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AFGHANISTAN

RESEARCH REPORT

ENGAGING MEN IN WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT AND RIGHTS ACHIEVEMENT: AN EXPLORATIVE STUDY

APRIL 2014

This report was produced for review by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). It was prepared under contract with Checchi and Company Consulting, Inc. for USAID's Afghanistan "Services under Program and Project Offices for Results Tracking Phase II" (SUPPORT II) project.

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ACRONYMS

| | |
|-------|--|
| AWDP | Afghanistan Workforce Development Program |
| AWN | Afghan Women's Network |
| CBDR | Community-Based Dispute Resolution |
| GAD | Gender and Development |
| ICT | Information and Communications Technology |
| ISAF | International Security Assistance Force |
| MEP | Men's Engagement Program |
| MoI | Ministry of the Interior |
| MoPH | Ministry of Public Health |
| MoWA | Ministry of Women's Affairs |
| NGO | Non-Governmental Organization |
| RLS-I | Rule of Law and Stabilization Program - Informal component |
| CSO | Civil Society Organization |
| SOW | Statement of Work |
| ToR | Terms of Reference |
| WEP | Women's Empowerment Program |
| WID | Women in Development |

GLOSSARY

| | |
|-----------|---|
| Baad | The practice of compensating for a murder (or even an accidental killing) by giving either one or two never-married girls in marriage from the killer's family to the victim's family |
| Enqilab | Revolution; used to refer to the mujahedeen uprising against the Soviet Union's occupation of Afghanistan |
| Jirga | Meeting held to resolve disputes. It has an ad-hoc membership and formation depending on the nature of the dispute. |
| Malik | Village representative to the state or a community leader |
| Nazdana | Childish or spoiled |
| Spingaary | Whitebeard; used to refer to an elder male who is responsible for local governance and generally resolves disputes among community members |
| Spinsaary | White-hair; used to refer to an older woman |
| Shura | Council or group of people, usually a fixed body that meets on a regular basis to discuss issues of relevance to the community, it may have non-state or state governance responsibilities. |
| Waliswal | District governor |
| Waliswali | District (literal); used to refer to the district center and area where state administrative and governance functions take place |
| Zena | Any form of sexual activity outside of marriage, including adultery and sex between unmarried people. Illegal in Afghanistan |

I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. BACKGROUND

Since at least the mid-1990s, scholars and practitioners have recognized the importance of including men as advocates, in target groups, and as beneficiaries of initiatives to empower women and achieve women's rights. The development of the GAD (Gender and Development) approach in the late 1980s and early 1990s stressed the importance of addressing power dynamics between men and women and asserted that both men and women have gendered roles, responsibilities, needs, and interests.

However, large scale development practice has often lagged behind such initiatives, and nowhere more so than in Afghanistan. In both government and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Afghanistan, women's needs and interests and gender issues have been segregated in gender offices and gender advisers, rather than being mainstreamed throughout institutions and programs. Similarly, the concept of gender itself is largely misunderstood in the Afghan context to mean women's rights, allowing for little conceptualization of gendered power dynamics and the social construction of women's and men's roles and responsibilities, as well as the value placed on them. This approach by its very nature leaves little room for men's engagement in women's empowerment and women's rights initiatives.

This study aims to address the gap in understanding men's potential to contribute to gender equality in the Afghan context. In doing so, it identifies ways in which men are already contributing to struggles to secure women's rights and engaging with initiatives to empower women outside of the private realm of the household. It has conducted primary data collection for four case studies: one looking at men's engagement through activism and advocacy initiatives; two examining men's engagement with projects that have a women's empowerment and rights achievement objective; and lastly one considering gender relations more broadly in an urban labor market sector.

2. FINDINGS

This study has been highly explorative in nature and very short in terms of timeframe. The study was conducted in two months. Even so, based on the analyses of data collected from 14 focus group discussions, 39 semi-structured interviews, and a selection of more informal conversations, it suggests the following tentative findings:

1. Men in Afghanistan are already engaged in and supporting women's empowerment and rights achievement. This includes men in families that support female family members' education, careers, and personal ambitions; men in the workplace treating their female colleagues as equals and contributing to the women's rights and empowerment goals of programs on which they work; male elders defending women's rights in their communities; and men deliberately advocating for changes to legislation in support of women's rights.

All these represent spaces for engagement that can be built upon and expanded.

