



Working with Gender in Rural Afghanistan: Experiences from Norwegian-funded NGO projects



Frontpage image:



Photo: Aga Khan Foundation.
Afghan women attending ski
instructor course.



Photo: Ken Opprann

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Responsibility for the contents and presentation of findings and recommendations rests with the study team. The views and opinions expressed in the report do not necessarily correspond with those of Norad.

Desk study

Working with Gender in Rural Afghanistan: Experiences from Norwegian-funded NGO projects

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Abbreviations and glossary

ACTED	Agency for Technical Cooperation and Development
AKF	Aga Khan Foundation
CBO	Community Based Organisation
CBSG	Community Based Saving Groups
CDC	Community Development Council
CMI	Chr. Michelsen Institute
DACAAR	Danish Committee for Aid to Afghan Refugees
GBV	Gender Based Violence
GoA	Government of Afghanistan
LNGO	Local non- governmental organisation
<i>Mahram</i>	Male escort
NAC	Norwegian Afghanistan Committee
NCA	Norwegian Church Aid
NGO	Non- governmental organisation
NORAD	Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation
NRC	Norwegian Refugee Council
NOK	Norwegian Kroner
NSP	National Solidarity Programme
SHG	Self Help Group
<i>Shura</i>	Local council
TOR	Terms of Reference
WB	World Bank
WRC	Women Resource Centre
YDC	Youth Development Centre
USD	US Dollar

Executive summary

This study was commissioned by NORAD upon the request of the Norwegian Embassy in Kabul in order to review gender aspects of six large rural development projects in Afghanistan. The projects were supported by the Norwegian government between 2010 and 2013, and implemented by six different non-governmental organisations (NGOs). More specifically, the terms of reference of the study called for a review of current literature on gender and development in Afghanistan, a discussion of how the six organisations conceptualised and prioritised gender and organised their interventions in order to achieve gender-related objectives, and an assessment of the relevance, sustainability and results of the NGOs' gender work. Emphasis was placed on generating useful and practical insights regarding promising experiences that might serve as an input for future programming.

Due to security restrictions, the study was conceptualised as desk study with telephone and skype interviews taking place from Norway, but given the presence of one of the consultants in Kabul, interviews in the Afghan capital were carried out. The scope of the study nonetheless excluded field-based research and the team was encouraged to identify issues that might be explored through a later fieldwork based study.

Regarding the organizations 'gender profiles' the study noted that in many ways, the organizations were quite similar. One of the organizations; the Norwegian Afghanistan Committee, appeared to have a higher number of female staff than the other organizations.

The study also looked at **how is gender mainstreaming understood and operationalized in the projects**. Based on a distinction between transformative and integrative mainstreaming, the study found that the most prevalent way that 'gender mainstreaming' has been conceptualized is integrative; proceeding from the objective that women should be *included* both as beneficiaries, and as participants consulted in needs assessments. In order to achieve this, staff would monitor beneficiary numbers, and frequently design parallel /segregated activities that would ensure gender balance through enabling women to participate in program activities without radically transgressing predominant gender roles. However, in some areas there were also efforts to include larger numbers of women in more male-dominated fields. Occasionally, mainstreaming also meant examining the projects resources allocated to men versus women. Like in most other settings, gender mainstreaming in its most radical version - the idea that all development programs should have the transformation of gender relations as a core objective was largely absent.

The team found that three out of a total of 22 project components specifically targeted women or gender equality. In addition it identified a number of smaller sub-components that were targeted in this sense. The ToR raised the **question of the relative effectiveness of targeted versus mainstreaming approaches** in the current setting in Afghanistan. However, team found it more useful to distinguish between transformative and integrative approaches, whether within projects as a whole or within targeted approaches. The report argues that there is a risk that even targeted approaches become too neutralized and possible even a way of improving the gender balance sheet as a whole by having something 'special' for women. Such 'special things' should be aiming for some kind of strategic change, (thus eventually making themselves redundant) and constantly assess whether they are being ambitious enough, as well as thorough and of high quality.

The study zoomed in on women's income generation projects in order to examine the **relevance, sustainability, results and promising practices** of gender related activities. The review found interesting differences in how projects were conceived and implemented; to what extent they aimed and succeeded in expanding women's control over the value chain, whether it was possible to mobilize women in small collectives with regular meetings and to what extent women were able to obtain a sustainable income. The findings suggest that organizations should consider whether they can be more strategic, focused and ambitious in their work with women's economic empowerment.

Moreover, as a general point, the team would like to suggest that what 'works' in Afghanistan when it comes to promoting women's rights cannot be framed in terms of a general recipe across sectors. Often, working through religious idioms and local leaders has been presented as one panacea, counterposed to an 'externally imposed' or culturally insensitive intervention. However, as illustrated by the case study of women's income generation projects, it is the specifics of how and whether an intervention is informed by and adjusted to the particular constraints facing women in a particular area -- and has a realistic strategy for how to overcome them -- that is the key to 'success'.

Recommendations and issues for further exploration

Given the limited scope of the study in the light of the number of organizations included, the team has been hesitant to offer prescriptive recommendations regarding project design and implementation, or organizational structures or practices. Instead the review has identified issues that merit consideration and questions to be explored further through field based study.

At the organizational level; organizations could consider whether there might be any of NAC's practices of supporting female staff that might be worth replicating- such as free child care. They could also consider how they could incorporate more expansive ways of measuring gender equality in their activities, for instance by examining the resources allocated to male and female beneficiaries and being more systematic in how they measure change, for instance by introducing more pre and post assessments of changes in attitudes, distribution of resources and decision-making power.

Regarding programs that works with women's income generation organizations should consider a horizontal rather than vertical approach. Instead of attempting to get a broad coverage, it might be more effective to focus on one or two particular products and systematically expand women's ability to collectively produce and to strengthen their links with markets at the regional, national and international level. The latter is important both to cut out middlemen and to ensure that products are standardized and competitive. Moreover, as funds decrease, a more strict business logic based on calculation of profits must be applied. There is nothing wrong with subsidizing emerging sectors, women entrepreneurs included, but it should take place in a strategic and –literally- calculated fashion. Market analysis and a more systematic recording and analysis of profits should be obvious components. In addition, attention must be paid to women's working conditions and ability to control their own income. It also appears that most of the organizations could review the scope for engaging more women outside of their conventional home-based roles.

At this point additional topics for further, more field-based inquiries include the following:

- women's mobility and ability to interface with outsiders in selected project locations; (with a focus on actual practices rather than the opinions of community leaders)
- to what extent and how women can take control over earnings and their working conditions

- a more systematic mapping of the social aspects of the savings and self-help groups; under what conditions might women's solidarity be generated by these groups and what concrete actions do they lead to?
- the projects should be reviewed in relation to how they complement and coordinate with government institutions and other cooperatives and organizations
- a more in-depth processes oriented study of how organizations obtain and maintain access, perhaps focusing on Faryab in order to determine how much difference prolonged engagement with community elders can make.

1. Introduction and purpose of the study

This study is commissioned by the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD) for the purpose of reviewing the gender aspects of six large rural development projects in Afghanistan supported by the Norwegian government between 2010 and 2013, and implemented by six different non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

The rationale of the study, as stated in the Terms of Reference (ToR) is as follows;

Gender is an important cross cutting issue in Norwegian development assistance in general and, due to the special conditions, in Afghanistan in particular. Gender considerations are part of most of the development projects, but vary in terms of specificity from agreement to agreement, and between the different channels of funding.

NGOs are recognized as an important development channel for the Norwegian Embassy in Kabul, and are expected to continue to be so over the coming years as alternatives or complements to aid channeled through national government programs. All the six NGOs included in this study; Agency for Technical Cooperation and Development (ACTED), Aga Khan Foundation (AKF), Danish Committee for Aid to Afghanistan (DACAAR), the Norwegian Afghanistan Committee (NAC), Norwegian Church Aid (NAC) and the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC)¹ have extensive experience of working in Afghanistan with some working exclusively in the country and others internationally. Some of the organizations have received Norwegian assistance since the early 1980s and others only since 2007 or later.

This review is taking place at a crucial time for Afghans, marked by major uncertainty over the future and the extent of international assistance. International forces are drawing down their presence during 2014, and insecurity has gradually increased in many parts of Afghanistan. This has worsened the working conditions for NGOs and reduced access to several areas. They, and international donors, are also affected by the uncertainty over future political stability due to fraud allegations made over the presidential elections. All these factors might affect assistance levels and implementation capacity and possibility over the coming years, including for gender assistance.

Due to security restrictions, this study has primarily been a desk-review, which has imposed certain limitations on the study, explained in more detail below.

Purpose and scope of the study

According the Terms of Reference (ToR), the purpose of this study is to:

...systematically collect information about the gender work of these NGOs and to compare them and *to the extent possible* (provided this is a desk review) assess their relevance, sustainability and results. The main intention is to produce experience based information as basis for future work of NGOs in particular and for other actors in general, in similar cultural, religious and socio-economic settings. The main questions are in short: What works? Are

¹ For a brief description of each NGO, see Annex 3

there “promising practises”? Can they serve as input to future programming for gender equality for the six NGOS and others?

The ToR lists 10 points for the scope of work (see ToR in annex 5 for more details), including a brief discussion of current reviews and research related to development activities aiming at improving women’s situation and rights in rural areas of Afghanistan, a description of how the NGOs gender priorities are reflected in organizational and human resource policies, and a review of how the organizations incorporate historical, social and religious context in their gender programming. The ToR further asks for a description of how the six projects included in the study are organized in order to reach gender related objectives, and how gender issues are reported on. Moreover, the review should identify activities where gender is mainstreamed as well as activities targeting women or gender in particular, and assess the importance attached to them within the projects as a whole. If possible these activities should be assessed according to relevance, sustainability, and results. Finally, the study should search for what the ToR calls “promising practices” among both mainstreamed and targeted approaches and try to explain how and why the NGO in question has developed such approaches in the first place.

According to the ToR, the main sources of information for the review should be:

- Plans and Annual Reports from the 6 NGOs for the agreements covering the years 2010-2013, 8 plans, 18 annual reports and some reports covering only parts of 2013 and a number of final reports.
- Reports from a limited group of other NGOs operating in Afghanistan, and which are focusing on gender issues in integrated rural development.
- Specific gender related papers, plans, strategies for, or by, the NGOs, either at HQ, national or project levels.
- Plans, studies, reviews and evaluations of the 6 NGOs.
- Other relevant documents as identified by the review team.

Methodology

The review team has consisted of Torunn Wimpelmann and Arne Strand, both from Chr. Michelsen Institute (CMI).² As Wimpelmann was based in Kabul for a part of the review period has she been able to undertake interviews in person with NGO staff in Kabul, rather than by phone/skype as envisaged in the ToR. In addition to the material listed in the ToR, we have included some reports from other gender related projects of the same NGOs and some more general literature, evaluations and reviews on gender and on Afghanistan.

The team have primarily focused on the six projects listed in the ToR. However, in two instances we found it relevant to include other Norwegian funded-projects, a Norwegian Church Aid (NCA) project focusing specifically on women’s empowerment that was an extension and expansion upon the initial project and a Norwegian Afghanistan Committee (NAC) project supporting female self-help groups. The inclusion of these projects was related to the fact that team decided to select a focus area which would allow for a degree of comparison across six rather different approaches and project types. As

² Strand worked with NAC from 1988 to 1991 and with NCA from 1993 to 1997. He has in recent years undertaken a number of reviews and assessments for NORAD and for international, Norwegian and Afghan NGOs, including NAC and NCA and some of NCA’s Afghan Partner NGOs.

set out in the inception report submitted early in the review, this led the team to identify income generation projects targeting women as an activity undertaken by all the NGOs included in this study and thus suitable for comparative exploration. This focus did not exclude consideration of other projects and types of activities, but it allowed for a degree of comparison and possibilities to identify promising practices that might be of use for all involved NGOs. In some ways, these projects also served as an entry point to an understanding of broader practices and approaches to gender in the organizations as whole.

Both team members reviewed NGO plans and reports and selected literature, including more generally on rural development and on micro-finance. Wimpelmann conducted interviews in person with key staff of all six NGOs, including management, program staff, gender advisors and human resource personnel and some instances field staff. Additional email exchanges with the NGOs and some follow-up interviews to clarify details from earlier meetings and to obtain further information followed. Wimpelmann also undertook phone or skype interviews with field based projects staff and a small number of beneficiaries, sometimes with the use of an interpreter.

