

**Evaluation of the “Strategy for Women and Gender
Equality in Development Cooperation (1997-2005)”
Country case study: Afghanistan**

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Abbreviations

AIHRC	Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission
ACBAR	Agency Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief
AKDN	Aga Khan Development Network
AWN	Afghan Women's Network
AWSDC	Afghan Women's Skill Development Centre
ARTF	Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund
CDC	Community Development Council
CDP	Community Development Plan
CIDA	Canadian International Development Agency
FAO	Food and Agricultural Organisation
FOKUS	Forum for Women and Development
GTZ	German Technical Cooperation Agency
IARCSC	Independent Administrative Reform and Civil Service Commission
IOM	International Organisation for Migration
LEP	Lateral Entry Programme
LOTFA	Law and Order Trust Fund for Afghanistan
MDG	Millenium Development Goals
MoE	Ministry of Education
MoF	Ministry of Finance

MoH	Ministry of Health
MoI	Ministry of Interior
MoWA	Ministry of Women's Affairs
MRRD	Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development
NDF	National Development Framework
NGO	Non-governmental organization
NAC	Norwegian Afghanistan Committee
NCA	Norwegian Church Aid
NSP	National Solidarity Program
PRT	Provincial Reconstruction Teams
PRR	Priority Reform and Reconstruction
UNAMA	United Nations Assistance Mission to Afghanistan
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
USD	United States Dollar
UNMACA	United Nations Mine Action Program for Afghanistan
WHO	World Health Organisation
WFP	World Food Program

Executive summary

This country report is part of the Evaluation of the “Strategy for Women and Gender Equality in Development Cooperation (1997-2005)”. The evaluation was commissioned by Norad’s Evaluation Department, and carried out by Norwegian Institute of Urban and Regional Research (NIBR) and partners from May to November 2005. It is one of three country case studies in Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Zambia. Both the main report as well as the three country case studies are available at Norad’s web-page www.norad.no. The field work for this country report was carried out in June 2005.

Afghanistan may be one of the most challenging contexts in which to address gender issues. Unlike in many other post-war contexts, the war did not lead to mobilization and increased participation of women economically¹ and militarily, but the last phase of the war, the Taliban phase, manifested itself in unprecedented oppression of women. The war deprived women of basic services in critical areas such as health and education and destroyed livelihoods. The Taliban years saw a strengthening of traditional practices and a further weakening of urban and modern aspects of Afghan culture. Most women activists pin oppression and discrimination of women down to traditional practices, such as forced marriages, often at a very young age, rather than to Islam and the fact that Afghanistan is an Islamic state. Yet, the legal framework adopted in the new Constitution is seen as a good framework for promoting the rights of women, although there is still considerable scope for improvements in national law.

The findings of this country study must be understood within a context in which all donor countries, as well as the Afghan government and civil society organizations are immersed in building their own institutions. Their focus is on recruitment and of ensuring that staff acquires the basic skills to work effectively. Boundaries between institutions are fluid and the role of each institution is not clear. The mandates, policies, rules and regulations governing these institutions are being rewritten. The division of labour between donors, government and civil society institutions and organizations is being worked out. The government recruits from civil society and donors have assigned a number of technical staff to build the capacity of government institutions.

¹ With the exception of refugee women in Afghanistan.

In the midst of this flux, most informants agree that gender issues have not been a priority, neither from the government side, nor from donors. However, they disagree on the appropriateness of prioritizing gender. With reference to Afghan traditions that discriminate against women and to the long list of other priorities, some argue that gender should remain a non-priority. Others argue that donors have a window of opportunity now, in terms of influencing the situation, which they may not have in the medium-term future and that they should make use of it. So it could be argued that the fluidity of the situation in itself and the relative dependence of the Afghan government on donor funding means that donors should make use of the opportunity and firmly place gender issues on the agenda.

The situation in Afghanistan can be summed up in the following points:

- There is hardly any policy dialogue between donors and the Government on gender issues at the national level and at the program level.
- Strategic coordination and planning by donors on gender issues have not taken place.
- There is currently no national framework, action plan or strategy for work on gender issues. Donors and the Ministry of Women's Affairs (MoWA) have taken a number of initiatives to address this issue, but so far with limited success.
- Considering the initial interest in this area, very limited financial resources have been channeled through the government, with the exception of resources to MoWA.
- There is a dearth of practical tools and instruments as well as concrete mechanisms that are useful to practical gender work within government ministries. Some argue that gender specialists are generalists while the need is for practical, specific tools and instruments.
- Gender analysis is not carried out and consequently interventions are not effectively designed and reporting is made difficult because base line data is lacking.
- Networks are weak.
 - Networks among donors are weak.
 - Networking between donors and MoWA is ineffective.
 - There is hardly any networking between donors and civil society organizations.
 - There is collaboration between MoWA and Afghan women NGOs, but some NGOs feel that the relationship is contentious and that the role of MoWA in relation to civil society is unclear.
 - There is an Afghan network of women's organizations, but donor funding in this area is limited.
- There is a lack of competence and experience on gender equality issues both within Afghan institutions and among donors. Professionalism needs to be strengthened.
- Gender expertise is of a general nature and is often not linked with technical competence in the relevant sector.

Within this overall context, Norway has raised gender issues at international donor conferences and is seen by some informants to have a clear profile on gender, due to high

level political interventions and to a natural inclination by Norwegian staff to integrate a gender sensitive perspective into programming.

Despite limited staff and resources the Embassy has carried out initiatives to improve its gender focus, by requesting studies on how to improve work on women and gender equality conducted in the spring of 2005. New staff has been recruited to the Embassy. This is a step which could allow for more focused work on gender equality.

Although the Government of Afghanistan (GoA) has formally committed itself to gender mainstreaming, the Afghanistan Reconstruction trust Fund (ARTF) lacks a gender policy. By channeling a large portion of aid to Afghanistan through ARTF, Norway as a donor has become removed from government programs and does not have a regular and close dialogue with Afghan authorities for raising issues of concern at the program level. Although Norway regularly raises gender equality issues at the highest political level in donor fora, the channels, tools and instruments for follow-up at the line ministry and program level is lacking.

Out of the programs supported by ARTF, the National Solidarity Program (NSP) has an excellent reputation among stakeholders in Afghanistan. Through participation in the Community Development Councils (CDCs), women have become primary stakeholders in, and beneficiaries of, this program. This is recognized as a major achievement of the program. Two of the other programs currently supported through ARTF, the water and sanitation program and the education program, target women as beneficiaries. According to program staff, the success of the 'soft side', hygiene and sanitation, of the water and sanitation program depends on an effective strategy for involving women in the program, both as beneficiaries and as program staff. The education program has not started yet, but as a sector, education is accorded high priority by all informants as a means of improving the situation of women. The lateral entry program is also in an early phase. There is a concern, however, that special considerations in relation to gender could come into conflict with the overall objective of promoting a merit-based civil service. Efforts to target women through a specific program have not been successful yet.

Norwegian Church Aid (NCA) and Aga Khan are in the process of examining their approach to gender, in terms of policies, planning, implementation and monitoring. Although the NGOs have been active in Afghanistan for a long time, their work has been in the area of relief, and to some degree rehabilitation. Their current challenge is to transform their programs into long term development programs, and in doing so also to take into account the gender aspects of their work. There are best practice examples to be found in this area that emphasize the importance of appropriate entry strategies and intervention methodologies that take into account the local context. There are also practical considerations such as the need to employ women staff to approach women.

1 Introduction

1.1 Background and scope

This country report is part of the Evaluation of the “Strategy for Women and Gender Equality in Development Cooperation (1997-2005)”. The evaluation was commissioned by Norad’s Evaluation Department, and carried out by Norwegian Institute of Urban and Regional Research (NIBR) and partners from May to November 2005. It is one of three country case studies in Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Zambia. Both the main report as well as the three country case studies are available at Norad’s web-page www.norad.no. The field work for this country report was carried out in June 2005.