2. Engaging men and recognizing that men's role and place in society are gendered allows for a shift away from understanding gender as being only relevant to women, and toward the understanding that both men and women are gendered beings. This shift in focus and understanding can facilitate projects and programs becoming truly gender mainstreamed, rather than just adding a component for women to projects and programs designed for men.
3. Projects do not need to be specifically, or only, working on women's rights or women's empowerment to engage men in women's empowerment and rights achievement.
4. A gender mainstreaming approach to any program can incorporate men's engagement in women's empowerment and women's rights. To do this, the *design* process of a program needs to incorporate women's needs, interests, and contributions, as well as how men can be motivated and enabled to contribute to their realization.
5. Programming to encourage men's engagement in women's empowerment and rights achievement is a new area in Afghanistan. Like all good programming, it should be evidence-based.
6. Knowledge is the most important factor motivating men to engage in women's empowerment and rights achievement. This may be knowledge of women's struggles and suffering; knowledge of alternative gender systems as gained through exposure to other countries, literature, and/or the media; knowledge of women's rights in the *Sharia* and evidence of women's capabilities; and the benefits of women's empowerment to society, individual communities, or businesses.
7. Due to the strict sex-segregation of social space outside of the family in Afghanistan, when men and women do work together, unfounded accusations of sexual impropriety are not uncommon and a significant hindrance.
8. Female women's rights activists are in general positive about the idea of more men becoming involved in advocacy around women's rights.
9. However, there is a significant lack of trust, coming from civil society female women's rights activists, of men who are becoming engaged and wish to become engaged in civil-society efforts focused on women's rights. This limits the ability to enhance men's and women's joint actions in support of women's rights.
10. Young male entrepreneurs working in Information and Communications Technology (ICT) are generally accepting of women working in the sector and keen to employ them when it makes good business sense.
11. Common assumptions held by both men and women about the capabilities of each sex are a significant hindrance to women's advancement in formal labor markets.
12. Through university and training courses, women are able to create their own networks and tap into existing male networks to increase employment opportunities in urban labor markets.

13. USAID programs, such as the Afghanistan Workforce Development Program (AWDP), can create such opportunities for women by setting targets and conditions for the trainings they fund.

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on these findings and the study team's collective knowledge of the subject matter, recommendations are made in the final chapter of this report. In particular, the recommendations advise USAID implementing partners and civil society organizations on ways to motivate male staff to engage in women's empowerment and rights achievement through programming and project implementation. Recommendations regarding how projects can encourage male beneficiaries and target groups to engage with women's rights and empowerment are made, as are recommendations in relation to men's engagement with women's economic empowerment through urban labor markets. The most important recommendations include:

1. Projects do not need to be specifically, or only, working on women's rights or women's empowerment to engage men in women's empowerment and rights achievement.
2. A gender mainstreaming approach to any program can incorporate men's engagement in women's empowerment and women's rights. To do this, the *design* process of a program needs to incorporate women's needs, interests, and contributions, as well as how men can be motivated and enabled to contribute to their realization.
3. Programming to encourage men's engagement in women's empowerment and rights achievement is a new area in Afghanistan. Like all good programming, it should be evidence-based.
4. Projects must allow sufficient time for research, reflection and adaptation. USAID should make it clear that this is an expected approach and that adapting projects and activities once implementation has begun is acceptable.
5. If donors and implementers really want to encourage men to support women's rights and empowerment, they must first demonstrate their own commitment to this by truly implementing gender mainstreaming.
6. Projects must be designed to take account of men's and women's needs and interests and contributions to program outcomes equally, rather than adding on activities for women as an afterthought.
7. Programming budgets should be spent roughly equally on activities for men and women.
8. Information about women's rights provided to encourage male community elders to engage should be delivered within an Islamic framework.
9. Knowledge should be related to the local reality, and men who are receiving knowledge about women's rights on programs must have the opportunity to implement what they are learning.

10. Particular efforts should be made to invite men to conferences and other events concerned with women's rights to overcome the idea that gender issues are only relevant to women.
11. Opportunities need to be presented for women to demonstrate their capabilities – be this through supported workplace placements or through the media to present discussions with women about their careers.
12. Male leaders of industry and business could be brought together at a 'high status' conference to discuss how best they can support women's advancement in the private sector.

As this has been an explorative study, suggestions are given about the direction of further research to deepen and broaden understanding and make better informed programming and policymaking decisions in this area of work, such as:

1. In-depth qualitative research should be conducted across different employment sectors to find innovative ways in which the hindrances presented by the strict norms of sex-segregation can be overcome.
2. A study incorporating analyses of both the civil service and the private labor market should be undertaken. It is stressed that enough time should be given to conduct rigorous in-depth qualitative research.
3. A further exploration of constructions of masculinity in Afghanistan is needed. This would need to be anthropological research conducted at the community level by experienced researchers familiar with using semi-structured to unstructured research techniques.