The team encountered four methodological constraints that should be pointed out;

1. With hindsight, the team somewhat underestimated the number of staff interviews necessary in order to go into some depth about the project activities as well as organisational gender policies and experience. More than 45 interviews (phone, skype and face to face) were conducted with more than 60 informants (see Annex 1). This limited the time available to interview project participants, as well as external stakeholders such as government officials and head quarter staff outside of Afghanistan.
2. For the phone/skype interviews with beneficiaries we noted that NGO field staff at times were present in the same room as the interviewees. This limited the possibility to explore personal reflections around the project and potential negative experiences. Such issues are also challenging to explore through phone interviews as they require a certain degree of trust and personal rapport to be established.
3. The fact that the review took place over the summer (early June to early August) caused some challenges in the form of holiday absence of senior NGO staff leading to a delay in receiving updated information and project details as requested. That was also the case when we requested interviews with key gender experts working in i.e. the World Bank to obtain independent views on rural development and gender assistance to Afghanistan.
4. As a primarily desk-based review, covering six organisations and with limited to no interaction with project participants, the study is cautious regarding the drawing of definite conclusions. We have rather attempted to bring out a more detailed comparison of one type of intervention, income-generating activities for women, to make the findings as comparative and practical as possible. In accordance with the ToR we have therefore suggested issues that will benefit from a more field based study that would include a broader sample of field staff, beneficiaries and local (and central) authorities to enable a full assessment of relevance, sustainability and results, as well as the organizations overall gender work.

2. Women, gender equality and rural development in Afghanistan: some key perspectives

Framing the issue

While 'Afghan women' has remained high on the international agenda for more than a decade, there are many different ways in which the issue is approached and understood amongst donors and Afghans themselves. One fault line runs between ideals of women's empowerment as individuals and or as a gender group, versus collective improvements as part of family and kinship groups. For those who emphasize the latter, the notion that women in Afghan society are structurally discriminated against or even disadvantaged might be based on a Westernized ideal of what women as a whole should aspire to and must therefore be rejected. Afghan women, it is argued realize themselves through family and collective achievements, and their limited public appearances deflect from the fact that they exercise influence through and enjoys respects in, private domains. Others dismiss this as misguided cultural relativism, arguing that unequal access to material resources and public spaces construct women as dependents of male family members.³

Even if the general idea that gender equality is a problem in Afghanistan is accepted there are numerous ways to approach it: Many interventions focus on reaching and including women, without necessarily directly confronting gender relations or significantly attempting to alter them, exemplified by home-based activities. Other programs might indirectly attempt to change the scope of what women can do by offering women more access to employment, credit and education. Very few interventions would confront gender relations head on- for instance by mobilizing for changes in land and property ownership, sexual and reproductive rights, divorce and custody rights etc. As elsewhere, gender mainstreaming has constituted a core strategy in post-2001 Afghanistan. And like in other settings, critics argue that gender mainstreaming has become diluted from its original transformative agenda which made gender equality a core objective of all development, to a more technical exercise that, at worst, means integrating women into development activities but without changing gender roles(Desai 2005; Larson 2008).

In this report we classify activities according to three main categories. –*Non-gender* activities do not contain any explicit gender dimensions or direct inclusion of women (although we might distinguish between exclusionary activities that targeted men exclusively such as support to male farmers, and more neutral infrastructure projects such as electrification which may have more benefits to women). *Mainstreamed* activities mean that there has been an attempt to include gender considerations in the activity or program as a whole. Mainstreamed activities can be further subdivided into two types; integrative, where there has been an effort to include women on par with or in parallel to men without trying to transform predominant gender relations, and transformative, where the activity or program as whole has the transformation of gender relations as one of its core objectives. Finally, *targeted* activities are those which have been designed especially to focus on gender. Again, it is useful to distinguish between two types, 'women's components' which are activities specially designed for women for them to be able to take part without transgressing

³ For a discussion see Kabeer, N., A. Khan, et al. (2011). Afghan values or women's rights? Gendered narratives of continuity and change in urban Afghanistan IDS Working Paper 387. Brighton, Institute for Development Studies.

predominant gender roles, and transformative, which are particular interventions designed specifically to transform gender relations (whether working exclusively with women or with both sexes).

Table 1. Categorizing development interventions according to their gender approach

Non-gender	
Exclusive Men are the only beneficiaries	Neutral Both men and women are (indirect) beneficiaries
Mainstreamed	
Integrative Women are included in the activity or program, although within predominant gender roles	Transformative All interventions are systematically designed and assessed against how they contribute to the transformation of gender relations
Targeted	
'Women's component' Activities especially designed for women to take part without transgressing gender roles	Transformative Activities especially designed to transform gender relations

It should be noted that the goal is not necessarily that all activities should be at the transformative end of the scale. Rather, from a gender equality perspective what is important is to be conscious about the different approaches and their implications, and to constantly reassess whether there is scope from transitioning from one approach to another. In Afghanistan – for a number of complex reasons; the instrumentalization of women's rights for other purposes, the ways in which 'gender' has been made to represent a symbol of foreign interference and the insecurity and militancy of recent years -- the attractions of the more 'neutral' integrative / women's component approaches have been particularly strong. Compared to other regional countries, Afghanistan also has less of an organized women's movement. This is not surprising given decades of war and the years of Islamist rule, but it has probably meant that there have been fewer calls and constituencies for a more radical approach from within the country.

Women in agriculture and rural livelihoods

Female livelihoods, both and rural and urban, and women's economic empowerment more generally have largely been less of a focus within development interventions in Afghanistan since 2001, with legal protection, political participation, health and education taking presence when it comes to women or gender -oriented activities (AREU 2013). Whilst women are certainly involved in

agriculture (including livestock and horticulture) in Afghanistan, they tend to remain at the micro-scale, non-monetized end of the production and their contributions are thus not formally recognized or directly remunerated. Apart from reproductive work (food preparation, child rearing, cleaning, and caring for elder and sick family members) women play important roles in looking after livestock (an estimated 93 percent of poultry farmers are women) and dairy and egg production, as well as weeding, processing, harvesting and post-harvest work such as threshing and cleaning (World Bank 2014). In the northern and central regions women produce carpets and kelims, activities that primarily takes place within the home. Women's involvement and activities varies between regions and among different ethnic groups, and to what extent women takes part in agricultural work outside the house – or boundaries set around a cluster of houses, also depends on the economic status of her family, with women from poorer families and smaller farms tending to work more in the fields. It should also be noted that with the onset of a more cash-based economy, and decreasing plots sizes, many families are finding it impossible to sustain themselves in rural Afghanistan. As a result, many men have migrated to Iran or the Gulf for work, leaving women increasingly in charge of all aspects of agricultural production in some areas (NAC unpublished document).

However, with the exception of some widows, women generally do not own land (Grace 2004) and, given the strong sanctions against female visibility and mobility women often do not take part in market transactions of the produces they contribute to. As a result women are often unable to make estimations of profit- including how important their own labor is compared to raw materials etc. and decide over the use of such income. At the same time, women's economic participation has been something of an understudied topic in Afghanistan and there appears to be considerable regional and even district level variations in women's activities and to what extent they hold influence on different types of investments – or financial resources brought into the family.⁴

Aid programs focusing on women in agriculture and livestock have targeted women through 'training on input supply, extension services, weed control, harvesting, post-harvest processing, packaging and kitchen 'gardening' (World Bank 2014). From what the team can gather, programming in Afghanistan have only to a limited extent incorporated the changes associated with large scale male labor migration and associated increases in female agricultural participation, although this may now slowly be changing.⁵ Instead, aid projects has often proceeded based on traditional gender roles, with women receiving support for 'inside' activities such as kitchen gardening and poultry rearing.

In the field of income generation for rural women more generally, a number of micro-finance programs have also been established. By 2013, the World Bank estimated that there were 400,000 microfinance clients in Afghanistan, out of which 38% were women. While micro-finance programs have generally been viewed positively by women participants, studies have cautioned that they appear to have been more successful in channeling money through the women in order to increase household economic status (which would go a long way in explaining family and male approval of such programs) than to systematically address women's strategic gender needs or 'empower' them

⁴ For instance, Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock representatives report in interview with AREU that women in Kunar and Nuristan undertake ploughing and other activities normally associated with men. Ganesh, L., M. Kohistani, et al. (2013). Women's Economic Empowerment in Afghanistan 2002-2012. Information Mapping. Kabul Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, p. 42

⁵ In an internal NAC document on gender and agriculture (NAC, unpublished document) the organization states its intention to proceed from the assumption that women are active in all aspects of agriculture and to involve women more actively in farming interventions.

in a broader sense. In some instances, loan money are simply handed over to the husband or other male family members. While this can improve women's status in the household temporarily, experiences from Afghanistan and beyond has suggested that programs that provide a platform for women to meet, increase their knowledge and skills in a meaningful way, and improve their decision-making power are more likely to have an impact on women's relative situation (World Bank 2014: 117). But another study also suggests that micro-credit programs are more likely to have this kind of impact when women's roles are less circumscribed in the first place. (Ganesh, Kohistani et al. 2013: 61)

Some context

Out of the 6 different NGOs, 5 are self-implementing while the Norwegian Church Aid (NCA) works through 13 Afghan partner organizations. Four of the NGOs have activities in Faryab where Norway had their Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) based until 2012, a mixed ethnic province with an Uzbek majority. With the exception of NCA engaging in Uruzgan and NRC in Nangarhar, all other project activities are implemented in provinces located in central and north Afghanistan and primarily inhabited by non- Pashtuns.

These areas are in general more receptive to the involvement of women in decision making and economic activities than many Pashtun dominated areas, and should as such offer an easier opening to women's participation in development projects. There are still differences between the provinces/areas that need to be taken into account when analyzing the implementation of the projects included in our selection. An interesting dimension noted in an NCA report is the two types of resistance a project targeting women in Faryab was met with.⁶ One is communal resistance (due to cultural norms and traditions) but the other is governmental and in the form of extensive bureaucratic procedures, though these might well be triggered by the same norms and traditions.

A second factor is that the security situation has worsened in many of these provinces from 2010 and until today, and thus posed increased security risks and operational challenges to the NGOs. Direct threats to beneficiaries and project staff is one type of risk, fighting causing challenges for staff movement or bringing in supplies is another. Faryab has had a very negative development over the last year, Uruzgan and Nangarhar is generally challenging, the situation in Badakshan has worsened in 2014, Bamyan has reported some incidents of concern and there have been more security incidents reported from the other provinces as well. Travelling along the main roads has become more hazardous due to the increase in attacks from Taliban and other groups in opposition the Government of Afghanistan but also due to how groups and militias affiliated (or at least supported) by the Afghan government and international forces operate.

⁶ NCA (2013) *Periodic Report for Promoting Women Engagement and Participation*, 25th January 2013

3. Gender organizational policies

This section offers a brief overview of the gender policies of the organizations included in the review. While it was far beyond the timeframe of the review to provide a systematic assessment of organizational practices when it comes to gender, we have compiled a brief overview of the NGOs' gender policies, female staff levels, gender strategies and designated gender positions.

When it came to stated organizational policies regarding (female) staff the organizations were quite similar. All had the standard 3 months maternity leave and provisions for *mahrams* (although there was divergent views on whether the use of *mahrams* (male escorts) should be encouraged or not). Only a minority of the organizations had on-site, staffed child care facilities. As an increasing number of urban younger families opt out of the extended family model and move into smaller apartments, childcare provision, especially for more junior staff positions with lower salary levels, would seem important.

All the organizations reported challenges with recruiting qualified female Afghan staff, which is largely caused by structural factors; competition over a limited pool of female professionals, and in the countryside, restrictions on women working. AKF and NRC have initiated small-scale internships for women, although there is an overall lack of experienced and qualified women within older age groups, especially outside the fields of medicine and technical training. Two of the organizations (NAC and NRC) stated that they routinely practiced direct affirmative action when it came to recruitment- women would need two-thirds of the qualification levels of male candidates to be recruited.

NAC has a significantly greater female staff ratio than the other organizations; at 36 percent this is considerably higher than the others ranging from 12.5 to 16 percent. One reason for this might be that NAC employs a great number of health staff, many of whom are women, although the management emphasized that NAC places great weight on accommodating and supporting female staff, for instance by reimbursing documented childcare expenses and hiring relatives on a monthly basis to look after the children of female fieldworkers overnight.

