the government should ensure that local administrations observe

⁵⁷ KI-F-HER-NG-1

⁵⁸ KI-F-KAB-GO-10, KI-M-KAB-NG-22, KI-F-KAB-GO-3

⁵⁹ KI-F-KAB-PM-14, KI-F-KAB-GO-10, KI-F-KAB-GO-6

⁶⁰ KI-F-KAB-GO-2, KI-M-KAB-NG-22

⁶¹ KI-F-KAB-GO-2

⁶² KI-F-KAB-PM-14

⁶³ KI-F-KAB-PI-1, KI-M-KAB-MJ-17

this rule.”⁶⁴ In Kabul, one male representative from the Ministry of Women’s Affairs suggested that the implementation of the NAP would strengthen women’s role in internal decision- and policy-making processes, as well as awareness programs for changing people’s mindset about the role of women in government.⁶⁵ A female respondent from the AIHRC in Kabul also emphasized the issue of implementation, noting, “I think that despite the commitments and the strong laws related to women’s rights, few improvements have been made concerning women in our society ... If the laws were actually implemented, and if the United Nations was truly committed, we would not have a problem right now.”⁶⁶ One male member of the Peace Council in Mazar-e Sharif also highlighted the need for stronger international monitoring of the government’s performance.⁶⁷

Some respondents also argued that the lack of political commitment to the implementation of these laws was indicative of the wider lack of support for women in Afghanistan. For example, one female Member of the Meshrano Jirga argued that “women will not be able to progress until they are supported politically, socially, economically and culturally. That leaves them at the margins of engagement, in symbolic roles, with no progress.”⁶⁸

Conclusion

This research, conducted in the cities of Mazar-e Sharif, Kabul and Herat, moved beyond questions of women’s quantitative representation in government positions in contemporary Afghanistan, to ask questions regarding how women themselves experienced these positions. The research explored perceptions around differences in working conditions between men and women; the extent to which women in such positions felt able to exercise decision- and policy-making power; how gender considerations were incorporated into internal decision- and policy-making processes; how women working in these positions were viewed by their families and communities; and finally, what could be done to strengthen women’s roles in both internal decision- and policy-making processes.

Working conditions for women, compared to those for men, were largely perceived to be inferior across all three provinces. Respondents highlighted that not only were there less women working in government, but that they also occupied lower positions than men. In all three provinces, key informants noted the ways in which deeply-rooted gender discrimination within Afghan society continued to not only exclude women in government from positions in which they were able to exercise decision- and policy-making power, but also to prevent women from entering these positions in the first place. Respondents spoke about many of the challenges facing women in terms of accessing positions, including lack of education, societal perceptions that women should not work in such positions, and the assigning of women to short-term projects and low positions. In Mazar-e Sharif and Herat, participants emphasized differences in women’s access to facilities at work, for example, inadequate sanitation and restrooms, as well as access to prayer rooms, transport, internet services, and computers. Some respondents also highlighted restrictions on women’s ability to travel and access transportation, as well as challenges arising from Afghanistan’s security situation. Key informants described an ongoing social

⁶⁴ KI-F-HER-GO-5

⁶⁵ KI-F-KAB-GO-2

⁶⁶ KI-F-KAB-PI-1

⁶⁷ KI-F-BAL-GO-4

⁶⁸ KI-F-KAB-MJ-18

and cultural climate of gender discrimination that continues to restrict meaningful opportunities for women.

The research also points to ongoing limitations in women's substantive involvement in internal decision-making of the government entity in which they work. With some exceptions, respondents across all three provinces argued that women are mostly not involved in decision- and policy-making processes, and that, at present, their participation is largely symbolic. Some key informants noted that women's views were not taken seriously and at times were even ridiculed. Others reported that women were only invited to give input into what are what are considered as women-specific issues (such as how to celebrate teacher's day at female schools). In Kabul, respondents noted that in the capital the situation might be somewhat better than elsewhere in the country, as women working in high-ranking positions do have some say in decision-making, though others pointed out that there are no women in important and strategic decision-making entities. Findings around policy-making were similar, with respondents across all three provinces noting that in general, and with some important exceptions, women were seldom effectively involved in government policy-making.