According to the Terms of Reference (ToR):

‘The purpose of this evaluation is thus also to learn more about the process by which partners and Norway interact about women and gender equality, and to some extent also the outcomes of these partnerships. The evaluation shall assess the process by which Norway and partners have attempted to promote women in development and gender equality, focusing on lessons learnt from applying the gender mainstreaming approach and targeted interventions, with a view to how Norway in partnership can play an active role in promoting gender equality.’

The specific questions to be answered were the following:

- i. What resources are available in the Norwegian embassies and how are these organised to undertake women and gender equality (W&GE) work?
- ii. How has the availability of capacity, resources and networks with partners influenced the content and outcomes of W&GE work?
- iii. What has the balance been between gender-targeted activities and mainstreaming, and what progress has been made with both types of work?
- iv. What has the relevance of Norway’s W&GE in development cooperation been to its development partners, what roles have been taken on by the embassy and other partners, and how are tasks divided between them?

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- v. How does the embassy cooperate with national partner governments, CSOs and other donors on W&GE work? How has this cooperation been affected by the new aid modalities and donor harmonisation?
 - vi. What are the views of embassy staff and local partners on the future of W&GE work and the Norwegian strategy that guides it?

The evaluation covers the post-Taliban period and in particular the period from 2004 when Afghanistan became a main partner country for Norwegian development aid. Prior to 2001 Norwegian assistance was given as humanitarian aid through non-governmental organizations and this form of aid is not included in the ToR for the evaluation.

1.2 Methodology

The study was conducted by a Norwegian researcher based at NIBR and by an Afghan consultant based in Kabul. Field work was carried out by the two-member team from the 4th to the 16th of June 2005. During this period thirty-five representatives of the Afghan government and civil service, Afghan civil society organizations and donor agencies were interviewed using a semi-structured questionnaire. Available documentation at the Embassy was reviewed. Documentation was also collected from organizations and institutions, both program and context documentation. The team decided not to make any field visits because (i) the ToR for the evaluation mainly concerns itself with organizational and institutional issues; (ii) relevant field visits would have been time consuming given the distances that would have had to be covered; and (iii) the added value of making a short field visit would have been limited as opposed to the value of meeting with people in Kabul. A debriefing meeting with Embassy staff was held at the end of the field visit.²

1.3 The Afghan context

Gender equality issues in Afghanistan must be understood within a context in which there are enormous needs for reconstruction, human security, economic development and effective service-delivery after more than two decades of war and regime changes. The war destroyed the traditional subsistence agriculture and the pastoral way of life and transformed Afghanistan into the world's largest opium producer and a centre for arms dealing and smuggling. In urban areas the public role of women in the economy was undermined as women's access to public employment and education collapsed due to the break-down of the state sector. But many Afghan women did, as refugees in neighbouring countries, gain access to income generating programs and employment in aid agencies, although on a limited scale. During the war violations against women such as abduction, rape, forcible

² All staff present participated in the meeting: Ambassador Mr. Jan Erik Leikvang, Mr. Carsten Hveem Carlsen, Ms. Nina Schelderup and Ms. Helene Sand Andresen.

marriages to commanders and sale into prostitution were reported, but the reports went largely unnoticed. As Taliban gradually extended its rule until it assumed control of most of the country in 1998, women who previously composed 70% of teachers, almost 50% of civil servants and 40% of doctors were banned from paid employment and prohibited from leaving their homes without a male relative (Kandiyoti 2005).

Despite progress in the areas of state law and public policy, the life options of Afghan women remain conditioned on their situation and role within their family, community and ethnic group. Violations against women are often blamed on traditional practices in these spheres. Yet, serious human rights violations have also happened as a result of new dependencies and vulnerabilities that are consequences of the war. The interrelationship between all these factors is captured in the following quote:

‘The dynamics of gendered disadvantage, the erosion of local livelihoods, the criminalisation of the economy and insecurity at the hands of armed groups and factions are analytically distinct phenomena, yet their effects combine seamlessly to produce extreme forms of female vulnerability’ (Kandiyoti 2005:13).

These processes have resulted in the worst statistics in the world on indicators such as maternal mortality rates and infant mortality rates. With a population of 27.6 million³, life expectancy at birth is 44.5 years. The infant mortality rate is 200 pr. 1000, the literacy rate stands at 28.7%, while gross primary enrollment stands at 54.4% (68% for boys and 40% for girls). All these figures are substantially worse than the South Asian average. On two indicators that are critical to the situation of women: maternal mortality rates (1,600 per 100,000 live births) and access to adequate drinking water (13%) the Afghanistan score is the lowest in the world. Malnutrition, at 70%, is also one of the highest in the world. Overall Afghanistan finds itself as number 173 out of 178 countries on UNDP’s human development index for 2004.

According to a new Amnesty International report, women and girls in Afghanistan feel that their situation has remained largely unchanged since the end of the Taliban regime. Discriminatory practices that were institutionalized during the war have in some respects grown stronger. Poverty has increased. Violations of human rights continue. Being used as households strategies to overcome poverty, settle debts and avoid violations by armed groups, forced marriages and child marriages are on the increase.⁴

The position of women is a highly contested area in Afghan politics. If and how Islam and shari`a law adds to the difficult situation of women is open for debate. Many women activists say it is important to argue for the improvement of the status of women within an

³ World Bank and Afghanistan Human Development Report 2004

⁴ Amnesty International 2005: Afghanistan: Women still under attack: a systematic failure to protect. www.amnestyusa.org.

Islamic religious framework. Others argue that the Afghan government is responsive to clerics who often resent and work against the rights of women.

1.4 Achievements in Afghanistan since 2001

The situation of women under the Taliban caught the attention of the world. Immediately after the fall of the Taliban regime women were seen as symbols of the oppressive policies of the Taliban regime and their plight became a justification for international aid to Afghanistan. Since then there have been positive developments. Afghans point out that for the first time there is a female governor in one of the provinces, there is a woman Ambassador, and women Ministers have been appointed, albeit not in the most powerful Ministries. Women are highly placed in other Ministries as well. Women mobilised very actively during the Loya Jirga, despite being subjected to harassment⁵. With financial and technical support from donors, a Constitutional framework was put in place which provided men and women with equal rights before the law (Article 22). Several laws, like the National Election Law have 'affirmative action' provisions. The election law provides for a minimum representation of women in both houses of Parliament. 27% of the seats in the lower house are reserved for women. Of the 10.5 million registered voters before the Presidential elections on October 9th 2004, 40% were female.⁶ The Ministry of Women Affairs was set up. Institutions that had been banned, such as the Family Court in Kabul, were reinstated. An inter-ministerial task force to combat violence against women has been established. Traditional practices have been prohibited. An increasing number of girls are being enrolled in schools, although gender disparities continue to exist, particularly in the Southern Provinces where girls make up less than 15% of the total number of children attending school.⁷

In addition to having a national legal framework, Afghanistan is a signatory to international instruments, including the Beijing Platform, The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Millennium Development Goals. According to one donor 'the overall legal framework is nearly ideal'.

The Bonn declaration of December 2001 refers to the importance of the participation of women in the interim-administration and in the Loya Jirga. The Declaration also emphasizes the need for ethnic, religious and geographic representation. Consequently Dr. Sima Simar was appointed Vice Chair and responsible for women's affairs in the interim-administration.

⁵ Amnesty International 2005.

⁶ Through UNDP Norway contributed to the voter registration project with USD 2.2 million (figures from the Afghan government Development Budget and External Relations Unit).

⁷ Afghanistan Millennium Development Goals.

The Berlin Declaration of 1st April 2004 stated that ‘all efforts to build a new Afghanistan will reflect the aspiration of the Civil Society and promote the participation of women.’ The concrete steps to be taken were to:

- promote increased recruitment and guarantee equal opportunities to women in the civil service.
- ensure that gender is mainstreamed within all sectors, programs and policies.

In the National Development Framework (NDF) from April 2002 it is stated that: ‘Gender is a critical issue for us. Subjected to the segregationist policies of the Taliban, our girls and women need special attention. We do not want gender to be a ghetto. There must be specific programs directed to enhancing the capabilities of our girls and women. More importantly, all programs must pay special attention to gender, and not include it as an afterthought. We have to engage in a societal dialogue to enhance the opportunities of women and improve cooperation between men and women on the basis of our culture, the experience of other Islamic countries, and the global norms of human rights.’