Only two of the organizations (ACTED and NCA) have gender strategies in the form of a written document at the country level. It is unclear however to what extent these strategies shape the organizations' practices. NCA's country representative stated that their gender strategy, which was developed by a consultant in 2008 was not in use. NAC stated that they are in the process of developing a gender strategy and anticipated it to be ready in September 2014. NRC has a global gender strategy, but seemingly do not have plans to develop one at the country level. However its global gender strategy reverberates at the country level; for instance NRC reported that their global policy require them to have an equal number of male and female beneficiaries in education and this it practiced in its vocational training program in Afghanistan. Other organizations also operated with targets of various levels, and had gender checklists for project design which included specific questions on women's workloads, and sometimes their access to resources and decision-making. Due to time constraints, and in accordance with the emphasis on focusing on extracting promising experiences, the team was unable to systematically assess how such tools are being applied at the organizational level.

Although the study could not map this in full, interviews suggested that there were few coordination forums for NGOs working with gender and rural development. One senior staff member argued that gender-focused forums for implementing agencies did not really exist, a coordination group chaired by the Ministry of Women’s Affairs (MOWA) appeared to be defunct, and as implementing agencies they did not attend donor coordination forums. However, ACTED’s gender advisor reported to be the chair of the gender working group for the National Solidarity Program (NSP) implementing partners. In general, however the lack of coordination mechanisms for NGOs working with gender and rural development was confirmed and identified as a gap by other informants.⁷

Table 2. Organizational gender profiles at a glance

Gender policy	Female staff	Gender strategy document	Gender advisors/units/focal points
ACTED			
Yes – Combined strategy and policy articulates ACTEDs views and offer guidelines. Action points; comprehensive gender analysis at planning stage, women to be consulted directly, gender unit to be established, risk analysis for women to be carried out, increase female-targeted programs, as well as expansion of ‘traditional female activities’, targets to be set for female staff, opens for affirmative action. Separate and detailed sexual harassment policy	An estimated 200 out of 500 in Faryab. ⁸	Yes; (for 2012-2013) Encompasses both programs and HR policy. Sets out the process in which gender is to be integrated through project cycle, and the particular measures to be taken within programmatic fields.	Yes, gender unit (national staff) and 7 gender focal points.
AKF			
Yes-(effective from Jan 2013, but previous policy also) states commitment to gender equality, monitoring of gender objectives and outcomes, build staff capacity on gender equality, sets out responsibilities of various management and staff levels, refers to sexual harassment.	Out of 1770 national staff, 286 (16 %)are female. 25 are in senior positions Out of 77 international staff; 23 are women, including 3 directors.	No	Yes, 2 person gender unit (expatriate) 3 regional gender advisors (national), gender focal points in most sector teams.

⁷ As such the field seems to differ from other areas such as gender based –violence, gender and protection and gender and legal reform, where several coordination groups (such as the gender based violence protection sub-cluster) are or have been active

⁸ National level numbers for female staff were requested, but not obtained by the time of the submission of the final report, although they are considered to be much lower than in Faryab. They will be obtained prior to the submission of the final report. The total staff of ACTED Afghanistan is around 900.

DACAAR			
Yes, (2013.)	850 staff, 13 percent female. Few women in leadership positions	No	One gender advisor (vacant at the time of the field research but due to be filled shortly)
NAC			
Yes (HR policy)	36 percent female staff. Several women in senior positions	In progress – to be completed in September	One gender focal point, based in Jaghori, Ghazni (national)
NCA			
Separate sexual exploitation and abuse policy (adjusted from NCA's global template)	Out of 56 employees- 7 are women (12.5 %) 2 of these are expatriate. Female national staff includes 2 program officers, 1 finance assistant and two cleaners.	Yes (for 2008-2015) Fairly comprehensive strategy which covers project cycle, HR, sexual harassment. Envisages a number of assessment on how programs affect women, establishment of indicators etc. But not in use, according to country director.	Gender coordinator in Kabul (national)
NRC			
No specific policy but Code of Conduct includes sexual harassment etc. According to HR affirmative action is practiced when female candidates are 2/3 as qualified as male candidates	77 female national staff out of 420 (18 %)	No	Noone in Afghanistan- just in HQ

4. Inclusion, allocation, transformation? How do the projects incorporate gender and women's rights?

The ToR of this study asks how women's rights and gender equality are included in the projects, how such questions are reported on and the relative importance given to gender related activities within the projects as a whole. In the table below we have attempted to provide a 'visual' overview of how gender and women are included in the projects under study, based on how the project reports described the project activities. In accordance with the framework set out in section 2, components and activities are classified into 3 broad categories; gender neutral, mainstreamed and targeted.

It should be noted that in practice, drawing the line between 'mainstreamed' and targeted interventions is actually somewhat tenuous, given that Afghanistan is such a gender segregated society. Since many of the activities men and women perform in their daily life are more or less exclusive to their gender, designing interventions that include both men and women in the same activities (even if not necessarily in the same space) is not always realistic or considered desirable. Thus, in rural Afghanistan for instance, women might receive support for kitchen gardening whilst men might be engaged in 'outside' agricultural work. The question of whether this becomes a special or targeted women component or a case of women being 'included' together with or in parallel to men ultimately becomes difficult to determine in any objective or scientific way. In this report we have categorized agricultural activities that does not have a male equivalent, such as kitchen gardening, poultry farming and tree sapling as 'targeted' and onsite vocational programs including both men and women as 'mainstreamed' even though these vocational training programs often have different courses for men and women. However these categorizations are pragmatic and not necessarily set in stone.

The table below aims to provide a sense of the six projects listed in the ToR and how women /gender are included in them, as well as the relative scope of targeted activities within the broader project.⁹ It also illustrates how gender (in the sense of gender disaggregated beneficiary numbers) is reported on. Given that the projects are different in what kind of activities and focus they include, and that reporting formats also differ, a more quantitatively accurate presentation (which in some way could precisely reflect the budgetary scale of all activities /components relative to each other within and across the six organizations) was not feasible. What the table provides therefore, is more of an approximate impression.

⁹ It should be noted that the table is not representative of the organizations' total activities, but presents a gender breakdown of the six projects included in the ToR. For instance, there are other projects that specifically target women or gender equality, such as NAC midwife training, NCA's new gender empowerment program in Faryab and (in parts) NRCs legal assistance program to internally displaced people and returnees. The two former are funded in their entirety by Norway.

Table 3. Key project activities and how they incorporate and report on gender

<p>Organizations & key project components</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When overall activity is specifically designed directed towards women or gender equality- marked in red. • When activities explicitly include both men and women, the women number -marked in blue. • When there is no information about gender of beneficiaries in reporting- marked in black
<p>ACTED (NOK 120 mill) A Agriculture and livestock</p> <p>B Access to capital & business networks</p> <p>C Health and hygiene</p> <p>D Governance</p> <p>E Youth training and mobilisation</p>	<p>Generic training to various CBOs; farmer organisations, water user groups. ToT to 'key farmers, basic veterinaries (6:30 women) and water associations. Demonstration plots established by 'key farmers'. Block grant for each district for water infrastructure (USD 287.000) Kitchen gardens for 1200 women; seeds and basic equipment. Tree planting; 68.000 trees given to vulnerable farmers.</p> <p>Basic veterinaries (20 percent female) given starting kits of 200 USD. Vaccinations distributed</p> <p>8 poultry farms established, each for 8 women. Construction of building and distributions of 200 hens.</p> <p>Cashmere goats distributed to 160 people; 60 women Organisational support, training block grants and business plans to UC (farmer's groups) and 173 all-female self-help groups (SHG) and 4 SHG Federations.</p> <p>Establishment of health promotion networks in 3 provinces. (49 % women) Training session include house to house and family planning as topic, health radio, water cleaning campaigns and water and disease surveillance.</p> <p>Support to 4 types of community based groups through which other component work. (Note: the majority of CBOs assessed (81%), including CDCs, had only between 0 to 10% female representation (49% had 0% levels of female representation))</p> <p>Vocational training centers and youth development centers established, with literacy, supplementary vocational training and apprenticeship (separate topics for women) Sports promotion. 868 vocational trainees / graduates (198 women), 2670 graduates of YDC courses (588 female) , 16,780 literacy graduates (ca 9575 women), 160 Apprenticeship (8 women).</p>
<p>AKF (NOK 64 mill) A Human and institutional development</p> <p>B Education</p>	<p>Institutional development of sub-national government structures; CDC training on conflict resolution (male /female ratio 87/13), gender sensitisation, resource management, computer and proposal writing. Poverty analysis and wealth ranking, support to LNGOS, fellowship grants, 307 community based saving groups (CBSG) with with 874 male and 2897 female members, 3 conferences including women's development conference, various campaigns, LGNO micro-grants.</p> <p>Capacity building of MoE at province and district level; support to 290 PED/DED personnel for planning and management, capacity building /workshops to 1251 male and 28 female teachers, including one workshop on women in education, support to Teacher Training Colleges; teaching methodology training to faculty members (5 of 60 female)</p>

<p>C Public health promotion</p>	<p>Campaigns on health and hygiene; training on health hygiene and nutrition to community workers (338, ca 102 female), community health workers (339), women's groups (339), mullahs (170), members of student associations (363, 181 female) teachers (377, 116 female) government staff (90).</p>
<p>D Culture and tourism</p>	<p>Support to 6 festivals and events in Bamyan and Badakshan, support to 113 entrepreneurs and small scale infrastructure, support to 118 individuals to attend tourisms coordination meetings.18 youth (8 women) attended 3 month ski-instructor course.</p>
<p>E Alternative technologies</p>	<p>Distribution of 224 energy efficient stoves and support to 6 stove manufacturers and 34 stove installers.</p>
<p>F Maternal and child health</p>	<p>56 health professionals and 88 community health workers including females received technical training on maternal and child health. 60 outreach visits by maternal and child health team. 53 midwives graduated, 50 deployed to home area. Establishment of 3 maternity waiting rooms.</p>
<p>G Electricity</p>	<p>Electrification – construction of power station and distribution network</p>
<p>DACAAR (NOK 77 mill) A Water supply and sanitation</p> <p>B Rural Development</p>	<p>Trained 233 government and NGO employees in water management (15 % women). Ground water monitoring. Construction of 1062 waterpoints, with input from women through sanitation couples in 33 % of cases. Bio-sand distribution to 184 126 beneficiaries. 3099 families supported in latrine construction. 2786 households received hygiene education by mixed-sex team to ensure women access.</p> <p>Training on new techniques and planting methods including fodder yield production, livestock management, 712 people employed in livestock sector. 255 farmers trained in water management, anti-soil erosion measures; 656 hectare planted with pistachio, water harvesting and bioengineering.</p> <p>Improvement on canals and culverts. 8 WCRS established. 3840 women took part in income generation activities. Training and support on market linkages, support for exhibitions. Food packages for vulnerable women; poultry and kitchen garden support</p> <p>12 producers' associations established with 2674 members. Training on natural resource management and business planning for producer associations VOs, MZs and CDCs. Government staff trained on cultivation, water management</p>
<p>NAC (NOK 45 mill) A Education</p> <p>B Natural resource management</p>	<p>Vocational training of 80 women and 26 men in tailoring, and of 50 men in carpentry, car repairing or mobile phone repairing. Various training and workshops for teachers and staff; (1113 male, 168 females, 277 non-specified). Construction of schools and playgrounds, distribution of equipment to schools, establishment of community based schools in 5 districts, University entrance exam training for 540 female and male students; Accelerated learning classes (ALC) for 50 over-aged students supported. Literacy, numeracy and life skills training of 450 women from 3 districts; literacy campaigns.</p> <p>Construction of various irrigation and flood diversion infrastructure. Training of 450 women in vegetable production, 450 kitchen gardens established. 53 orchards established and 930 farmers and 2200 students trained. Potato demonstration plot established in 13 villages. 90,000 sapling purchased back from 450 women who received seed (Foster Mums) in tree plantation campaign, 78474 sapling distributed for re-plantation.</p> <p>Women trained in sapling production. 80 kilogram of seed distributed to 450 women.</p> <p>1070 farmers supported with fodder seeds and 2200 poultry distributed to 160 families. 4 wheat experimental plot established and 120 farmers trained, 4 greenhouses established in 2012.</p>