Further, this research probed questions regarding how gender considerations were incorporated into internal decision- and policy-making processes within the government entities represented by key informants in this work. Respondents in all three provinces largely perceived the incorporation of gender considerations into both internal decision-making and policy-making processes of government entities to be limited, but again, with some important exceptions. In Kabul, for example, some respondents highlighted the creation of gender departments within government as a positive step in improving the incorporation of gender considerations into internal decision- and policy-making processes. However, it is also important to note that the majority of respondents, in discussing this question, equated the incorporation of gender considerations into decision- and policy-making with issues of the numerical representation of women in such positions. However, the presence of women government positions does not necessarily mean that gender considerations are being incorporated into either internal decision-making or policy-making processes.

Another theme in this research explored how women working in government positions were viewed by their own families, and within their own communities. Generally, key informants' responses around community perceptions of these women were mixed. Some believed that people have a positive view when they see a woman working and making a positive contribution to her family and society, while others noted that community members will speak out negatively about women working in government positions – particularly in relation to women working in the military or the police. Some respondents reported that many community members continued to believe that women should work only as teachers, and noted that there were perceptions within some communities that women in decision-making or leadership positions in government had obtained their positions illegally. In Kabul, the majority of respondents believed there had been an improvement in public perception regarding women working in government, with the younger generations, under the age of 35. Respondents argued that literacy also contributes to more positive perceptions. Despite some improvements, key informant responses across all three provinces indicate that significant levels of societal and familial discrimination remain against women in positions of leadership and decision-making in government.

Finally, this research project probed the question of what key informants felt could be done to strengthen women's roles in both internal decision- and policy-making processes in contemporary Afghanistan. Many respondents across all three provinces spoke about the urgent need to provide further support and build women's capacity. These suggestions include expanding the coverage of

tertiary education for women through scholarships; ensuring the recruitment process is transparent and free of nepotism and bribery; encouraging capacity-building trips (nationally and internationally); encouraging training for men around working with women, and improving the work facilities for women (e.g. transportation, kindergarten, sanitation and restrooms, internet services, offices, and equipment). Respondents highlighted the importance of ongoing advocacy and communication, and for women leaders to be able to be independent in their ability to represent their own vision, agenda and ideas. Importantly, respondents in all three provinces also highlighted the issue of the ineffective implementation of already existing laws, policies and international commitments, including NAP1325. Some suggested this was connected to issues of inadequate political will and commitment, and to ongoing widespread issues of women's marginalization politically, socially and economically.

Recommendations

Government of Afghanistan

13. Conduct an exhaustive needs assessment of all governmental entities to establish women's most pressing needs in terms of basic facilities such as separate toilets, changing rooms, and prayer spaces, and develop an adequately resourced action plan to address them within a specific time span.
14. Develop a strategy for the professionalization of women working in government.
15. Raise awareness of girls about employment opportunities with the government through career coaching educational programs, bursaries, scholarships, and skills-building programs.
16. Develop a mentoring process, through which experienced and respected senior women can mentor younger, less experienced professional women and female students near graduation.
17. Develop and implement transparent recruitment processes for men and women.
18. Conduct a needs assessment in government departments to establish working women's most pressing workplace needs, and ensure these needs are met.
19. Set gender representational goals in various tashkeels that can be monitored and evaluated, including by human and women's rights non-government organizations.
20. Develop and implement training and coaching for men and women regarding professional engagement protocols.
21. Intensify recruitment of qualified women for government leadership positions.
22. Develop mechanisms to ensure women's participation in and contribution to decision- and policy-making.
23. Create a *best practices* forum, including periodic publications, that highlights successes by women, men's contributions to support women in high ranking positions, and engages the Afghan media to project positive images of women in leadership positions.
24. Establish and promote workplace mechanisms dedicated to addressing the harassment of women in the workplace.

Civil Society, Non-governmental Organizations, and Donors

4. Develop strategies and mechanisms to work with the Government of Afghanistan in addressing working women's most pressing needs, from basic workplace facilities to professionalization.
5. Develop programming initiatives for a gender-inclusive advocacy agenda to increase and strengthen women's involvement in decision- and policy-making positions within the government.
6. Engage religious leaders on the benefits of women's more active role in government.