The needs of women for vocational training and the recruitment of women trainees to the police academy is specifically mentioned in the framework, as measures to ameliorate the limited opportunities that women and girls have had to develop their human potential.

In a comment on the NDF ahead of the Afghan Development Forum (ADF) meeting in 2005, the Gender Advisory Group⁸ stated that: ‘There is a need to re-examine national poverty reduction programs in order to sharpen their focus on women, particularly vulnerable groups such as widows, rural women who live in remote communities where economic options do not exist and female headed households.’

The Minister for Women Affairs in her speech to the meeting emphasized the link between gender inequalities and pro-poor growth in saying that without gender equality growth will be limited and the poorest will be excluded.

The Millennium Development Goal report for Afghanistan takes the argument even further in proposing that ‘Gender provided the basis for a distinct development strategy for Afghanistan’ and ‘Gender equality is not only a goal in its own right, but an essential ingredient for achieving broad based economic growth and fulfilling the required MDG goals.’ The report refers to maternal and child health, political participation and economic empowerment through micro credit schemes as essential for empowering women, and for achieving the Millennium Development Goals. In the MDG report, gender equality is also identified as a human security issue. For example, the maternal mortality rate in the

⁸ For the purpose of formulating the National Development Budget, the Government of Afghanistan has established 16 consultative groups, six of which has been given responsibility for ensuring that cross-cutting issues are considered. The cross-cutting issues are gender, environment, humanitarian Affairs, human rights, M&E, and counter-narcotics.

Badakshan Province that are the highest ever recorded in the world; 6500 out of every 100 000 women die in child birth.

Despite the achievements there are substantial challenges to be overcome. The Ministry of Women's Affairs has identified the following areas as key to improving the overall status of Afghan women: health, education, legal protection/access to justice, economic empowerment, violence against women and women's participation in politics and public life.⁹ Many also point to the urban-rural divide and the need to take into account the variations in the situation faced by women in the two contexts. While political discrimination and a lack of policy influence may be the major barriers for women in the cities, in rural communities, in which 'Mullahs are controlling everything' security, traditions and informal justice are the main issues.

Among Afghan women working on women's issues there is optimism, although people agree that changes will take a long time to show up and become sustainable. Many feel that awareness about women's issues has improved in the general population and in ministries as well. Donors take a more cautious view. Some say the initial donor euphoria on gender issues has faded. Because work on gender issues is long term and does not provide results as quickly as for example physical infrastructure projects, donors are reluctant to allocate resources that do not provide quick and tangible results.

1.5 The role of the Ministry of Women Affairs (MoWA)

'Our Ministry may be likened to a two year old girl, born destitute and marginalized, and saddled with great expectations that are too heavy for her young body to carry.'¹⁰ Like all the other ministries in Afghanistan, MoWA started from scratch to develop visions, objectives, plans, strategies, capacity and links with other Ministries. Currently the Ministry has approximately 1000 staff in 32 provinces. Each office in the provinces is staffed by 1-3 persons, but some are without office buildings. Yet, unlike most other ministries, MoWA does not have a large project portfolio of its own. The role of the Ministry is not entirely clear, should MoWA restrict itself to policy making and providing technical advice, should it channel funds from donors to NGOs or should it be involved in service delivery activities? The Ministry itself states that it has shifted its strategy from a 'welfare oriented, direct implementing approach into a policy influencing body – from that of a 'doing' to a 'thinking' ministry.'¹¹

Many donors have provided resources and technical advisors to the Ministry and in the Afghan context the Ministry is said to be relatively well resourced. Yet, the reality of work in the Ministry does not always fit in with preconceived concepts and plans: 'We had our

⁹ Advisory Group on Gender. Background note for the 2005 Afghanistan Development Forum. Online on www.adf.gov.afghanistan.

¹⁰ Ministry of Women's Affairs (MOWA): 1382 (2003-4): Accomplishments and plans.

¹¹ Ministry of Women's Affairs(MOWA): 1382 (2003-4): Accomplishments and plans.

own terms of reference but as you know the reality is completely different.’¹² Hence, much basic training is needed before the Ministry will be in a position to deliver policies and technical services. Due to its own lack of experienced personnel the Ministry has drawn heavily on the capacity and competence of the civil society sector. It has entered into formal collaborative agreements with civil society organizations, such as the Afghan Women’s Network, for training of staff.

The Ministry has set up a number of structures and activities to reach out to other Ministries:

- mainstreaming of gender in the national development budget and processes
- MoUs with the ministries of education, health, commerce, planning and justice to mainstream gender capacities in those ministries
- training programs for ministries
- gender focal units in ministries
- coordination with donors through the Gender Advisory Group.

In reviewing the achievements of the MoWA ahead of the Afghan Development Forum in March 2005¹³, the Minister Mosouda Jalal pointed to a number of achievements¹⁴, but she also outlined the following key constraints to the Government’s work on women’s issues:

1. Our government lacks an adequate structure or mechanism for gender mainstreaming.
2. We lack an agreed policy direction to advance the role of women and to reduce poverty, which is women’s primary security concern for their families.
3. We lack an adequate mechanism to ensure funding to address women’s particular needs and advancement.
4. We have an urgent need to translate our commitment to women into broader-based substance.

According to many donors there is a need for a more comprehensive and strategic approach both from donors as well as from the Ministry if the Ministry is to achieve the policy influence that most donors believe is necessary for the Ministry to fulfill its role.

¹² Quote from a technical advisor from a donor agency.

¹³ Islamic republic of Afghanistan: Consultative Group Standing Committee Meeting Minutes, 19th-20th March 2005

¹⁴ 1) Enhanced political participation of women: over 40% of those registered for the Presidential Election were women and the first female Governor has just been appointed; 2) International engagement: Afghanistan was represented for the first time at the UN Commission on the Status of Women - Beijing + Ten Conference; 4) Achievements of the Ministry of Women’s Affairs: capacity development; clarified mandate with focus on policy development, advocacy and gender mainstreaming; 5) Launching of gender training institute at Kabul University; 6) Creation of inter-agency taskforce on CEDAW; 6) Creation of 8 provincial women’s development centres; 7) Established 5 gender units within Ministries; 8) Established employment service centre for women

Other government ministries expect the MoWA to provide technical support. Several informants argued that with a well thought out strategy and accompanying activities MoWA should be able to promote gender issues. Informants within the civil service suggested that they needed technical expertise on how to go about working on gender issues. They indicated that they were aware of the need to work in this area, but that they did not know how to approach gender equality work.

The views are widely divergent as to the need for MoWA in the first place. On the positive side, the Ministry is seen as a body which could potentially have policy influence and provide technical advice to other Ministries. On the other hand, critics argue that by providing support to the Ministry donors are seen to be paying lip-service to the cause of women in Afghanistan. They argue that MoWA is marginal, it does not have any influence with other Ministries (and never will have), and it does not have any capacity.

2 Norwegian aid to Afghanistan

Norwegian aid to Afghanistan is provided through four channels:

1. The Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund (ARTF) is a multi donor trust fund that was set up in order to facilitate donor coordination and in response to a strong wish from the Government of Afghanistan for such a mechanism. The Fund is managed by the World Bank. The major part of Norwegian funding for transitional and long term assistance is channeled through the ARTF. The planning horizon for support to ARTF from the donor community is until 2010.
2. Norwegian and international NGOs.¹⁵ The Norwegian Church Aid and the Norwegian Afghanistan Committee have had a long standing presence and long experience in working in Afghanistan, both in relief and rehabilitation. More recently the Aga Khan Foundation based in Geneva has been added to the portfolio.
3. United Nations agencies, including UNICEF, IOM, UNHCR, WFP, WHO, FAO, UNDP, UNFPA, UNMACA are recipients of aid. UN agencies are outside of the mandate of this study.¹⁶
4. Direct project implementation. Norway has a team of instructors at the police academy in Kabul, with a mandate to train the Afghan police force in collaboration with the lead country in this area, Germany.