<p>C Health</p>	<p>Environmental awareness and cleaning campaigns involving local governance structures. Establishment or strengthening of farmer groups, training of 519 PTA members. Handover of 5 tree nurseries, 3 erosion protection projects and one plantation</p> <p>Hygiene promotion, training of school and community health promoters as well as 7320 female community members (on health, hygiene and family planning). Establishment and training of Family Health Action groups, 518 members trained on various topics including pregnancy care</p>
<p>NCA (NOK 105 mill)</p> <p>A Women, peace and security</p> <p>B Climate change mitigation</p> <p>C Livelihood and trade</p> <p>D Water, sanitation and hygiene</p>	<p>4,490 persons received literacy education in Faryab and Daikundi provinces (87.7 % female) female sessions sometimes combined with hygiene and peace awareness. 43 Women’s Human Rights Defenders Committees established in Faryab to combat discrimination and violence against women. 118 self-help groups established and trained on management and entrepreneurship –Income generating activities emerging out of the groups include carpet weaving, beekeeping and ball making.</p> <p>Establishment and training of mechanics for maintenance of 5 micro hydro power stations. Installation of solar panels, benefitting 7610 households, 58 persons trained as ‘engineers for installation and maintenance (28 men and 30 women)</p> <p>Introduction of new agricultural and livestock production techniques. Support establishment of self-help groups, training on entrepreneurship and management and providing access to resources through loans. 17 farmers' cooperatives consisting of 6,130 members established and trained on new methods and techniques on agriculture and livestock. Specific training targeting women, on for example kitchen gardening to increase cultivation of vegetables.</p> <p>Rehabilitation of wells, construction of latrines and washrooms, desalination plants, protection of water springs. Thirteen desalination plants installed, providing clean water to more than 5,100 families in eleven villages.</p>
<p>NRC (NOK 38 mill)</p> <p>A Youth education</p> <p>B GBV prevention</p>	<p>The Youth Education Pack (YEP) was implemented from 27 centres In Nangarhar and Faryab and included several components. One was vocational training, a second literacy and numeracy, a third life skills and a forth support and child care. A total of 514 males and 688 females graduated, (77 % of the males students and 95 % of the female students)</p> <p>The Gender-Based Violence (GBV) project had five components; legal assistance to vulnerable women with 144 counselling cases, coordination with the Department of Women affairs, capacity development with local actors with 6 legal trainings for 77 males and 84 females, awareness raising in local communities for 643 males and 813 females and last livelihood training for 350 females.</p>

The most basic and obvious way to assess the gender aspects of a project is by counting and comparing the number of female and male beneficiaries. As the table shows, in most cases, (but not all) the organizations include gender disaggregated data on beneficiaries in their reporting. However, as is often pointed out (including by staff interviewed for this report) counting beneficiary numbers across type of activities does not in any comprehensive way translate into a measure of how 'gender mainstreamed' a project is, (and it tells us even less about how the organizations approaches and impacts on gender *relations*).

Allocation

The organizations do not generally report on how different resources are allocated to male and female beneficiaries, meaning that for instance the beneficiary of a short term, 'cheap' intervention will be counted as equal to a beneficiary of a more costly and time consuming one. Neither do all the organizations provide data that allows for a straightforward determination of how resources are allocated according to targeted or non-targeted components. In sum therefore, although we can count male and female beneficiaries across activities, that in itself will not necessarily tell us much about the resources allocated to each gender, and based on the reporting of the projects it is difficult to say anything more substantial on how budgetary resources are allocated.

It should be noted that although not included in the reporting for the projects under review, some efforts to track resource allocations according to the gender of the beneficiaries are emerging. Staff at the Aga Khan Foundation (AKF) has carried out a gender sensitive budget analysis as an informal pilot in another project, calculating the resources allocated per beneficiary and comparing male and female data. It found that the average resources allocated to male and female beneficiaries differs, with men benefitting from more expensive interventions. While not engaging in this kind of exercise, an internal gender audit by ACTED from 2011 points out that the distribution between male and female beneficiaries changes significantly when health promotion activities, which are short term and low impact, are removed from the calculations.¹⁰

Transformation

On a third level, programs can be reviewed from how they impact gender relations, specifically how they increase increasing women's access to knowledge, resources or decision-making in a more structural or strategic way including through work with men. Such changes; in attitudes, distribution, relations and authority are notoriously difficult (and labor intensive) to translate into concrete indicators that can be reported on, which is why it is not surprising that data on such changes are less prevalent in the reporting for projects; (as exemplified in the six projects' final reports).

The information provided in ACTED reporting on such changes was mostly anecdotal. It referred to observations that more women had taken up veterinary practice, a field normally dominated by men. (6 of the 30 members of the basic veterinary network set up by ACTED were women). Because women often conduct much of the household work related to livestock, a trend in which they take on more expansive and 'outside' role related to animals seem important also from a more 'transformative' perspective. ACTED also provided some comments from a survey of women's self-help groups where the members explain how joining the groups have led to changes in status and confidence. Finally there was some data on the income of women self-help group members¹¹ and on

¹⁰ From 54% men and 46% women to 79% men and 21% women,

¹¹ See section 5 below for more details on this.

the relative enrollment rates of girls in literacy and vocational training. With the exception of literacy courses, the latter are relatively low (in the range of 22 to 5 percent female) when compared to NRC, who also have vocational training in the province(see table 3 for more details).

AKF referred to its substantial component on maternal and child health and its contribution to increased access to maternal health, as well as a brief mention of contributing to women's participation in education, although these things were not phrased in a language of women's empowerment. In particular, AKF emphasized its maternity waiting rooms which have been established in 3 community health centers and have enabled more than 120 women to access extended medical care prior to and after delivery.

DACAAR, in its gender equality assessment of the projects final report, focused its reporting on changes for members of its Women Resource Center, giving some figures for income increases and asserting that women have become more aware of social and political issues, more mobile and more influential and respected within the household.¹² At the same time it stated that men remained the community leaders.

NAC in its comparatively briefer final report referred to the significance of having focused in particular on mother and child health through its campaigns, and of supporting vulnerable women to obtain a livelihood. The latter has partly been achieved through the purchasing of tree saplings 'fostered' by vulnerable women and it is not yet clear how sustainable the activity will be after an transition to selling the saplings to local markets will completed this year.

NCA asserted that women, as a result of literacy classes and participation in groups, were becoming more vocal and that there had been a decrease in early and exchange marriages as a result of the women's right committees facilitated by the organization, although there was no concrete data to back up these claims It also suggested that there had been an 'observable change in attitude towards women' during the project cycle, especially as a result of women's income generation projects. Again, there was not concrete evidence to substantiate this claim.

NRC, while emphasizing that 50 percent of its vocational student were female, ensured through targets and the provision of childcare, raised a concern about the need to move beyond traditional subjects in order to avoid reinforcing stereotypes. The report on its gender-based violence project brought up a number of indicators and statistics. It states that 50 per cent of the family cases and 85 percent of property claims were solved in the favor of NRC clients and that assessments showed that knowledge on GBV had increased as a result of NRC trainings.¹³

As the above suggest, discussions of the projects' impact on gender relations were mostly brief and few indicators or tangible data were provided, with NRC the most noteworthy exception. In any case, questions of whether organizations set out to, and whether they succeeded, in transforming gender relations are often better assessed through a more process-focused analysis. In order to determine

¹² See section 5 below for more details.

¹³ In an interview, a MOWA representative in Faryab stated that NRC's work with women's inheritance (part of their GBV-project) was an example of a successful gender intervention in the province. She argued that NRC's activities had normalized and made it acceptable for women to claim to their inheritance. Since the deprivation of the inheritance rights of women afforded to them in the Afghan civil code is a significant cause of their economic dependence, the ability of the NRC program to influence this field, if confirmed, seems significant.

this, a more in-depth analysis of the projects, examining to what degree mechanisms have been in place to directly or indirectly expand women's (and men's) roles, and the results that followed, would be helpful. With the view to assess this in some more detail the team focused on micro-credit projects (including savings groups and income generation micro-grants) since this is a type of activity all of the organizations have engaged in (although not always within the 6 projects included in the ToR for the study).

5. A case study of income-generation projects

As stated above, the fact that a program has a component designed particularly for women does not necessarily mean that it has transformative aspirations. Similarly, an intervention working both with men and women can also be transformative if it seeks to alter the ways in which women and men generally are positioned in relation to each other. In other words, the key to understand whether a program has gender transformative aspirations or whether it instead reinforces status quo can be found by looking at whether it seeks to increase the *relative* access of women to markets, property, knowledge, mobility, security etc. The organizations all have interventions seeking to specifically increase women's access to income and/or credit as a tool towards women's broader empowerment. However there are significant differences in the ways in which these projects are designed and implemented, which the team believes makes for useful comparative analysis.

The projects at a glance

ACTED has established 172 female self-help groups in Faryab province, with 3,732 members registered. The groups receive training over a 3-month period, including accounting, basic literacy, underage marriage, hygiene and safe motherhood. Male relatives and community leaders were also invited for 1 to 3 days gender training. The members then receive a grant of around 150 USD per person, based on a joint business plan. Previously these were given as individual grants, reportedly upon the members insistence but ACTED has now started to give out block grants instead, with the groups doing collective purchases.

Staff in Maimane did not have overviews of the profits that the self-help groups have generated. An internal report from February 2013 suggested that the groups did not track their expenses or profits; only savings were recorded. However the final report of the project stated that the combined profits in 2012 and 2013 were around 210 000 USD, which would amount to a meagre 2,7 USD per month per member. However it is likely that these profits would be unequally distributed with some women making a more substantial profit. The groups also generated savings of almost 100 000 USD altogether in the period 2011-2013. By the end of 2013, around 45 000 USD were outstanding in loans, with staff reporting some problems in retrieving these loans.

Through the self-help groups ACTED have also established poultry farms in Faryab, with eight women sharing the labor and the income from each farm, which holds around 200 chickens each. These farms are generally considered one of the most successful interventions by ACTED staff, who argue that the income that the farms have generated for the women involved has translated into complete community acceptance of their participation in self-help groups. ACTED reported that the average yearly profit for each farm is 4 942 USD, yielding an additional net income of 617 USD per beneficiary per year.

The Aga Khan Foundation (AKF) has initiated both male and female savings groups. They target poor community members without access to savings, who are identified through village visits, participatory wealth ranking tools and village listings. The groups are given support over three years; training on leadership, accounting, livelihoods, and exposure visits. They save on average 50 afghanis (just under 1 USD) per person per month. No grants are given, but AKF staff encourage the members to use them as a mechanism for mobilizing resources for income generating activities.

Throughout the life of the Norwegian supported-project AKF supported the establishment of 304 new saving groups with 3 771 members and aggregate savings of 87 123 USD. (A gender breakdown of savings was not available). A small sample of women interviewed for this study reported that they had not invested the groups' savings in business (although one other used the money to give to a family member to start up a shop) but appreciated the social security function of the group. According to AKF reporting, some of the groups have started up businesses.

AKF has also supported income generation activities for women through small grants. Of the various activities they have supported, poultry farming is considered most successful. Women have been given around 50 chickens as well as basic training. They are connected with paravets, the costs of which the women cover themselves. They also pay for the construction of the sheds. Since this requires some assets the women are typically not amongst the poorest in the village. Women report sales of around 30-80 USD per month, (with the start-up package amounting to around 380 USD.) From the current year, the input will be given as a loan rather than a grant, and women will be organized in groups of 20-25, enabling larger parts of the community to benefit.

Other activities supported through such micro grants are wool spinning, embroidery and tailoring by garment groups. These have been less successful and their input is comparatively expensive with orders tending to be seasonal-e.g. around weddings. Food processing has also not yielded much and similarly the machinery is expensive. In Baghlan city AKF have set up a Women Resource Centre (WRC) with the Department of Women's Affairs, which has a women's garden and shops for female entrepreneurs.