II. INTRODUCTION

1. RATIONALE FOR AND PURPOSE OF STUDY

Since at least the mid-1990s, scholars and practitioners have recognized the importance of including men as advocates, in target groups, and as beneficiaries of initiatives to empower women and achieve women's rights. The HIV/AIDS epidemic, in particular, made glaringly obvious the inherent weakness of empowerment approaches targeting only women.¹ At the same time, the conceptual shift from Women in Development (WID) to Gender and Development (GAD) approaches highlighted the limitations of efforts to incorporate women as beneficiaries of development initiatives if the power dynamics between different groups of men and women are not acknowledged and addressed.² Large-scale development practice has often lagged behind research and academia in incorporating a GAD approach and has instead frequently stuck with projects for women, or incorporated women's needs and interests as an afterthought to development and reconstruction programs and projects.³

This is perhaps true nowhere more so than in Afghanistan. In both governmental and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Afghanistan, women's needs and interests and gender issues have been segregated in gender offices, rather than being mainstreamed throughout institutions and programs. Similarly, the concept of gender itself is largely misunderstood in the Afghan context to mean women's rights, allowing for little conceptualization of gendered power dynamics and the social construction of women's and men's roles and responsibilities, and the value placed on them.⁴ This approach by its very nature leaves little room for men's engagement in women's empowerment and women's rights initiatives.

Despite these challenges, there are dedicated and committed Afghan men now working within gender offices and as gender advisers. Men are involved with advocacy initiatives and struggles for the legislative recognition of women's rights and the implementation of laws to uphold those rights. Examples of male community elders protecting women from violence and abuse can be found across Afghanistan.⁵ However, little has been done to understand men's roles, motivations, and challenges in contributing to women's empowerment and rights achievement

¹ Epslen, E (2006) *Engaging Men in Gender Equality: Positive Strategies and Approaches*. BRIDGE, IDS: Sussex

² Rathgeber, E. M. (1990) 'WID, WAD, GAD: Trends in Research and Practice' in *The Journal of Developing Areas*, vol 24 July.

³ USAID adopted several comprehensive and interlinked policies and strategies to reduce gender inequality and to enable girls and women to realize their rights, determine their life outcomes, influence decision-making and become change agents in households, communities, and societies (ADS CHAPTER 205).

⁴ For a discussion of gender mainstreaming and the misunderstandings of the concept of gender in Afghan Government Ministries see Larson (2008). For a discussion of gender mainstreaming in USAID programs in Afghanistan see the collection of Gender Assessments conducted by Checchi Consulting's SUPPORT project for USAID (2012-13). These statements regarding gender mainstreaming and the misunderstandings of the concept of gender are also based on the author's personal experience of working on a variety of programs and projects in the Afghan context.

⁵ For examples see, Smith, D. J. (2009) *A Case Study of Community Based Dispute Resolution Processes in Nangarhar Province*. Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit: Kabul and Smith, D. J. with S. Manalan (2009) *A Case Study of Community Based Dispute Resolution Processes in Bamian Province*. Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit: Kabul

in Afghanistan. Likewise, best practices in this field and lessons learned from where achievements have already been made in Afghanistan have not been documented or understood in order to make recommendations for future steps.⁶

This study aims to begin filling this gap in understanding and knowledge. In addition, it provides practical recommendations that will be useful for programs, projects, advocacy groups, and civil society organizations (CSOs) more broadly that wish to engage men in women's empowerment and rights achievements. Recommendations are presented to USAID in the following five areas, and aim to:

1. Encourage USAID implementing partners, the international donor community, and civil society organizations to motivate male staff to engage in women's empowerment and rights achievement through programming and project implementation;
2. Provide guidance to programs and projects on how to engage male beneficiaries and target groups to work toward greater levels of gender equity;
3. Encourage men to become more involved in advocating for women's rights achievement;
4. Elicit men's engagement with women's economic empowerment through urban labor markets; and
5. Direct future research to ensure that initiatives and programming directives are appropriate.

The study has taken a case study approach by conducting qualitative research across the following four case studies:

1. Case A: Advocacy – Engaging men in the struggle for women's rights;
2. Case B: Programming – Rule of Law Stabilization Program- Informal Component (RLS-I), which involved parallel programming with men and women to achieve women's rights and empowerment;
3. Case C: Programming – Women for Women International (WfW-I), which provides complementary programming to gain men's support for women's empowerment; and
4. Case D: The Information Communication Technology (ICT) Sector, which explored gender dynamics in urban labor markets and how men can support women's empowerment in this sector.

The primary data collection has been complemented by a review of relevant literature and global best practices in the field.⁷

⁶ One exception to this is Angarola, Steiner and Zimmerman (2013), whose paper, based on the conclusions of a round table discussion held in November 2012 by the United States Institute of Peace (USIP) on how best to engage men to support women's rights and empowerment in South Asia and the Middle East, outlines lessons learned and best practice techniques that could be adapted in the Afghan context. It therefore draws on expert opinion and experience from the field; it is not based on data collection and analyses.

⁷ Refer to Annex I and II, pgs 61-67.