Since 2002 Norwegian aid allocation to Afghanistan has been as follows. All figures are in NOK¹⁷.

2002	2003	2004
486 million	487 million	456.4 million

Norway does not have an MoU with the Government. The sector priorities in Afghanistan are education and vocational training, livelihood and social protection, and public

¹⁵ Humanitarian aid is not included in the ToR of the evaluation. The Norwegian Refugee Council and the Norwegian Red Cross are the largest recipients of humanitarian funding. Other Norwegian organisations receive smaller funding from the humanitarian budget line.

¹⁶ UN agencies are funded over the humanitarian aid budget. Several UN organisations were funded up to 2003.

¹⁷ The figures have been provided by the Embassy in Kabul.

administration and economic management. Norwegian policy emphasizes gender equality and the need to ensure access to education for girls and women's participation in national programs.¹⁸ Gender is defined as a cross-cutting issue and support to women is referred to as a human rights issue. Integration of a gender perspective in measures funded by Norway is one of the objectives in the activity plan for Afghanistan 2004-2006.¹⁹ Other cross-cutting issues are human rights and counter narcotics.

2.1 The role of the Embassy

The Norwegian Embassy in Kabul was established in January 2002 and Afghanistan was established as a partner country for Norwegian Development Cooperation in 2004. Currently the Embassy has six full time Norwegian staff²⁰. One person works with a main focus on long-term development cooperation. This portfolio overlaps to some extent with the administration of the humanitarian and GAP²¹ budgets. The person in charge of the development portfolio is also responsible for the gender aspects of the work at the Embassy. Inevitably this means that gender is only allocated limited time and resources. All staff routinely review proposals and projects from a gender perspective, as required when writing the appropriation document. No specific training had been given on gender issues in preparation for staff postings to Afghanistan.

Despite the institutional constraints outlined in the above, gender has been given attention in the work of the Embassy through the commissioning of a review of gender in Norwegian assistance to Afghanistan (Schanke et al 2005) and through the supervision mission of the National Solidarity Program (NSP) for the purpose of which a consultant was funded to specifically examine the gender aspects of the NSP (Scanteam May 2005). Both exercises were intended to improve the knowledge and competence in this area in order to facilitate more strategic work on gender. The priority areas for a more strategic approach is according to the Embassy to work more closely with the Ministry of Woman Affairs and to promote donor coordination among likeminded donors by building on the work already carried out by the Gender Advisory Group.

Embassy staff attends meetings of the Gender Advisory Group organized by the Ministry of Women Affairs. The group is one of six groups responsible for cross-cutting issues under the consultative group structure that advise government ministries. At present, however, this is not seen to be an effective forum for voicing and raising gender issues with donors and with the Government. Embassy staff is also linked up informally with staff from other Embassies

¹⁸ Stortingsproposisjon nr. 1 (2004-2005), Norsk bistandsengasjement i Afghanistan i 2003: sektoravklaring og kanalisering av bistand, 04.03.2003.

¹⁹ Afghanistan. Virksomhetsrapport 2003 og virksomhetsplan 2004-2006.

²⁰ One additional staff is currently under recruitment.

²¹ GAP funding is intended as bridging funds in the transition from relief to rehabilitation and development.

with an interest in gender issues. There have been ongoing informal initiatives to strengthen networks on gender among donors and recently the Danish Embassy initiated regular donor meetings on gender. The only group that until then had met regularly was the European Union gender group.

The Embassy relies on Norad for backstopping on gender equality issues on a case by case basis, and staff assesses the dialogue with Norad positively.

Embassy staff also holds monthly meetings with Norwegian NGOs and Afghan civil society partners, which are intended for information and policy dialogue purposes, but gender issues are not given special priority in these meetings.

2.2 Policy dialogue on gender

There are a number of arenas for policy dialogue on gender issues in broader donor fora. The Norwegian Development Minister raised human rights and women's issues at the Berlin donor conference. The Embassy has followed up by raising gender equality issues at the Afghan Development Forum (ADF) meetings.

There is a dialogue between the Embassy and the government at the sector level, both through the Consultative Group mechanism and through bilateral meetings at the Ministerial level. Yet, the decision to prioritise the ARTF has meant that the Embassy has no structured dialogue platform for policy discussions with the Government of Afghanistan at program level, even in areas of priority for Norwegian aid.²² Norway has been urging the government to establish regular meetings at program level to enable a closer follow-up on gender benchmarks included in programs supported by Norway.

Several informants suggested that a policy dialogue should be accompanied by benchmarking and monitoring of results to ensure accountability towards agreed objectives, thereby moving away from a sole focus on financial accountability. It was pointed out that at present no institutions are accountable for the fulfillment of policy objectives. Although there is reluctance on the part of the donors to earmark funding, it was suggested that they could be more explicit about their own priorities.

Practically all donor informants made statements to the effect that 'gender is not a priority' among donors in their dialogue with the Government of Afghanistan. The list of priorities for development of Afghanistan after the war is endless. There are so many urgent tasks and so many things that need immediate attention. For some this is used as an argument against

²² However, for the purpose of reporting on the objectives of the Fund, reporting is adequate.

working on gender issues in the current context. Others argue that there will never be a right time and that now is as good as later.

Tradition is the other argument that is used to argue against making gender a concern. This argument says that due to traditions that discriminate against women, it is difficult to develop gender sensitive programming because men are going to resist such interventions. For example, civil servants have a tendency to list all the obstacles, rather than to focus on how they could be overcome. The implicit argument in the 'tradition' argument is that these values are hard to change and that now is not the right time; one has to wait for an enabling environment to emerge.

While some donors argue that gender is not a priority at all and that very little is happening, there is staff within the Ministries who are of the view that 'a lot of attention is given to women'. Within the government there are people, also at higher levels, who say they are sympathetic to gender issues and who argue that donors should use their influence to promote a gender agenda and to take advantage of the leverage which is a result of the Government's heavy dependence on donor funding. 'I appreciate donor pressure. If there is no pressure, people will not pay attention.... We may not have the donor attention tomorrow.' According to this view, the current context provides donors with a window of opportunity that they should make use of.

2.3 Aid delivery through government

Government institutions in Afghanistan are being built more or less from scratch. Basic skills are lacking in the Ministries, including report writing, filing, computer skills etc. It was even suggested that it is hard for government employees to request training because they do not know what they are lacking and what is available. Within this context donors are providing technical support to build government institutions. The recent review of the ARTF was positive in its praise for progress made in some areas of institution building, in particular financial management (Scanteam March 2005).

2.3.1 The Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund (ARTF)

The ARTF is a multi-donor trust fund administered by the World Bank and set up by donors in mid-2002, following donor meetings in Brussels and Tokyo, with a mandate to:

1. Fund recurrent costs of the Afghan budget (the 'recurrent window'). The largest share of donor funding has been provided for the recurrent window and most of the money allocated is spent on salaries for civil servants.
2. Allow for project investments in line with Afghan national priorities as expressed in the National Development Framework and the Government's National Priority Programs. ARTF projects in the investment window are divided into three categories: infrastructure, community development/service delivery and capacity development (the 'investment window').

By early 2005, donors had pledged nearly USD 1 billion to ARTF. Yet, currently there is a considerable gap between funding requested by the Government and pledges made by donors.

The post-conflict situation has provided the rationale for channeling funds through the government. Government institutions had been weakened for a number of reasons: (i) an exodus of qualified staff; (ii) absence of training and competence building for government staff; and (iii) neglect of educational institutions that could train qualified staff.

For 2005 Norway's priority areas within the framework of ARTF are:

Name of program	Amount in NOK for 2005	Implementing agency
The National Solidarity Program (NSP)	20 mill	Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development
Lateral Entry Program (LEP)	20 mill	Independent Administrative Reform and Civil Service Commission
Rural Water and Sanitation (RuWatSan)	15 mill	Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development

Aside from the National Solidarity Program (NSP) the other programs are not operational yet, but it is expected that they will start this year. An allocation made to the Education Quality Improvement Program for 2004 has been transferred to 2006, together with funding for the LEP and the water and sanitation program. In total Norway had paid in NOK 353 991 985 to the Fund before the 2005 allocation.