DACAAR runs several Women Resource Centers, which are something of a gender flagship for the organization. The WRCs are formed of clusters of around five villages and have around 500 members each. In total, the organization has established 46 such centers, with 38 still active. Within the Norwegian-funded program eight has been established in Faryab and Sarepul although the two WRCs in Sarepul are no longer actively supported since the DACAAR programs in that province have been closed down. DACAAR emphasizes the time invested in negotiating acceptance for the WCR in local communities, which normally takes around two months and happens through male and female Community Development Councils. After selections of leaders and registrations in Kabul, some of the women receive shorter training on topics such as hygiene, child rights etc, which they should then disseminate to other members. The women in the leadership committees develop proposals on the basis of which loans are given to a select number of women and tied up to a particular activity. Individual beneficiaries are then supposed to return the funds within a set period of time. While the final report of the project reported that women had increased their income by 23 percent as a result of the WRCs, and detailed records exist on each women's monthly income, numbers were not immediately available, and it appears they are not analyzed in any systematic way

Women in the leadership committees (generally around 40 women) report that they meet on a monthly basis and sometimes more frequently. In Maimane one of the WRCs has established production spaces where up to hundred women produce shawls and weaves silk.

One of **the Norwegian Afghanistan Committee (NAC)** longest running projects is its 'foster mum' project in which poorer women have been paid to foster up tree saplings. They are also provided with literacy and 'life-skills (including gender equality) classes over a longer period of time. Currently these projects are transitioning to a more sustainability- oriented project where women will sell the

saplings to the local community. In addition, and under another Norwegian grant, NAC have established a self-help group project in Ghazni and Badakhshan in 2012.¹⁴ Around 500 women have been organized in ca. 40 self-help groups and have received various training on civic participation, financial management and marketing/enterprising. Many of these women had already attended a 9-month literacy course provided by NCA prior to the establishment of the self-help groups. The groups are mainly saving groups but receive a small joint grant of around 400 USD towards a joint enterprise. Some of the groups have started to provide small business loans (with interest) to local villagers, and within the group members can also borrow money for health emergencies etc. The groups meet weekly or monthly in one of the member's houses.

Staff working in Ghazni report that the project has been extremely popular, with women queueing up to join. There was less clarity on the outcomes of the various income generation projects having been established- instead staff underlined the social mobilisation aspects of the project, stating that women felt empowered by coming together in a group, discussing each others' challenges and realising the potential of acting together. In Badakhshan as well, staff did not have numbers on earnings readily available but suggested that some groups were making a modest income.

Under its 2010-2012 program included in this review **the Norwegian Church Aid** organized women into 118 self-help groups in Faryab (5 districts) and Daikundi (2 districts). The group members were given individual loans of 200 USD and received various training; financial management and entrepreneurship and skills training. The loans were intended to function as part of a revolving loan fund although the repayment rates may have been around 50 percent according to one of NCA's partners. In 2013, NCA established larger cooperatives in Faryab instead. Many, but not all of the members of the Faryab self helps groups were included in the cooperatives, and income activities were more focused, centering initially on carpet weaving and poultry farming. In addition, two other NCA partners were engaged to carry out dialogue sessions with some 300 elders, religious leaders, and male head of families in 16 districts. Topics discussed were women's rights, peace building, gender equality, women's roles in economic activities, women's roles from an Islamic perspectives and the constitution of Afghanistan. According to NCA, these sessions facilitated support for women to attend literacy classes and become members of cooperatives.

Two of the cooperatives focused on carpet weaving. They aimed to enable women carpet weavers to purchase raw material independently and establish a local outlet in the carpet market of Andkhoy where traders can purchase the carpets. Women have reportedly significantly increased their earnings as a result of this. The two other cooperatives have focused on poultry farming- two large farms with a capacity of 1500 chickens have been constructed, to the cost of 55 000 USD. Production is yet to start, although the around 80 women who will be involved in the farm have been organized into committees with different tasks.

A component of its Gender Based Violence (GBV)¹⁵ project in Faryab, **NRC's** livelihood project targeted 350 vulnerable and poor women partly referred through its GBV counselling. These women were provided with 4 months training in a specific skill selected based on market assessments and

¹⁴ The project is funded by NORAD and also include training of community-based organizations. The budget frame is around 3 mill. NOK.

¹⁵ The overall GBV project is not included in this discussion since its focus is somewhat different. However when reviewing the project, the professionalism and thoroughness of the project appeared impressive, especially when compared to many other GBV programs in Afghanistan.

the location of the beneficiary. At the end each trainee received a start-up kit to use to establish their own private business. NRC claimed that 'given the cultural sensitivities and constraints in Faryab, it was beyond the scope of this project to enable women to produce goods or crafts on a large-scale basis or through establishment of cooperatives or similar', instead the project aimed at stabilizing the income of the women who were at risk.

6. Emerging themes and 'promising practices'

Given the scope of the study, an in-depth review of these projects, which would have included more and- ideally face to face- interviews with both project participants and key staff, as well as verification of information and records, was not possible. As such, the observations below must be considered tentative.

Financial results; what works (as 'promising practices') in terms of creating an income? The organizations report different results when it comes to generating income for the women participants. The carpet cooperatives in Faryab (NCA) appeared to be something of a success story on financial terms, with very rough estimations of average monthly profits to be around 100-200 USD per month. However, given the very particular skills set of this community- (carpet weavers for generations), it is unlikely that the project can be replicated on a broad scale. Moreover the team has not been able to verify the income levels of women prior to joining the cooperative. Nonetheless, the focused approach in which one specific sector is strategically targeted and where there is a conscious attempt to expand women's control over the value chain appears promising. The logical next step appears to be to expand into trading in regional centers and perhaps make contact with more local weavers to make a stronger cooperative, as well as with international markets.

On the other hand, the other main focus of the NCA cooperatives- poultry farming- has yielded no results as there have been long delays in starting up the operations of the farms. Moreover, the team could not find any indicators that the costly construction of the farms had been made on the basis of profit estimations or market analysis. Nonetheless, in other programs, poultry farming was frequently mentioned as a particularly successful intervention. In Baghlan, Aga Khan Foundation has been working with individual women. In contrast to the experiences of NCA and ACTED who had supported individual poultry farming before and had seen chickens perishing to disease or being sold or simply eaten, AKF reported a substantial income as a result of the poultry farming (30-80 USD per month, with little daily time spent on tending to the chickens). Some AKF staff were suggesting that it might be timely to look into the possibility of expanding women's role into veterinary and marketing functions (indeed, the commercial poultry farms run by men was reported to be very profitable). Staff at various organizations were also emphasizing that livestock such as milking cows and cashmere goats could be profitable, although on more modest scales. On the end of the spectrum, profits from many of the smaller scale activities in handicrafts and food processing appears less successful, or at least not reported on.

The degree to which staff record the incomes of the various self-help groups varies, and therefore it is not always possible to determine their financial results. The fact that income is not always recorded and even less so- analyzed- suggests that the business side of these groups are not always their main purpose or a priority for staff.

Negotiating access and acceptance. DACAAR argues that the way in which the organization spend time negotiating acceptance with the community prior to setting up its WCRs makes its projects stand out. Others (ACTED) emphasizes that the material gains promised by its projects are the key to their acceptance amongst local actors. This study was not able to go into further details about the relative merits of these two approaches, but this could be done for a field-based study. On the one hand, there are clearly sustainability issues to ACTEDs approach but on the other hand, there are

possibilities that an overemphasis on community acceptance (and particularly the leaders of those communities) might result in unnecessary concessions.

Do women's positions within the household change as they start to make money? Within projects there is often an explicit or implicit assumption that a woman's prestige and decision-making power within the family increases when she is able to bring money into the household. While there are plenty of anecdotes and 'success stories' of women reporting such positive changes, there are less systematic attempts to explore and document them, although some work has been done. For example, NRC conducted an impact assessment of their livelihood project in Faryab, going door to door to carry out interviews with 231 of 350 of the beneficiaries some months after their program concluded. The assessment found that even with a modest increase in their income, 'more than 50% of the beneficiaries experienced an increase in self-confidence and/or respect from their families and communities.' ACTED also interviewed 21 self-help groups in Faryab, listing each groups response to the question of what the most important changes resulting from the program were.¹⁶ Around half of the groups responses centered around self-confidence and respect.

In order to capture these dynamics in a more systematic way, post *and* pre-intervention surveys or qualitative research (which would include interviews with other household members) could explore women's ability to control the income that they create,¹⁷ whether their overall labor burden has increased etc, and the impact on their status generally in the household.¹⁸ Such studies should be carefully designed in order to avoid ready-made responses intended to ensure the continuation of support.

It appears as if women's ability to exercise influence over their earnings and assets increases with their ability to interact with the outside world. For instance, when NCA distributed chickens to women to keep in their houses, they found that women had little authority over their birds and many a chicken ended up being sold or served to guests upon husbands' insistence. Similarly, a study commissioned by NCA in 2013 reports that although women were making between 100 to 150 USD per month on carpet weaving, their husbands would take their earnings whereas the women would work up to 18 hours a day, with some resorting to opium to ease the work. According to the study, the main reason for why their earnings are appropriated is the fact that male relatives brings the carpets to the market and conduct the business transactions.¹⁹

Sustainability: Out of the activities listed here, AKF's savings groups and poultry farms, DACAARs WCRs and NCA's carpet cooperatives, and possibly, ACTED's poultry farms are noticeable for the way they seems to have found some sustainability that suggest continuation beyond the life of the projects. Although comprehensive numbers were not immediately available, it is clear that DACAAR keeps a rigorous record of the revolving loans funds and the incomes generated from them. The organization reports good repayment rates and modest, but recurring income for many of its

¹⁶ Final report, page 138.

¹⁷ A study in Kabul showed that most loans to women had been used as capital to for male members of the household, 'to pay off earlier loans or for use in the household and ceremonial expenses' (AREU 2013: 561)

¹⁸ See Kabeer et al for a more in-depth study of the impact on micro-credit on Afghan women's lives.

¹⁹ The women interviewed for this study are not necessarily the women included in the NCA cooperatives. However, the study does seem to contradict the suggestions by NCA staff that prior to establishment of the cooperatives, the earnings of women were less due to their dependence on buying raw material from middle men.

members as a result of the loans. One or more of its WCRs in Sarepul, were still active, despite DACAARs withdrawal from the province. The savings groups in Bamyan initiated by AKF also appeared to have found a sustainable mode in the sense that members are reporting regular savings and repayments, although there were no reports of the money having been invested. From what the team can assess the key to such sustainability is a long term, phased approach, combined with targeted support to selected sectors based on market analysis.

If changes in women's status are linked to the material rewards that the program brings then it is possible that should the material rewards prove short-lived so would the status changes. It would be useful to collect data amongst women who had experienced such an improvement to see whether this is the case. Men are normally happy when money arrives, but there is a risk that organizations contribute to a cottage industry of female grantees, where families might put forward their women in the knowledge that they are a useful short term income generator.

Saturation in Faryab? One issue emerging is that organizations appear to have particular problems with both getting saving groups to save and retrieving loans in Faryab. NCA's partner CHA reports that from 10 million afghanis (ca 175 000 USD) that were given as loan grants, only around 5 million afghanis has been paid back. NCA also reports that the self-help groups in Faryab were unwilling to save- stating that they did not have money. Staff explained this as linked to cultural sanctions against interest rates, but such obstacles have been overcome elsewhere. ACTED's saving groups in the province moreover, saved around 5 million afghanis, although around half of these funds have since been classified as outstanding loans, with staff reporting some problems with retrieving such loans and reluctance to put pressure on women. ACTED also reported that the grants given to the self-help groups, while intended to serve as block grants, sometimes were divided amongst the women instead. If it is the case that the mobilization of resources are more difficult in Faryab, possibilities are that the province is somewhat saturated with these kinds of projects compared to elsewhere, and that organizations are not sufficiently rigorous in selecting project participants. ACTED for instance report widespread demand for saving groups, as a result of which they were significantly expanded. However there is a possibility that the attractions of the saving groups in this instance were primarily linked to the prospects of grants and other short term considerations.

Increased mobility/ collective gatherings- how can it happen and does it change anything?

According to experience from elsewhere, one of the most important contributions of micro-credit and self-help groups are the opportunities they offer for women's solidarity and a sense of collectiveness.²⁰ In order for such potentials to be realized, for a start women must meet at regular intervals. Here, some organizations reported more success than others. AKFs savings groups in Bamyan were reportedly meeting weekly or bi-weekly and in interviews, members stated that they valued the chance to meet other women and to share experiences and support each other. Staff working with the Norwegian Afghanistan Committee's (NAC) self-help groups reported similar meeting frequency although in Badakhshan the winter snows would halt meetings for some time. The NAC staff in Ghazni reported that there was no restrictions whatsoever on women taking part in gatherings or dealing with male staff and was particularly enthusiastic about the potential for mobilizing around women's issues, arguing that gender awareness sessions was futile unless

²⁰ AREU (2013)

accompanied by concrete strategies and foras for social mobilization. (It should be noted that the area in question, Jaghori, has a long history of activism and is therefore somewhat unique.)