Appendix 1: Interview Codes

No	Codes	Affiliation
HERAT		
1	KI-F-HER-PI-1	AIHRC
2	KI-M-HER-GO-4	Member of the Peace Council (Male)
3	KI-F-HER-GO-5	Member of the Peace Council (Female)
4	KI-F-HER-GO-6	Family Response Unit
5	KI-F-HER-GO-7	Department of Educaiton
6	KI-F-HER-GO-5	DoWA
7	KI-F-HER-GO-15	Human Rights Department of Police
8	KI-F-HER-NG-1	NGO
BALKH		
1	KI-F-BAL-PI-1	AIHRC
2	KI-M-BAL-GO-4	Member of the Peace Council (Male)
3	KI-F-BAL-GO-5	Member of the Peace Council (Female)
4	KI-F-BAL-GO-6	Family Response Unit
5	KI-F-BAL-GO-7	Department of Educaiton
6	KI-F-BAL-GO-5	DoWA
7	KI-F-BAL-GO-15	Human Rights Department of Police
8	KI-F-BAL-NG-1	NGO
KABUL		
1	KI-F-KAB-PI-1	AIHRC
2	KI-F-KAB-GO-1	Ministry of Women's Affairs (Gender)
3	KI-M-KAB-GO-2	Ministry of Women's Affairs (Policy)
4	KI-F-KAB-GO-3	Department of Women's Affairs
5	KI-M-KAB-GO-5	Ministry of Education (Policy)
6	KI-F-KAB-GO-6	Department of Education
7	KI-F-KAB-GO-7	Ministry of Interior (Gender)
8	KI-M-KAB-GO-8	Ministry of Interior (Policy)
9	KI-M-KAB-GO-10	Ministry of Public Health (Policy)
10	KI-F-KAB-GO-11	Ministry of Public Health (Gender)
11	KI-M-KAB-PM-12	Member of Parliament (Male)
12	KI-F-KAB-PM-14	Member of Parliament (Female)
13	KI-M-KAB-MJ-16	Member of the Meshrano Jirga (Male)
14	KI-M-KAB-MJ-17	Member of the Meshrano Jirga (Male)
15	KI-F-KAB-MJ-18	Member of the Meshrano Jirga (Female)
16	KI-F-KAB-ML-19	Member of the Meshrano Jirga (Female)
17	KI-M-KAB-NG-22	NGO

Appendix 2: Guiding Questions

1. What are the main differences in the general working conditions of men and women in government entities?
2. To what extent are women involved in internal decision making of the government entity in which they work?
3. To what extent are women involved in policy making within the government entity in which they work?
4. How are gender considerations incorporated in internal decision-making processes of the government entity?
5. How are gender considerations incorporated in the policy-making processes of the government entity?
6. How are women working in government positions viewed by their own families and within their communities?
7. What can be done to strengthen women's role in internal decision-making mechanisms of the government entity?
8. What can be done to strengthen women's role in the policy-making processes of the government entity?

Appendix 3: The Four Pillars of Afghanistan's NAP 1325

Participation

- Increase effective participation of women in the decision-making and executive levels of the civil service
- Ensure women's active and effective participation in leadership positions of security agencies
- Ensure women's effective participation in the peace process
- Encourage women's meaningful participation in the drafting of strategies and policies on peace and security
- Strengthen women's active participation in politics.

Protection

- Protect women from all forms of violence and discrimination through the enforcement, monitoring and amendment of existing laws and development of new laws and policies
- Promote women's human rights gender mainstreaming of laws, policies, and institutional reforms
- Create an enabling environment for women to have access to justice through women's effective participation in the judiciary
- Protect women from all forms of violence through awareness raising and public outreach
- Provide health, psychological, and social services for women survivors of violence throughout Afghanistan
- Effect special measures to ensure women's protection from sexual violence.

Prevention

- Prevent violence against women
- Eliminate culture of impunity in violence against women
- Strengthen the role of women in the security sector and judicial structures
- Effect gender-related reforms in the security and justice sectors
- Involve men and boys in the fight against all forms of violence against women
- Increase awareness among women of their rights and their role in preventing violence and resolving conflict.

Relief and Recovery

- Provide relief and recovery services for women affected by conflict, internal displacement and women survivors of violence
- Increase rural women's economic security through increased employment opportunities
- Consider women's social and economic needs in the design, implementation, and evaluation of relief and recovery programs
- Implement the policy provisions of UNSCR 1325 for the internally displaced persons (IDPs).