According to the Scanteam evaluation of ARTF there is no expressed gender policy in ARTF (Scanteam March 2005:43), despite the fact that gender has been defined as a cross-cutting issue in the National Development Framework of the Government. According to the evaluation 'ARTF gender policy is ad hoc in that it greatly relies on the experience of the World Bank's task managers assigned to projects' (Scanteam March 2005:43). The programs that do have a gender dimension are the microfinance program which mainly benefit women and the NSP program which provides a voice to women through the Community Development Councils (CDCs).

National Solidarity Program (NSP)

The objectives of the NSP are twofold: to assist in the construction and development of rural communities and to strengthen community level governance (Scanteam March 2005). Formal evaluations, its positive reputation among informed Afghans, as well as continuous expansion suggests that the program has performed well. Although as the Scanteam evaluation notes, overheads have been high; it has cost a dollar to deliver a dollar. By the end of 2004, more than 4200 Community Development Councils in 32 provinces had received

block grants. USD 101 million had been committed and USD 59 million had been disbursed (Scanteam March 2005: 31). The program is managed by the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development (MRRD), which is considered by donors to be the best performing of the Afghan Ministries. Implementation is carried out in collaboration with national and international non-governmental agencies.

The building block of the participatory approach of the program has been the establishment of CDCs. The CDCs are seen to have been a success both in terms of mobilization of communities, in linking up communities with the government, but also in terms of participation of women in the committees (Scanteam March 2005). According to a recent review of NSP 'most female CDCs reported satisfaction with their role in defining the CDPs (community development plans) and priorities to be financed by block grants.' Women also appreciated the space for participation given to them during the mobilization process that preceded the establishment of formal CDCs (Scanteam May 2005:14). Yet, women expressed a desire to play a more active role in decision-making about the allocation of block grants and management of the grants. Currently the 10% of the block grant targeted at women is not utilized (Scanteam May 2005, Schanke et al 2005). In all the communities covered by the review, it was found that men managed and controlled the block grants. Women saw a more active role for themselves as a way of building their own capacities and to increase their freedom of movement.

The Scanteam review points out that a substantial review of gender policies within NSP is lacking, no systematic research has been carried out on the role of female and male CDCs, and the program still lacks gender guidelines and indicators. The lack of systematic work on gender is explained by Scanteam as resulting from a lack of capacity in the MRRD.

Lateral Entry Program (LEP)

In the Berlin declaration, Afghanistan made a commitment towards promoting recruitment of women and guaranteeing equal opportunities for women in the civil service. The Lateral Entry Program is implemented by the Independent Administrative Reform and Civil Service Commission (IARCSC) and was approved in December 2004. The IARCSC, foreseen in the Bonn Agreement and set up by presidential decree in May 2002, is the lead body within the government mandated to coordinate the public administration reform process. The objectives of the program are to (i) provide capacity to ministries to modernize the public administration in Ministries where the Priority Reform and Reconstruction process (PRR) has lagged behind; (ii) to facilitate reform within the civil service in ministries and agencies that are currently not part of the PRR process; and (iii) to carry out training programs as part of the reform process. The training program includes training in basic skills of management within the civil service, but does not have a gender component. The Commission stresses the need to be consistent and to follow up initiatives for reform and to guide staff carefully through change processes.

IARCSC attaches great importance to the principle of merit within the civil service in order to overcome favoritism and political appointments. From the Commission point of view it is not evident how affirmative action could be reconciled with the principle of merit. There is also a concern about affirmative action being a hindrance to recruitment of competent people. The lack of competent people is seen to be the real bottleneck for capacity-building in the Ministries. A major obstacle to recruitment of people is the existing salary structure within the Ministries which does not allow for salaries to be competitive with those offered by the United Nations and international non-governmental organizations. The result is problems in recruiting competent people as well as loss of competent people to international agencies after they have received training.

At present UNDP is carrying out a study on 'women's advancement and equal opportunity' in the civil service. The Commission will await the result of the study before any recommendations are made with respect to gender issues in the civil service. The rationale for increasing the number of women in the civil service was the loss of civil service jobs to men during the Taliban-regime and the notion of creating a civil service that fully reflects Afghan society and that provides every group with equal-opportunity access to employment.

Jointly with UNDP, IARCSC is implementing an Internship Program for a small group of outstanding graduate and post graduate-level students. The Program offers 24 young graduates the opportunity to acquire direct exposure to the work of Technical Ministries of the Afghan Government, relevant to their field of study. Following a broad advertisement of the Program at Universities and through the media and local television, 16 female and 8 male interns were selected in a joint process between the IARCSC and UNDP.²³

Water and sanitation

The Rural Water and Sanitation Program is implemented by the MRRD. The program has four components: supply of hardware, hygiene, sanitation and operational maintenance. For the hygiene and sanitation component reaching out to women is seen to be crucial to the success of the program. Only 13% of the Afghan population has access to safe drinking water, hence water and sanitation is a major challenge in Afghanistan. As 'women are managing the whole family', hygiene and sanitation is seen to be within the traditional sphere of women's activities. Employment of female staff is considered essential in order to reach women, and the agency sees a clear need to recruit more women staff, in addition to the very limited number of female staff who is employed at present. For the purpose of achieving gender sensitivity within the organization, the agency has asked for a gender advisor to guide them in their work and to examine available models. The program also plans to work with the Ministry of Education, The Ministry of Women's Affairs, the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Haj on issues of hygiene and sanitation. Achievement of quality standards is seen to be a priority in a sector which has been dominated by quantitative objectives.

²³ www.undp.org.af

A fund to benefit women?

At the Berlin conference it was suggested that a program targeting women should be designed and implemented through ARTF. The Canadian International Development Agency, CIDA, was asked to work on the development of a national plan for gender which could be funded under the investment window of ARTF. The idea was that the plan should cover four areas:

- primary education
- maternal health
- financial empowerment
- access to justice and legal aid.

For a variety of internal organizational reasons this work has not taken off within CIDA. Moreover, concerns have been expressed from other donors about the future ownership of a program designed by a donor agency. Hence, donors have not been able to agree between themselves about how to proceed with the program.

2.3.2 The police project

This project coordinates closely with the lead country for the police sector in Afghanistan, Germany. The project reports to the Directorate of Police in Oslo and to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The project is set up independently of the Law and Order Trust Fund for Afghanistan (LOTFA) which is an UNDP managed fund for police remuneration, procurement, maintenance and operations of non-lethal equipment, rehabilitation of police facilities, institutional development and, interestingly, gender sensitization of the police force.²⁴

The Norwegian Police Project composes of three components:

- trainers at the Police Academy in Kabul
- advisors to the Provincial Reconstruction Team in Mazar
- advisors to the narcotics police.

The goal of promoting women within the police force is seen by staff as possibly the main reason why Norway became involved in the police sector. There are two components of this project that are particularly relevant for achieving this objective:

- Training of higher ranking officers within the Afghan police in management, human rights and gender issues at the Police Academy in Kabul.²⁵ The idea is to raise the awareness among police officers on gender issues.

²⁴ Transitional Islamic State of Afghanistan and United Nations Development Programme: Support to Law and Order in Afghanistan, Phase II. 1383 Annual Report.

²⁵ Transitional Islamic State of Afghanistan and United Nations Development Programme: Project Document. Support to Law and Order in Afghanistan, Phase II.

- Efforts to train women who are already part of the police force. Over the last few months a needs assessment was carried out through a residential meeting of the relevant police officers. Potential areas for training include the use of computers, examination of witnesses and reporting. Recently 38 police women participated in a one week course.

The number of women in the Afghan police is between 164 and 180, or 0.3% of the total force, according to two different counts.²⁶ Most of them are located in Kabul. They were recruited under different regimes and their length of stay in the police varies between one and 30 years. According to a recent survey, women police officers perform duties that are very different to those of men. They are most often found in an assistant role to men, or they perform clerical and menial functions. Apart from body searches and interviewing women when necessary, their first hand knowledge of police work outside of the police buildings is limited. Yet, they have received the same training as men and they receive the same salaries.