In Faryab, things were more uneven. The carpet cooperatives of the Norwegian Church Aid (NCA) were not active in this sense. The cooperative managers would travel to members' houses for collecting carpets and deliver raw materials, but NCA staff stated that members would not meet regularly and that it was not an 'active organization.' In the DACAAR supported WRCs, which counted around 500 members each, a smaller group of women belonging to the leadership committee (around 40) would meet regularly. They would discuss matters related to the business they had started up, and also, according to one manager, women's social issues. However, whilst the committee members would regularly pay visits to the other members in their home villages, there would be no occasion for these other members to meet. The NRC livelihood project did not include a collective component of this kind, but according to the NRC internal assessment of the project, the lack of possibilities to form larger groups was something pointed out by a large number of participants.

Interestingly, and to the stated surprise of its author, the NRC assessment also found that none of the women who had started businesses regarded it as problematic to venture to the bazar to sell their products, and they reported to be confidently negotiating with traders on their own. The assessment concludes that 'this is conflicting with the general outsider understanding of their role within the Afghan society,' and suggests that women might be more mobile than what is usually perceived. If such findings are replicated elsewhere it would suggest that organisations could perhaps be more adventurous regarding the integration of women into male business transactions and trading spaces, or at least in preparing them for this in a more systematic way. There might be scope for instance, for AKF home-based chicken farmers to select a woman to house medicine and transport the eggs to the shops, or for the carpet cooperatives set up by NCA to engage a female shopkeeper.

Pay attention to potential patronage dynamics within larger groups (leaders selecting beneficiaries.) In some of the programs, such as NCAs carpet cooperatives and DACAAR's Women Resource centers, it appeared as if a small number of women were primarily the active members, keeping connections with traders and (in the case of DACAAR) selecting the beneficiaries for specific micro loans. While some divisions of labor will be inevitable, it would be prudent to keep an eye out for developments which suggests that some participants have appropriated the project.

7. Conclusions & Recommendations

The organizations 'gender profiles. The study only undertook a cursory review of this issue but noted that in many ways, the organizations were quite similar. NAC appeared to have a higher number of female staff than the other organizations.

The projects: how is gender mainstreaming understood and operationalized? The study has found that the most prevalent way that 'gender mainstreaming' is conceptualized is through the objective that *women should be included* both as beneficiaries, and as participants consulted in needs assessments. In order to achieve this, staff would monitor beneficiary numbers, and frequently design parallel /segregated activities that would ensure gender balance through enabling women to participate in program activities without radically transgressing predominant gender roles (although it could be argued that in communities where women's contact with outsiders are heavily circumscribed, even for them to be program participants is a small transformation in itself) However, in some areas there were also efforts to include larger numbers of women in more male-dominated fields. Occasionally, mainstreaming also meant examining the projects resources allocated to men versus women. Like in most other settings, gender mainstreaming in its most radical version - the idea that all development programs should have the transformation of gender relations as a core objective was largely absent.

Gender mainstreaming versus targeted approaches. The team found three overall components specifically targeted towards women or gender equality; AKFs maternal and health project, NCA's Women, Security and Peace project, and NRC's Gender Based Violence Project. In addition it identified a number of smaller sub-components that were targeted in this sense. The ToR raises the question of the relative effectiveness of targeted versus mainstreaming approaches in the current setting in Afghanistan. However, it was deemed necessary to rephrase the issue somewhat. The effectiveness of *both* mainstreaming and targeted approaches depend on how each are applied in practice; the study has argued that both mechanisms can be practiced in a more conservative way which translates into including/targeting women without challenging existing gender norms, or a more radical way which sees the main purpose to be the transformation of existing gender relations. From this perspective, the main question becomes to what extent programs have found the right balance between realism and ambition, or alternatively whether a more transformative approach might be possible. There is a risk that targeted approaches become too neutralized and possible even a way of improving the gender balance sheet as a whole by having something 'special' for women. Such 'special things' should be aiming for some kind of strategic change, (thus making themselves redundant) and constantly assess whether they are being ambitious enough, as well as thorough and of high quality.

Relevance, sustainability and results & promising practices: Through a case study of women's income generation projects, the review found interesting differences in how projects were conceived and implemented; to what extent they aimed and succeeded in expanding women's control over the value chain, whether it was possible to mobilize women in small collectives with regular meetings and to what extent women were able to obtain a sustainable income. The findings suggests that organizations should consider whether they can be more strategic, focused and ambitious in their work with women's economic empowerment. In the opinion of a (female) official at the Women's

Economic Empowerment Center at the American University of Afghanistan: ‘Some women think they can sit in their houses and people will come and buy their products.. if you want to make money, you have to get out, talk to the customer, find out what sells...’In other words, the idea that home-based production will make for transformative change often seem unrealistic, and perhaps even becomes a quick and easy way of ticking the ‘inclusion of women’ box. As funds dry up, there will be a need to be more selective and strategic. Moreover, as a general point, the team would like to suggest that what ‘works’ in Afghanistan when it comes to promoting women’s rights cannot be framed in terms of a general recipe across sectors. Often, working through religious idioms and local leaders has been presented as one panacea, counterposed to an ‘externally imposed’ or culturally insensitive intervention. However, as illustrated by the case study of women’s income generation projects, it is the specifics of how and whether a intervention is informed by and adjusted to the local circumstances of women and has a realistic strategy for how to improve them that is the key to ‘success’.

Recommendations and issues for further exploration

Given the limited scope of the study, at least in the light of the number of organizations included, the team is hesitant to offer prescriptive recommendations regarding project design and implementation, or organizational structures or practices. What we instead have done is to identify issues that merit consideration and questions to be explored further through field based study.

At the organizational level; organizations could consider whether there might be any of NAC’s practices of supporting female staff that might be worth replicating- such as free child care. They could also consider how they could incorporate more expansive ways of measuring gender equality in their activities, for instance by examining the resources allocated to male and female beneficiaries and being more systematic in the way they measure change, for instance by introducing more pre and post assessments of changes in attitudes, distribution of resources and decision-making power.

Regarding programs that works with women’s income generation organizations should consider a horizontal rather than vertical approach. It is important that women’s income generation projects do not become a convenient way of improving the overall ‘gender balance sheet’ without serious intentions of laying the foundation for sustainable empowerment. Thus, instead of attempting to get a broad coverage, it might be more effective to focus on one or two particular products and, having involved women with relevant skills and motivations, systematically expand their ability to collectively produce and to strengthen their links with markets at the regional, national and international level. The latter is important both to cut out middlemen and to ensure that products are standardized and competitive. Moreover, as funds decrease, a more strict business logic based on calculation of profits must be applied. There is nothing wrong with subsidizing emerging sectors, women entrepreneurs included, but it should take place in a strategic and –literally- calculated fashion. The very first step would be to keep systematic records of the actual surplus generated by the participants, and analyze these for program input.

In addition, attention must be paid to women’s working conditions and ability to control their own income. It also appears that most of the organizations could review the scope for engaging more women outside of their conventional home-based roles.

At this point additional topics for further, more field-based inquiries include the following:

- women's mobility and ability to interface with outsiders in selected project locations; (with a focus on actual practices rather than the opinions of community leaders)
- to what extent and how women can take control over earnings and their working conditions
- a more systematic mapping of the social aspects of the savings and self-help groups; under what conditions might women's solidarity be generated by these groups and what concrete actions do they lead to?
- the projects should be reviewed in relation to how they complement and coordinate with government institutions and other cooperatives and organizations
- a more in-depth processes oriented study of how organizations obtain and maintain access, perhaps focusing on Faryab in order to determine how much difference prolonged engagement with community elders can make.

Annex 1: List of interviews

Organisation	Persons
ACTED	Ziggy Garewal, Country Director Chidambaram. CT, Head of Programs Samira Amiri, Gender Manager Majhabeen Omary, Women's Empowerment Department Manager, Faryab
AKF	Melanie Boyd, Director, Policy & Partnerships Urlima Simkhada, Gender Advisor Simona Varga, Programme Coordinator, Market Development Programme Education team, Kabul Human and Institutional Development team, Kabul Natural Resource Management team, Kabul Health Programme team, Abdul Khaleq , MDP Area coordinator , Baghlan Simin Gul, MDP area assistant, Baghlan Saeed Rahman MDP Manager, Baghlan Saving groups member 1, Bamyan Savings group member 2, Bamyan Saving group member 3, Bamyan Poultry farmer 1, Baghlan Poultry farmer 2, Baghlan
DACAAR	Irshad Alamyar, Interim Director Shahwali, Head of Programme Halim Azimi, Grants and Monitoring Manager Arif Basiri, Operations Manager Shakilla Assa, Women's Empowerment Manager Mehroq, WCR manager, Faryab Guljar, WCR manager, Sarepul
NAC	Terje Watterdal, Country Director Dr Khalidja, Project Manager Mir Raofi, Natural Resource Manager Mustafa Hammati, Human and Institutional Development Officer Sahar Suleimanzada, Civil society officer, Badakhshan Hanifa Sadiqa, Gender Focal Point, Ghazni Ishmael, Head of Programs Akillah Rahimi, Civil Society Officer Najib Kakar, M&E officer
NCA	Liv Steimoeggen, Country Representative Padraig Maccarthy, Assistant Country Representative Ahmad Hassan, Head of Programs Mughazan Jalal, Gender coordinator

	<p>Ebrahim Safi, Livelihoods Manager Saliha Olker, Faryab Cooperative Manager 1 Cooperative Manager 2 Partner CHA: Abdul Nazif Naimi, Community Development Program Manager Partner ADA: Mohammad Sharif Fayeze, Education Manager</p>
NRC	<p>Kjersti Haraldseide, Acting Program Director Anna Cervi, Head of Faryab Office Reuben Ambicha, Finance Manager Ariel Rivera Solari, Education Manager Christopher Nyanmandi, ICLA Manager</p>
Other	<p>Sippi Azarbaijani-Moghaddam, Independent Consultant Madina Mahboobi, Program Coordinator, Institutional Center for Afghan Women’s Economic Empowerment, AUAF Siddiqa Nawrozian, Institutional Center for Afghan Women’s Economic Empowerment, AUAF Sharifa Azimi, Head of the Department of Women’s Affairs, Faryab Marianne von Malmborg, Program Manager, Gender Afghanistan Unit SIDA/ Swedish embassy Frederick Runsten, Swedish Embassy</p>

Annex 2: Key Documents Reviewed

ACTED

Acted (2010) Proposal for Sustained Rural Development, Faryab Province, Afghanistan 2010 – 2012

ACTED (2011) Afghanistan Gender Survey Results 2011-2012, ACTED Gender Unit, July 2011

Acted (2011) Sustained Rural Development Programme, Almar, Qaisar, Kohistan and Pashtun Kot districts, Faryab province, 2010 Annual Report

Acted (2012) Sustained Rural Development Programme, Almar, Qaisar, Kohistan and Pashtun Kot districts, Faryab province, 2011 Annual Report

Acted (2013) Sustained Rural Development Programme, Phase II Completion Report, Faryab province, Almar, Qaisar, Kohistan and Pashtun Kot districts

Acted (2013) Gender and Development. PP presentation

AGA KHAN FOUNDATION

Aga Khan Foundation (2011) Annual Report, April 2010 – December 2010, Multi-Sector Support Programme (MSSP) – extension, Strengthening Licit Rural Livelihoods in Bamyan, Baghlan and Badakhshan Provinces of Afghanistan, including Maternal and Child Health Program, and Light Up Bamyan

Aga Khan Foundation (2012) Annual Report, January – December 2011, Multi-Sector Support Programme (MSSP) – extension, Strengthening Licit Rural Livelihoods in Bamyan, Baghlan and Badakhshan Provinces of Afghanistan

Aga Khan Foundation (2013) Annual Report, January – December 2012, Multi-Sector Support Programme (MSSP) – extension, Strengthening Licit Rural Livelihoods in Bamyan, Baghlan and Badakhshan Provinces of Afghanistan

Aga Khan Foundation (2013) Final Report, April 2010 – June 2013, Multi-Sector Support Programme (MSSP) – Extension, Strengthening Licit Rural Livelihoods in Bamyan, Baghlan and Badakhshan Provinces of Afghanistan

AKF (2011) Gender Planning at the District Level: A Workshop Manual

DACAAR

Floortje Klijan (2002) Water Supply and Water Collection Patterns in Northern Afghanistan. An Anthropological Study.

Dacaar (2010) Enhanced safe water supply and natural resource protection based rural development in Northern Afghanistan

Dacaar (2013) Final Report (April 2010 – June 2013)

Dacaar (2013) Rural Development in Northern Afghanistan. Evaluation Report, May 2013

Dacaar (2012) WRC Assessment. Summary Report Informing the Way Forward 2013-2016. Karen Moore, June 2012

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NAC (2010) An Integrated Rural Development Program for Afghanistan. Program document for the period 2010-2012

NAC (2011) Annual Report 2010

NAC (2012) Annual Progress Report 2011. Integrated Rural Development Program

NAC (2013) Annual Progress Report 2012. Integrated Rural Development Program

NAC (2012) Final Report. Integrated Rural Development Program (2010-2012, extension till mid 2013)

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NCA (2008) Gender Policy and Strategy for Norwegian Church Aid – Afghanistan

NCA (2009) Interim Application for the Integrated Rural Development Program, January 2010 – December 2010

NCA (2013) Periodic Report for Promoting Women Engagement and Participation (period 15 March – 31st May 2013)

NCA (2014) Final report for Integrated Rural Development Program, January 2010 – December 2012

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NRC (2011) Annual Project Report 2010. Strengthening Gender-Based Violence Prevention and Response in Faryab Province.

NRC (2011) Annual Project Report 2010. Youth Education Pack for Returnees, IDPs & Host communities in Afghanistan.

NCG (2011) Review of Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) Afghanistan. Final report.

NRC (2012) Annual Project Report 2011. Strengthening Gender-Based Violence Prevention and Response in Faryab Province.

NRC (2012) Annual Project Report. Youth Education Pack for Returnees, IDPs & Host

communities in Afghanistan.

NRC (2013) Final Project Report. Strengthening Gender-Based Violence Prevention and Response in Faryab Province.

NRC (2013) Final Project Report. Youth Education Pack for Returnees, IDPs & Host communities in Afghanistan.

NRC & Samuel Hall (2013) Strengthening Displaced Women's Housing, Land and Property Rights. Afghanistan Country Report

Other References

AREU (2013). Women's Rights, Gender Equality, and Transition: Securing gains, moving forward Afghanistan. Issues Paper. Kabul, Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit.

Desai, V. (2005). NGOs, gender mainstreaming and urban poor communities in Mumbai. Mainstreaming Gender in Development: A Critical View. F. P. a. C. Portman. Oxford, Oxfam Publishing.

Ganesh, L., M. Kohistani, et al. (2013). Women's Economic Empowerment in Afghanistan 2002-2012. Information Mapping. Kabul Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit

Grace, J. (2004). Gender Roles in Agriculture: Case Studies of five villages in northern Afghanistan. Kabul Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit.

Kabeer, N., A. Khan, et al. (2011). Afghan values or women's rights? Gendered narratives of continuity and change in urban Afghanistan IDS Working Paper. Brighton, Institute for Development Studies. **387**.

Larson, A. (2008). A Mandate to Mainstream: Promoting Gender Equality in Afghanistan. Issues Paper Series. Kabul, Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit.

NAC (Unpublished). The Role of Women in Agriculture in Afghanistan - Some considerations in connection with the implementation of the integrated rural development programme II (IRD 2) Unpublished document, Norwegian Afghanistan Committee.

World Bank (2014). Women's Role in Afghanistan's Future. Taking stock of achievements and continued challenges. Washington DC World Bank Group.

Annex 3: NGO profiles

Agency for Technical Cooperation and Development (ACTED) is an international relief agency with headquarters in Paris, France. ACTED was established in Peshawar, Pakistan in 1993 to provide humanitarian and rehabilitation assistance to Kabul during the civil war but has later broadly expanded their activities.

ACTED is among the largest NGOs operating in Afghanistan, employing 961 national and 9 international staff. ACTED has a broad range of projects throughout Afghanistan and a facilitating partner for the National Solidarity Programme (NSP), including in Faryab.

The Norwegian Embassy established a strategic partnership with ACTED in 2008, and the organization has since been a major implementer of Norwegian assistance for the Faryab province, including the Ghormak district. ACTED had six of their national staff-members killed in Faryab in November 2013. The financial framework has been NOK 120 mill for their project “Sustained Rural Development in Faryab Province”.

Aga Khan Foundation (AKF) is a Swiss registered foundation that forms part of the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN). AKF was established as an international organization in 1967 under the leadership of His Highness Aga Khan, the Spiritual Leader of the Shia Ismaeli Muslim community.

AKF established itself in Afghanistan in 2002 and quickly became one of the largest NGOs in the country with 1700 staff-members. It is facilitating partner for the National Solidarity Programme (NSP) in Badakshan, Baghlan, Bamyán and Takhar.

The Norwegian Embassy established a partnership with AKF in 2007, supporting a multisector support programme in the Badakshan, Baghlan and Bamyán provinces, including Bamyán Electrification Project, with a financial framework of NOK 64 mill. **Danish Committee for Aid to Afghan Refugees (DACAAR)** is a Danish NGO formed back in 1984 as a collaboration between 3 Danish NGOs. DACAAR supported Afghan refugees in Pakistan during the 1990s and pioneered then support for Afghan women through an embroidery project and structures for sale of the produces.

Following the withdrawal of Soviet forces, DACAAR started to shift their activities inside Afghanistan from 1989, going into rural development and vocational training while continuing targeted support for women and water and sanitation projects. What set DACAAR aside from many other NGOs was their employment of Danish (and international) academics with extensive knowledge of Afghanistan that informed their priorities and approaches.

DACAAR employs 850 national and 10 international staff members, and is a facilitating partner for the National Solidarity Programme (NSP), where they in 2012 worked in Faryab, Herat, Laghman and Parwan provinces.

The Norwegian Embassy has since 2010 supported DACAAR for their programme “Rural Development in Northern Afghanistan” in Faryab, Sar-e-Pul and Badakshan provinces. The two main activities, rural development and water supply and sanitation had a financial frame of NOK 77 mill.

Norwegian Church Aid (NCA) is a Norwegian NGO that work in partnership with/through Afghan NGOs and civil society organisations. NCA have supported Afghans since 1979, first with assistance to refugees and from the early 1990s with rehabilitation, development and humanitarian assistance inside Afghanistan, establishing a Kabul office in 1993.

NCA apply an integrated approach for their support for climate justice and the right to peace and security, done through long-term development, emergency assistance and advocacy work. Given their role as donor NGO has NCA a rather small staff based in Kabul and Maimane, Faryab.

The contract on integrated rural development included 12 partner NGOs, operating in Faryab, Daikundi and Uruzgan provinces, with a budget of NOK 105 mill. The more targeted programme “Promoting Women’s Engagement and Participation in Faryab» was implemented through 4 partners. These activities had a financial frame of NOK 6, 9 mill.

Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) is a Norwegian NGO that operated a joint office in Pakistan with NCA until 1994, when they disengaged from Afghanistan, but then reestablished their presence in Kabul in 2002.

NRC supports and advocates for the rights of returning refugees from neighboring countries and Internally Displaces Persons (IDPs) with legal assistance, education, shelter, WASH and emergency assistance.

NRC has 450 national and 22 international staff-members working from their Kabul and six field offices. The project included in this review, Youth education and Gender based Violence Program in Faryab and Nangarhar provinces” has a financial frame of NOK 38 mill.

Norwegian Afghanistan Committee (NAC) is a Norwegian NGO established in 1980 as a solidarity movement, working solely with Afghanistan. They provided during the 1980s emergency assistance and operated medial teams inside Afghanistan. From 1989 onwards came a shift towards rehabilitation and development assistance and field offices opened in Ghazni and Badakshan provinces.

NCA is working on health, education and natural resource management through an integrated approach, and has a staff of 200 national and 1 international member based in Kabul, Jaghori (Ghazni) and Badakhshan.

The rural development project included in this review, with projects in Ghazni and Badakshan provinces, has a financial frame of NOK 45 mill.

Annex 4: Province profiles

Faryab Province

The majority of the NGOs in this review have projects in the Faryab province, located in north-west Afghanistan bordering Turkmenistan. Norway headed a Provincial Reconstruction Team here from 2005 until their withdrawal in late 2013. The province is the only to have an Uzbek majority, followed in numbers by Tajiks, Pashtuns, Turkmens and Hazaras.

There has been a historical tension between Uzbeks and Pashtuns in Faryab. As the Taliban over the last years have advanced into the north has this conflict increased, and become more violent. That is not the only conflict though. We see increased political competition between Tajiks and Uzbeks that combined with the establishment and arming of militant groups as Afghan Local Police (ALP) has sharply increased the conflict level and insecurity in many districts.

While the northern areas, and Uzbeks, Tajiks and Hazaras in particular, are less restrictive than the southern parts of Afghanistan on restricting women's public role is there still a cultural and traditional limitation in place. One must further assume that the Pashtun part of the population maintain a more restrictive attitude, and increasingly so when there is increased insecurity.

Agriculture, much of it rain-fed, is the primary income for the population, but many men seek seasonal work in Iran to increase the family income. Women engage in carpet weaving that generate additional income, often including children in the production.

Jagori and Malistan (Ghazni Province)

Hazaras almost exclusively inhabit these two neighboring districts, but they come out as very different. The security situation has been and is relatively good in both districts, except for some internal rivalry between Hazara groups. Their main security challenge is that they have to travel through Pashtun dominated areas to the south to travel to/trade in Ghazni, Kabul or Quetta.

Jagori is a local commercial centre that has generated trade opportunities, including with a large contingent of Hazaras residing in Quetta, Pakistan. The district has had a number of political active individuals and groups that have prioritized and managed to attract a relatively high degree of assistance. An NGO established a large hospital in the early 1990s, and there has been sustained support for education and for projects benefitting women. This continued during the Taliban period, including education of girls up to 12th grade. Jaghori has therefore a very high degree of literacy, including for women, and is very open to projects and activities including women.

Malistan has had a very different development, and has not benefitted in the same way as Jagori. There is a very high degree of illiteracy for women (80 %), few services available for the population, and a much poorer population that depend entirely on agriculture. Drought has been recurring, forcing men to seek income outside the district. This has made it more challenging to implement projects directed towards women, and in finding qualified staff for NGO activities.

Baghlan

Historically was Baghlan a comparatively rich province with a well-developed and industrialized agriculture and a coalmine that provided jobs. Education was easily available in the provincial capital Pul- e Kumri, and the way was short to Kabul for trade and for higher education. The province has a Tajik majority, and with fairly similar numbers of Pashtuns, Uzbeks and Hazaras – and with a smaller (but influential) community of Ismaelis.

Political and religious affiliations has played a major role in how Baghlan during the Soviet invasion was spared from violent conflict, and benefitted from development assistance. The local leader of the Ismaeli minority, Sayed Mansoor Naderi, and his militia group aligned themselves with the communist government in Kabul in the early 1980s, while maintaining a pragmatic relationship with the mujahedeen groups. This protected the area from fighting and secured extensive support for education, health and government services that ensure a high degree of general literacy, and many baglanis – at least from the cities - with higher education.

The party Hezb-e Islami has a traditional strong following in Baghlan, and there has been instances of attacks on Ismaelis, but although insecurity has increased does Baghlan remain one of the safer provinces in Afghanistan. The higher degree of education, a tradition for women to take on public roles and the relative security provides an environment that is more acceptable for projects benefitting women.

Badakhshan

Badakhshan is one of the most remote provinces in Afghanistan, bordering both Tajikistan and China, and with many mountainous districts that are difficult to access during the winter. The majority of the population are Tajiks, Pamiris is defined as a separate group, and there are some Uzbeks, Kirgis and Ismaelis.

The main source of income is from small-scale agriculture/horticulture, which is prone to environmental changes. But the province have a number of mines for emeralds and lapis- lazuli that provide jobs and income, and smuggling across to Tajikistan (including of drugs) is another source of revenue.