Recruitment of women into the police force is seen as a challenge because jobs in the police are not considered attractive by most Afghan families and women who join often have family members who also work in the police force. For the purpose of facilitating recruitment of women, the Germans have built a residential building for female students. Recruitment is the responsibility of the Ministry of the Interior (MoI). According to the gender advisor to the project, a well planned, multi-faceted strategy is needed to achieve the recruitment targets. Even if recruitment is a success, the real challenge is to change the role of women in the police force, from support functions to operational police work.

Promoting women in the police may be seen as a particularly challenging task and hence illustrative of the constraints that other programs may come up against. Some of the lessons that can be learned from the program are:

- The need to plan programs carefully based on adequate knowledge of the ground situation. Due to the lack of reliable data in Afghanistan collection of new data is necessary most of the time.
- To set clear objectives and to establish adequate monitoring systems.
- To ensure political support and support from senior officials who can provide direction, assign responsibility for achievement and provide legitimacy.
- The preferred approach of gender advisors is often awareness raising and training. If organizational policies and procedures remain the same, this approach is not sufficient.
- There is a need to sensitise donor agency staff and technical experts on gender.
- Effective work on gender requires not only an understanding of gender issues, but also of the technical issues at hand. Gender specialists are often generalists who may find it difficult to communicate with technical staff. Having the same technical background facilitates effective communication.

²⁶ Tonita Murray, Gender Advisor, Ministry of Interior Affairs: Report on the status of women in the Afghan National Police, April 2005.

One informant suggested that although staff tend to be resistant to change and the first line of response tends to be to point out all the obstacles to change ‘there appears to be no active resistance in the MoI or ANP²⁷ to the notion of gender equality in policing....Paternalist and traditional attitudes exist, but these are not necessarily hostile to the notion that women in society need to have female representation in the police to ensure that their interests are served’. These observations support the idea that if resources are allocated and professional staff hired, there is scope to work on gender issues.

2.4 Delivery through non-governmental organizations

2.4.1 Norwegian Church Aid (NCA)

The Norwegian Church Aid became involved with Afghan refugees in 1979 and continued this work through the 1980s, while starting cross border operations out of Peshawar from the mid 1980s.²⁸ In 1996 NCA set up an office in Kabul and in 2002 the headquarters for NCA’s operations in Afghanistan shifted to the capital where NCA currently has four expatriate staff. Since 2001 the funding portfolio has been repositioned from relief to rehabilitation and development. In 2001 NCA entered into a framework agreement with Norad. NCA has 12 partner organizations that are operational in a number of sectors and districts in the south-eastern and central regions. The priority areas of NCA at the national level are advocacy, human rights, gender, peace building, water and support to government institutions.

Budget	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
Norad (framework agreement)	1 868 000	2 188 000	9 749 000	10 477 000	10 233 000
Transitional assistance	0	7 097 000	12 000 000	2 550 000	8 600 000
Humanitarian relief	12 850 000	33 786 000	11 102 000	10 545 000	4 498 000
Total	14 718 000	43 071 000	32 851 000	23 572 000	23 331 000

All figures are in NOK.²⁹

²⁷ ANP is the Afghan National Police Force.

²⁸ The information in this paragraph is based on Are Knudsen (2005): Norad review Afghanistan: Final report. Christian Michelsen Institute.

²⁹ All figures are from Knudsen 2005.

NCA is working to mainstream gender within its projects and programs. Ensuring participation by women and sensitivity to the needs of women are important aspects of all projects. A gender programme officer has been appointed with special responsibility for focusing on gender issues.

NCA and its partners are involved in the following activities specifically designed to improve the situation of women: advocacy for women's rights, establishment of shuras for women, water and health projects, literacy projects, psycho-social and income generating projects for war widows, veterinary training for women, education of women 'barefoot' engineers in the use of solar energy sources, and in new project areas baseline data on the situation of women is collected.

NCA has conducted comprehensive training programmes on gender issues for employees and partners. In 2004 training was conducted in the use of the 'Gender and Empowerment Assessment Manual' for 35 NCA and partner staff. This manual has also been translated into Dari. The manual was inspired by NORAD's Handbook on 'Gender and Empowerment Assessment' (2000) and produced in a joint effort between NCA and the Norwegian People's Aid in 2001. NCA seems to have gained acceptance for the importance of working on gender from its male staff. Its male staff is also said to be relatively gender sensitive.

NCA is well networked on gender issues as a member of the Afghan Women's Network (AWN) and the gender working group of the coordinating body for NGOs, ACBAR.

Two of NCA's partners are women's organizations; they employ mainly women staff and the target group is women; one is the Afghan Women's Skill Development Centre (AWSDC) and the other is the Hambistigi Foundation. AWSDC works with integrated income generation and political mobilization projects for women in remote areas. AWSDC also started the first shelter for women in Afghanistan against the advice of many who believed it to be too risky. The shelter may be an example of how bold initiatives may work if they are carefully planned. The Hambistigi Foundation works with women in remote areas and the program receives support from NCA's capacity development program funded by Norad. NCA is also considering new partnerships with other women's organizations. NCA is working to strengthen its gender focus in its integrated rural development program. NCA recognizes that it needs to take a more focused, structured and systematic approach to its work on gender. There is ongoing work in the organization to raise awareness on gender issues through internal discussions so as to facilitate changes in the organizational culture. NCA is also planning to recruit women to work on income generating projects and to raise the percentage of women in leadership positions in the organization. According to NCA staff the focus on gender is a consequence of experience in the field and a perceived need to address women's issues.

According to NCA staff they maintain a good dialogue with the Embassy, and gender issues are raised and discussed as part of the dialogue. NCA's portfolio also includes projects with direct support from the Embassy for the benefit of women.

2.4.1 NCA partner: Afghan Women's Skill Development Centre (AWSDC)

AWSDC is one of two women partner organizations working with NCA. AWSDC says about their collaboration with NCA that 'We work very honestly and closely with them' and 'They respect us a lot.' In addition to its financial support, NCA has provided financial and management training which the organization has found very useful. AWSDC appreciates the close dialogue that is taking place between the organization and NCA, in particular through field visits to monitor projects. According to AWSDC, close contact facilitates a learning process between the organizations. However, most of all AWSDC stresses the importance of the moral support that NCA has provided enabling them to go ahead with new initiatives, when faced with challenges that most people would deem too risky or too dangerous. Such support enabled the organization to go ahead with innovative projects, such as the shelter program for women run in close collaboration with the MoWA. AWSDC is also a member of the newly established Commission on Shelter that has members both from the government and civil society organizations.

AWSDC emphasizes the importance of appropriate entry points and intervention methodologies when working to improve the situation of women in Afghanistan. AWSDC argues that if the project objectives are explained to community leaders, the project design is integrated, for example through an integration of income generation projects with political participation or peace, and interventions are designed for the long term, discriminatory traditions can be overcome.

2.4.2 Norwegian Afghanistan Committee (NAC)

NAC has a long history of operations in Afghanistan and opened its first office in Peshawar, Pakistan, in 1983, from where it conducted field operations in Afghanistan. From 1986 NAC has had a presence in the Province of Ghazni in Afghanistan. Currently NAC runs programs in the East of Afghanistan out of its Kabul office. Total permanent staff in Afghanistan is 65 and total project staff, including staff in Pakistan, is 288. NAC defines itself as a solidarity organization and was set up in Oslo to advocate on behalf of the Afghan people after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979. NAC has signed a framework agreement with Norad which secures long-term funding for its operations until 2007. Other significant Norwegian funders are the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Forum for Women and Development (FOKUS).

	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
Norad (frame work)	783 000	6 272 000	8 042 000	8 342 000	7 000 000
Transitional Assistance (MFA)	0	0	4 850 000	4 850 000	7 977 000

Humanitarian Relief (MFA)	5 912 000	12 851 000	2 819 000	0	0
Total	6 695 000	19 123 000	15 711 000	13 192 000	14 977 000

All figures are in NOK³⁰

NAC works in the environment, health, education and construction sectors. In all the four sectors women are direct beneficiaries of the interventions. In the health sector NAC runs a number of hospitals, clinics and health centers, in addition to its mobile units. Some of the clinics are mother and child clinics. Its education program has focused on female enrollment and on teacher training. Within the education sector NAC has made a decision to focus on higher education because most agencies focus on primary education. The teacher training program concentrates on general science, social science, class room management, teaching methodology and pedagogy.³¹ The environmental program has a 'fostermum' project through which women generate income by growing trees in nurseries. In addition to its own program, NAC receives funding through FOKUS for the Medical Institute of Jalalabad which recruits and trains mid-wives and nurses from remote areas in Afghanistan.

Promotion of female participation is a policy objective of NAC. Women should be consulted in needs assessments and in the planning of program and the employment of women staff should be encouraged. NAC employed a gender advisor for a few months, but found that this was not a cost effective way of improving its gender focus given the relatively small scale of its operations. NAC has not adopted any specific tools to work on gender and gender has not been built into the monitoring and evaluation system of NAC. This situation means that despite efforts to work on gender issues, in practice, it has not been an easy task to achieve. One of the explanations that were offered by staff was that there is a need to start by sensitizing and educating male staff in the office as male staff has set ways of working. More gender awareness work with male dominated departments, such as the construction department, was also seen to be important, for example to ensure that water supply points are located in places that are suitable for women. Overall, the assessment of the expatriate staff is that it is easier to work with women partner organizations on gender issues.

The dialogue with the Embassy is good, but gender issues do not receive any special attention.

2.4.3 Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN)

AKDN divides its program into three components: economic, social and cultural. The components are built on different organizational models, including funds, foundations and trusts. The total budget for the Aga Khan Foundation in Afghanistan for 2004 was US\$ 17

³⁰ All figures are from Knudsen 2005.

³¹ Norwegian Afghanistan Committee Annual Report 2004, draft.

million.³² For 2005 the Aga Khan Foundation's livelihood support program received NOK 8 million in support from Norway. The livelihood support program takes an integrated approach to development. It aims to strengthen community level institutions, increase food security and incomes and improve access to services. Overcoming dependence on a booming poppy economy is a key objective.

One of AKDN's principles of operation is to 'Encourage the full participation of women in all activities.' According to staff, Aga Khan's work has benefited women in particular in the water and sanitation, hygiene and health sectors. As it moves into more long term development projects, the agency has started a process of examining gender issues more systematically aimed at the formulation of a gender policy and the development of appropriate tools for implementing the new policy in all its programs. As staff sees it, several steps needs to be taken to achieve results in this area:

- There is a need to legitimize the work with women within the organization as well as in communities.
- More women partner organizations should be selected.
- Extra resources and personnel must be allocated. The organization does for example plan to employ a gender specialist. Resources need to be allocated for security, lodging and transport for female field staff.
- There is a need to develop baselines and systems for monitoring with localized indicators.
- An idea that was floated was to add a budget line for capacity building on gender in each program.
- The work should be low key.
- The commitment needs to be long-term.

The dialogue with the Embassy is seen to be good, but they have not systematically articulated gender issues. According to staff, more support from the Embassy in this area would be appreciated.

2.5 Targeting participation and rights

Political participation

The community development councils of the NSP program and the lateral entry program are both potentially important programs for increasing the participation of women, at the community level and in the civil service respectively. A significant impact on women's participation has been recognized as a key aspect of the NSP program. With respect to the lateral entry program, a potential conflict with the principle of merit has been raised.

³² Aga Khan Development Network. Afghanistan. Strategies and Programmes. Undated.

A number of donors are carrying out programs to promote political participation of women. These programs are mostly focused on increasing women's awareness of the new Afghan political system, in particular to inform people about the electoral process, and on strengthening the capacity of female political leaders through a number of training programs on issues ranging from finance to the compatibility of Islamic law with international human rights law.

Economic participation

Women work predominantly in the informal sector, which account for some 80 to 90 percent of the total economy.³³ Through its support for ARTF Norway is not directly involved in support for income generation. However, NGOs supported by Norway are involved in income-generation activities. As suggested in the above, many NGOs advocate an integrated approach for example through projects where income generation is combined with awareness programs and programs to encourage political participation. Some argued that women may fail to take control of their own income unless projects have an awareness raising component. For example in traditional industries such as carpet weaving, women do the weaving, but men control the income. Hence, income generating projects could become an extra burden on women, unless interventions are designed to overcome this problem.

Human rights

Norway has contributed in this area through its support for the Independent Afghan Human Rights Commission where funding was channeled through UNDP. The Commission worked hard to secure the rights of women in the current constitution. Although the Constitution does not go as far as the Commission had suggested in terms of explicitly guaranteeing the equal rights of women, the Constitution adopted a provision stating that citizens, man or woman, have equal rights before the law.³⁴

Women's rights and human rights are seen as intrinsically linked by rights activists in Afghanistan and the rights of women are central to the work of the Commission. Severe human rights violations are rooted in traditional practices that discriminate against women. Examples are forced marriages, childhood marriages, the use of women as payment in various transactions, for example settlement of debts, denial of access to education and health care, domestic violence etc.

³³ Advisory Group on Gender. Background note for the 2005 Afghanistan development Forum.

³⁴ Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission: Annual report, June 2003-June 2004.

3 Approaches to working on gender equality: mainstreaming versus targeting

3.1 The role of donors

After the fall of the Taliban, the international community identified gender equality as a priority and mainstreaming as the strategy for achieving it. The prevailing view among donors is that mainstreaming is not happening. Overall very limited resources have been allocated for work on gender equality issues. The constituencies driving the gender equality agenda, both at home and in Afghanistan are seen to be weak or absent altogether.

Implicit in the work of many donors is the notion that improvements in the security situation and in the overall situation in Afghanistan will benefit women. For donors and government alike, security is the overriding concern, without which other programs can not go ahead. Similarly, an increase in government and NGO capacity for service delivery, particularly in the health and education sector has benefited women. Women's issues are also addressed from a human rights point of view through support for NGOs.

There is room for improvement with regard to donor coordination. Donors agree that there is a need for clearer objectives and a more comprehensive approach to overcome the current situation. Little cooperation results in overlaps and gaps, for example several donors have conducted conferences on elections. The proliferation of tailoring training in rural areas is seen as another result of a lack of coordination.

Many Afghans find that donors lack an adequate conceptual understanding of gender issues in Afghanistan, in addition to a lack of understanding of the general Afghan context. There are many reasons that explain why 'the situation at the moment is dismal' as it was put by a representative from a donor agency. Missions in Afghanistan are new. Most people have very little experience from Afghanistan. Many missions have limited staff and are in the process of increasing the number of staff. There is a large turn-over among mission staff

as staff only holds positions for a short period of time. Staff is offered frequent leave to compensate for being posted to Kabul. Due to the prevailing security situation, staff also faces restrictions on movements around Kabul and the country, something which limits their access to information. The international military presence is noticeable in and around Kabul and is an everyday reminder of the fragile security situation.

3.2 Mainstreaming: the government as a delivery channel

The government of Afghanistan has made a commitment to gender mainstreaming, most clearly stated in the Berlin declaration, in which the Government commits itself to equal opportunity in the civil service and to mainstreaming of gender in all sectors, programs and projects.

Donors have taken different approaches to gender and there are many views as to the best way in which gender sensitive policies could be promoted within governmental institutions:

1. Gender indicators for tracking performance. At the moment there is no way of establishing how programs implemented by the government have benefited women. It has therefore been argued that indicators for tracking gender performance should be developed at the program level.
2. GTZ is starting a project on gender sensitive budgeting within the Ministry of Finance. Critics are asking whether this is the right approach and whether Afghanistan is ready for gender budgeting as there are so many other priorities for capacity-building within the Ministry.
3. Some donors have introduced gender advisors. For example Canadian CIDA has appointed a gender advisor to the Ministry of Interior. Overall very little resources have been set aside for work on gender issues in line ministries.
4. A number of donors provide financial and technical support to MoWA and donors have engaged closely with the Ministry, which again engages with line ministries.