The party Jamiat-e Islami has traditionally been in full control of the province, and as the late President Rabbani came from the province has badakshanis held influence on/to some degree benefitted from government assistance. There is though some influence, and historic rivalry with Hezb-e- Islami, and a growing presence from Taliban over the last years that has lead to increased insecurity in some districts. It is difficult though to determine if this is due to a strategic expansion from the Taliban, or rather struggle over the various income/smuggling sources and channels.

Although there are very conservative elements within both Jamiat -e Islami and Hezb-e Islami has there been broad support and demand in the population for education, including of girls, and for projects benefitting women.

Annex 5: Terms of Reference

Afghanistan. Focus on women – experiences from Norwegian funded NGOs' projects

Introduction and Background

The Royal Norwegian Embassy in Kabul (RNE) has requested Norad to commission a study to assess how gender aspects are covered by main partner NGOs.

Gender is an important cross cutting issue in Norwegian development assistance in general and, due to the special conditions, in Afghanistan in particular. Gender considerations are part of most of the development projects, but vary in terms of specificity from agreement to agreement, and between the different channels of funding.

The NGOs constitute an important development cooperation channel for the Norwegian Embassy in Kabul. Although an increasing emphasis is given to governmental programs, it is likely that cooperation with the NGOs will be needed for years to come. All the NGOs which will be covered by this study have been operating in Afghanistan for several years, and some started their activities already in the 70-ies.

Due to the fact that they are implementing work in the rural areas of the country they have often developed important knowledge on local issues, and have established good cooperation with local people and institutions. For the embassy the NGOs have added value as they are contributing with important updated information about development in rural areas. This is relevant for Faryab, and also for Herat, Bamyan, Nangahar, Balkh, Badakshan, Uruzgan, Sar-e-Pul, Baghlan, Daikundi and Ghazni.

The main focus of the NGOs is strengthening local communities. Often the work includes capacity development and institutional strengthening, either by establishing new local entities or by following up of existing groups, as Community Development Committees (CDCs), District Development Assemblies (DDAs) or School Management Committees. Working in a wide selection of specialized fields (e.g. introduction of new agriculture practices, management of tool banks, solar power, water infrastructure, vocational training, and women/youth resource centers) is intertwined with the local institution building.

In Afghanistan NGOs are often considered to be relatively cost-efficient actors compared to other channels of development assistance. The NGOs have developed and maintained expertise which can be utilized by both local institutions and local government. The NGOs supported by Norwegian development assistance are also important carriers of basic principles of human rights and gender, solidarity towards marginalized groups and protection of natural environment. The fact that the NGOs also operate in districts where the government is yet to be properly established might make them even more important in the years to come with the reduction in presence of international military forces, for instance in Faryab.

Gender aspects were incorporated in the 6 large NGO-agreements from 2010 to 2013. The NGOs have applied different approaches and strategies to gender issues, depending on the sectors, the local conditions as well as the Gender policies defined by the NGO at Central level.

The agreements have the following reference numbers, contract names and financial framework.

- ACTED: AFG-2818 08/016 “Sustained Rural Development in Faryab Province” (NOK 120 mill);
- AKF/AKDN: AFG-2779 08/007 “Multi-Sector Support Program in Badakshan, Baghlan and Bamyan Provinces, including Maternal Health Program and Bamyan Electrification Project” (NOK 64 mill);
- DACAAR: AFG-2786 08/008 “Rural Development in Northern Afghanistan” (NOK 77 mill);
- NCA: AFG-2776 09/035 “Integrated Rural Development in Faryab, Daikundi and Uruzgan Provinces” (2010: NOK 40 mill, 2011: NOK 32 mill, 2012: NOK 33 mill.);
- NAC: AFG-2778 09/036 “Rural Development” (NOK 45 mill);
- NRC: AFG-2841 09/041 “Youth Education and Gender Based Violence Program in Faryab and Nangarhar Provinces” (NOK 38 mill).

The main part of the NGO activities take place at grass-root levels and with close cooperation with the local communities. However, as an important part of the NGOs’ work, and to a great extent as a precondition for their sustained activities in Afghanistan, they are involved in processes at many different levels both in the country, and also abroad. These are for instance:

- Internationally, and in the NGOs’ Head quarter countries, some of the NGOs maintain and participate in various networks and institutions, often with significant public relation activities. Such work can contribute to increased knowledge about gender issues in Afghanistan.
- In Afghanistan, the NGOs do maintain needed contacts with central governmental institutions as various core -, and line ministries. They have established personal and institutional relations with central politicians, organizations, consultants groups and research institutions. Through their active participation in national NGOs interest organizations they are active in advocacy, policy development and public relation work
- At provincial levels the NGOs coordinate their work with provincial government institutions, development boards, Provincial Governors Offices, Line Ministries, Provincial development organizations etc.
- In the districts the NGOs coordinate and base the activities on what are found of governmental offices, organizations, religious institutions and strongmen
- The bulk of the work and utilization of funds are taking place in the villages – and in close collaboration with community based traditional and more modern institutions.

The current review will concentrate on activities implemented at local/village levels, as assessed through the desk studies and phone interviews. However, the perspective should also include NGOs’ roles at the various levels indicated above, when this can shed light on the work carried out.

The gender review performed in Afghanistan in 2011²¹ in collaboration between Sweden and Norway focused on an overarching question: How can the Nordic countries become more effective supporters of women’s rights and gender equality in development cooperation in Afghanistan? Two large NGOs were

²¹ <http://www.norad.no/no/resultater/publikasjoner/norads-rapportserie/publikasjon?key=380820>

included as cases in that study; DACAAR and the Swedish Afghanistan Committee. But the main objective was not to assess and describe activities and outcome of the NGOs gender related work. This current review intends to concentrate on NGOs with a particular emphasis on practices and strategies implemented to reach out to and improve the living conditions of women.

The 2011 review recommended closer cooperation in the gender field with other Nordic countries. In order to follow up on this, the current TOR specifies that the review team should interview gender officers at the Nordic embassies in Kabul by phone. It was not considered feasible to undertake this review jointly as the scope would be too large and the current objective is to assess use of Norwegian grants. Findings and recommendations from the review will be discussed by the Embassy with gender focal points from other embassies.

I. Purposes of the Study

The current review is intended to systematically collect information about the gender work of these NGOs and to compare them and *to the extent possible* (provided that this is a desk-review) assess their relevance, sustainability and results. The main intention is to produce experience based information as basis for future work of NGOs in particular and for other actors in general, in similar cultural, religious and socio-economic settings. The main questions are in short: What works? Are there “promising practices”? Can they serve as input to future programming for gender equality for the six NGOs and others?

I. Methods

Due to insecurity in many parts of the country, with particular consideration of the elections taking place in the spring/summer of 2014, the review will not include field visits in Afghanistan. The review will utilize information collection methods such as document studies, phone interviews with informants in rural areas and centrally in Kabul and HQs, as well as meetings when and where possible. It is the intention that this study and its results shall provide the basis for possible field research at a later stage, when and if this is deemed feasible.

A HQ study at this point is nonetheless highly useful. By combining creative telecommunication methodology, many issues related to project performance and obtainment of results at various levels can be collected, systematized, compared, assessed and form basis for conclusions and recommendations and future project visits.

Main sources of information for literature study:

- Plans and Annual Reports from the 6 NGOs for the agreements covering the years 2010-2013.
 - This means 6 plans (plus two extra for NCA, who had annual agreements), 18 annual reports in addition to some reports covering only parts of 2013.
 - Some NGOs will have delivered their Final Reports at the time of the investigation and these should be included if relevant.
- It is proposed also to collect reports from a limited group of other NGOs operating in Afghanistan, and which are focusing on gender issues in integrated rural development.

(Among these one could propose CARE, Save the Children Foundation, and Swedish Afghanistan Committee etc.)

- Specific gender related papers, plans, strategies for, or by, the NGOs, either at HQ, national or project levels.
- Plans, studies, reviews and evaluations of the 6 NGOs.
- Other relevant documents as identified by the review team. There are a considerable number of books and papers covering development issues (at local rural area and community levels) for women in Islamic countries. Such documents can be useful for establishing theoretical framework, as frame for comparison, as well as concept clarification.

Use of telecom systems

People in a large part of Afghanistan's territory can now utilize mobile telephones, and even internet systems have an impressive outreach (although access to hardware may be a challenge).

The NGOs at central offices are maintaining frequent communication with their staff at provincial and district levels. Government offices at different levels are also connected to telecom systems. Hence, there is potentially a relatively large number of important respondents that can be reached and interviewed. The phone interviews shall take place from Norway and the NGOs will assist in providing information and contact details of relevant informants. With the limited time and resources available for the review close contact with the Embassy and Norad should be maintained, if this approach to information gathering proves to be too difficult.

II. Scope of work

The study shall cover the issues listed below. Other issues deemed to be relevant to achieving the purpose of the study may be included. If some issues mentioned below prove to be difficult to cover (for instance due to lack of reliable information) Norad/the Embassy should be informed as soon as possible.

- a) Briefly describe the "State of the art" from current reviews and research in terms of findings and results related to development activities aiming at improving women's situation and rights in rural areas of Afghanistan.
- b) Describe the priorities established by the NGOs for gender related work, for instance in terms of number of females in the organization at various levels, the inclusion of women's rights in NGO's constitution, policies, extent of networking with women's interest groups and institutions etc.
- c) Review how the organisations have related to and incorporated an understanding of the particular historical, social and religious context relevant for the situation of women in Afghanistan in their planning, implementation and reporting.
- d) Describe and compare the NGOs specifically in terms of how the projects under study are organized in order to reach the gender related objectives, including funding and other

resources used, staff capacity and competence. How is gender issues covered in the reports and other documents, as well as in the statistics presented?

- e) Identify activities where women's rights and gender equality, including work with men and boys, are included in general and integrated (mainstreamed) approaches of the projects,
- f) Identify targeted and specifically gender related activities and describe and categorize them
 - a. by sectors and subsectors
 - b. importance attached to them by the project (for instance funds provided, manpower attached)
 - c. if possible assess these activities in terms of evaluative concepts as: relevance, sustainability, and results
- g) Discuss relative effectiveness of the above strategies (mainstreamed or targeted) in the current setting in Afghanistan.
- h) Search for "promising practices" among both mainstreamed and targeted approaches. This search could be based on a combination of methods – how they are described in documents, by NGO representatives, the beneficiaries, or how they are considered by local shuras, government representatives or local politicians). The review team may also establish their own criteria for what constitutes a promising practice.
- i) If "promising practices" have been identified, the reviews should try to explain how and why the responsible NGO has developed the activities in the first place. (Are they based on initiatives from the local community, from the NGO's earlier experiences, from proposals of local government or from other sources?)
- j) Identify the main challenges and risks experienced among the NGOs in relation to gender based activities, as well as how these are tried mitigated.

III. The Consultants

The assignment can be carried out by one consultant or a team and the workload is estimated to approximately 5 working weeks altogether.

The team should cover the following qualifications:

- Documented experience from similar reviews and evaluations related to gender and NGOs in particular.
- previous knowledge of the NGOs in question,
- understanding of local development context in rural areas of Afghanistan,
- Knowledge of a relevant local language is an advantage
- knowledge of gender related work in integrated rural development settings in Muslim communities,

- knowledge of crosscutting issues of Norwegian development assistance (gender, environment, anti-corruption) and
- thorough knowledge and understanding of Norwegian development policy in general and regarding Afghanistan in particular.

IV. Implementation

The assignment shall be carried out during the spring of 2014. The assignment is considered to take altogether 5 working weeks including desk review, telephone interviews and report writing. The consultant/ team shall liaise closely with Norad regarding the implementation of the assignment.

V. Reporting and Products

Two weeks into the review the team shall present the status of the work to the Norad. This shall give an indication of preliminary observations, proposals for further process and methodology, and suggest focal issues for future field visits which could take place at a later stage.

The draft report shall be presented to the Embassy and Norad for comments after four and a half working weeks. The Embassy will share the report with the concerned NGOs for comments.

Comments from Norad and the Embassy are to be presented to the Consultant within 15 working days.

The Final report shall be presented five working days after the consultant has received the comments from the concerned parties.

The report in English shall not exceed 30 pages, including an Executive Summary comprising key findings, conclusions and recommendations.

Norad

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