Overall donors have not taken on board the implications for gender equality of working through the ARTF. There is no joint strategy for how to work on gender issues through ARTF and donors are exploring a number of approaches for working with government ministries, without having agreed on a common framework.

3.3 Civil society: targeting women and advocating for change

Norway does not have a program for direct funding to Afghan civil society organizations.

Afghan civil society is regarded by donors as weak, with some capacity for service delivery, but little capacity for advocacy. Overall, the strength of NGOs is seen to be their capacity to deliver services to underserved and insecure areas that are beyond the reach of the

government. Choosing the correct entry strategy and intervention methodology is seen as crucial for achieving success. Interventions need to be grounded in the communities and explained to gatekeepers and local leaders. If such procedures are handled effectively, organizations report that results can be achieved. The weaknesses of civil society organizations are seen as corruption and inefficiency, low quality of work and lack of sustainability due to short term funding frameworks. The government may also be ambivalent in terms of donor support for civil society organizations as the two channels compete for funding.

Many fieldworkers argued that the importance of having women staff can not be underestimated. Women staff is needed to approach and interact with Afghan women because of the cultural constraints inherent in male-female interaction. It is also argued that Afghan women have an intuitive understanding of women's issues that men lack. On the other hand, women stress the need to work with and to affect change in men, without such change traditional patterns of interaction are not going to change.

At present advocacy work is issue based and mobilization happens in an ad hoc manner. Recent issues have been self-mutilation in Herat, kidnapping, sacking of women in the police force etc. Advocacy is new to many women's organizations who have limited experience and lack a strategic approach to advocacy. Women's organizations contrast the current situation with the period following the fall of the Taliban, which witnessed strong, sustained mobilization of women's groups for the purpose of influencing the transitional process and in particular the constitution-making process. Currently, in pursuit of donor funding, women's organizations have become involved in project administration at the expense of more strategic, policy oriented work.

Afghan women's organizations claim that they receive less funding than organizations run by men and that their pay is considerably lower. Overall the funding structure is not seen to be conducive to building the capacity to work long term and to plan strategically because grants are small and provided for short time periods. There is also seen to be a lack of dialogue between civil society organizations and donors on how to strengthen women's organizations. However, some donors, for example Danida, who have provided funding for small organizations and small projects have decided to scale up their work because they have achieved impact and organizations have grown successfully as a result of donor support.

With a more long-term funding structure, civil society organizations could potentially be drivers for change by advocating for gender equality and keeping the government accountable to the Constitution. Currently the line between the political and civil society sector is not sharply drawn. Organizations involved with women in politics stress the need for women in politics to demonstrate a particular responsibility for gender equality issues. Because donors are heavily involved in both sectors, some argue that they too have a responsibility for facilitating collaboration between the two sectors to promote the formation of a vocal female constituency, which could keep the Government accountable on gender equality issues.

3.4 Improving civil society effectiveness

3.4.1 Networking

Compared to networks in Pakistan, India and Bangladesh women's networks are weak in Afghanistan. Many of the women's organizations themselves blame the fact they have to run after small project grants. 'Women are now busy with projects. We need a new approach.'

Representatives of women's organizations say that collaboration was better before the fall of Taliban when most of them were based in Peshawar. At the same time, many informants, both Afghans and representatives of the international community, maintained that the most effective way of having an impact on the situation of women, is to work through women's organizations. These organizations can either deliver specifically to women or they can advocate for women's rights and women's empowerment with the government.

Views differ on how to describe the relationship between civil society organizations and the government as some claim that the relationship is close and collaboration is very good, while others are more critical and suggest that MoWA wants to control civil society organizations. Collaboration between for example the Afghan Women's Network (AWN) and MoWA has been formalized through a contract whereby AWN supports MoWA in its capacity building efforts. Because of its own limited capacity, MoWA has drawn heavily on the competence of AWN for its training programs.

3.4.2 Capacity building

Capacity is an issue which pervades every aspect of every development discussion in Afghanistan. Since NGOs have operated throughout the conflict, their capacity is often somewhat better than that of the government and the government has in many instances drawn on skills and personnel from the NGO sector. From the government side it was pointed out that capacity is critical for ownership of development programs. Without the capacity to develop such programs, ownership is not possible. Impressive achievements have also been made as a result of a focused approach to capacity building. The evaluation of ARTF, for example, pointed out that the Ministry of Finance had come a long way in developing systems for financial accountability (Scanteam March 2005).

The comparatively low capacity of women is often put forward as an argument for not recruiting, nominating or involving women. Afghan women themselves claim that men are in equal need of capacity building and that the argument is an excuse for not making a more concerted effort to increase the participation by women. 'They say women do not have the capacity, but men also do not have the capacity'. Politics is often seen as an area in which

women have lower skills than men. Yet, women who are involved argue that the problem is not limited to women, but is a generic one. They see education and training of women politicians and future Parliamentarians in politics, speech making, decision-making, finance etc. as critical if women are to achieve influence in these areas.

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Annex 1: List of interviewees

Ms. Amina Afzali	Minister	Ministry of Youth
Ms. Suraya Ahmadyar	Human Rights Commissioner	Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission
Ms. Mari Akrami	Director	Afghan Women's Skills Development Center
Ms. Hanghama Anwari	Human Rights Commissioner	Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission
Ms. Meryem Aslan	Program Director	UNIFEM
Dr. Nipa Banerjee	Counselor Development /Head of Aid	Embassy of Canada
Ms. Kaja Borchgrevink	Program Grant Officer	Aga Khan Foundation
Dr. Nematullah Bizhan	Deputy Minister	Ministry of Youth Affairs
Mr. Carsten Hveem Carlsen	Councillor	Royal Norwegian Embassy
Mr. Walter Dederichs	Head of German Police Project Office	German Project for Support of the Police in Afghanistan
Mr. Faridoon Daudzai	Program Manager	Norwegian Church Aid
Mr. Fahim Hakim	Deputy Chair	Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission
Dr. Wali A. Hamidzada	Director, Civil Service Training and Development	Independent Administrative Reform and Civil Service Commission
Mr. Arne Hammersmark	Chief of Police	Norwegian Project for Support of the Police in Afghanistan
Ms. Najia Haneefi	Project Coordinator	Friedrich Ebert Stiftung
Ms. Shinkai Karokhail	Director	Afghan Women's Educational Centre (AWEC)
Ms. Monika Klinger	Senior Advisor on Rule of Law	German Technical Cooperation
Ms. Corey Levine	Gender Advisor	United Nations Assistance Mission to Afghanistan
Ms. Horia Mosadiq	Deputy Director	Human Rights Research and Advocacy Consortium

Ms. Tonita Murray	Gender Advisor	Ministry of Interior (CIDA)
Eng. Wahid Nabiyar	Director for WATSAN	Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development
Mr. Hamidullah Natiq	Senior Researcher	Independent
Ms. Mariana Noteboom	Deputy Head of Mission	Royal Netherlands Embassy
Ms. Marianne Olesen	First Secretary	Office of the Representative of Denmark to Afghanistan
Ms. Suraya Parluka	Director	Afghan Women's Union
Ms. Sara Petersson	Acting Country Director	Norwegian Afghanistan Committee
Ms. Malika Qahni	Director	Educational Centre for Women
Ms. Roya Rahmani	Project Coordinator	Women's Rights in Afghanistan Fund
Ms. Elisabeth Rousset	Deputy Head of Section - Operation	European Commission
Mr. Sachin Sachdeva	Deputy National Program Coordinator	Aga Khan Foundation
Mr. Raziq Samadi	First Deputy Minister	Ministry of Finance
Ms. Nina Schjelderup	First Secretary, Development Cooperation	Royal Norwegian Embassy
Eng. Aziz Rafiee	Director	Afghan Civil Society Forum
Ms. Larisa Taheri	Development Budget Assistant and Gender Focal Point	Ministry of Finance
Ms. Heba Tarzi	Office Manager	Afghan Women's Network
Ms. Fulya Vekiloglu	Program Manager, Institutional Capacity Building Program	MOWA (UNDP)
Ms. Rachel Wareham	Gender Advisor	German Technical Cooperation (GTZ)
Mohd. Ehsan Zia	Deputy Minister	Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development