2. CONCEPTUAL OVERVIEW AND KEY TERMS

Gender is at the heart of this study. The study views gender as essentially a description of relationships between men and women based on power differentials, whereby neither gender is either wholly powerful or powerless, but in which power is skewed in favor of men. Understanding the concept of power and how it operates within the social world is essential to understanding the analyses this report presents.

Empowerment finds its origins in the concept of power. Empowerment is widely assumed by governments, NGOs, and international agencies to be the most satisfactory way of bringing about improvements in women's lives and social development.⁸ It has become a buzzword within mainstream development discourses. Large-scale projects and programs are launched with the specific aim of the empowering the poor and/or women. There is a general consensus in the GAD literature that empowerment involves certain people acquiring more power over their lives; a process whereby people become aware of the power dynamics operating within their lives and develop the skills and capacities to gain control of their lives.⁹ Gaining self-confidence and overcoming internalized oppression are often recognized to be key processes of empowerment.¹⁰

Power and empowerment are not a zero-sum game in which, through the process of an individual or a group gaining power, another automatically loses power or becomes disadvantaged. It is particularly important to understand this when strategizing for the greater engagement of men in women's empowerment and rights achievement.

III. METHODOLOGY

This is the first study of its kind in Afghanistan examining men's engagement that involves collecting data from different geographic areas and social arenas. It has necessarily been loosely-structured and explorative in nature, while at the same time aiming to collect data from a variety of sources. Consequently, the methodological approach has been purely qualitative, allowing for the use of semi-structured, flexible research methods. The study has been reflexive to the data gathered, allowing for the adaptation and refinement of research tools accordingly. Many different research tools were used; they were selected depending on the different categories of respondents. Interview and focus group discussion (FGD) guides are provided in Annex V.

⁸ (Rozario, S. (1997) 'Development and Rural Women in South Asia: The Limits of Empowerment and Conscientization'. *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars*, 29: 45-53; Parpart, J. L. (2002) 'Lessons from the Field: Rethinking Empowerment, Gender and Development from a Post-Development Perspective', in K. Saunders (ed.) *Feminist Post-Development Thought: Rethinking Modernity, Post-Colonialism and Representation*. London and New York: Zed Books.

⁹ Batliwala, S (1994) 'The Meaning of Women's Empowerment: New Concepts from Action', in G. Sen, A. Germain and C. Lincoln (eds.) *Population Policies Reconsidered Health, Empowerment, and Rights*. Boston, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press; Kabeer, N. (1999) 'Resources Agency and Achievements: Reflections on the Measurement of Women's Empowerment', *Development and Change*, 30: 435 - 464; Oxaal, Z. and S. Banden (1997) *Gender and Empowerment: Definitions, Approaches and Implications for Policy*. Brighton: Institute of Development Studies. 1998; Rowlands, 1995; Wierenga, 1994).

¹⁰ Rowlands, J. (1995) 'Empowerment Examined'. *Development in Practice*, 5: 101-107

The research team read and re-read the transcripts, utilizing an approach broadly based on a grounded theory that allows for themes, categories, and codes to naturally arise from the data. This approach was complemented by reading relevant literature, conversing among team members as a way of extracting meaning from data, and drawing on team members' previous knowledge and experience in the subject matter.

The case studies were analyzed both horizontally and vertically, meaning that each case study was analyzed separately to tell the story of men's engagement in that particular case, and the themes that are relevant to more than one of the case studies were then drawn out and explored further. This enabled the study to provide recommendations that are appropriate across different sectors and different types of programming.

It should be noted that, given the relatively small dataset for each case study, some of the findings, ideas, and suggestions made in this report may be based only on the ideas of a very limited number of respondents. As the dataset is relatively small and it was not easily available, qualitative data analysis software was not used in the analyses of data.

Listed below are the key areas and questions on which the research focused:

- a. Motivation: What motivates male staff, company owners, advocates/activists, and community members to engage with and support women's empowerment and rights achievement in each of the case studies?
- b. Process: What were the key processes adopted for women's empowerment and rights achievement in each case study, and how were men involved in these processes?
- c. Challenges: What challenges did men face in engaging in women's empowerment and rights in the case study examples?
- d. Enabling factors: What structural and organizational factors enabled men's engagement with and support for women's rights empowerment in the case study examples?
- e. Benefits: What benefits did men's engagement in women's rights and empowerment produce in each case study example?
- f. Successes: What were the key achievements of each case study in regard to women's empowerment and rights achievement?

As the data was analyzed, it became clear that not all of these areas were equally important. Motivation developed as the most important area for inquiry, which respondents could identify the most easily across all case studies. Enabling factors were particularly important to the programming and ICT case studies. Benefits stood out as particularly important for the case study on men's engagement in women's rights advocacy initiatives.

1. RESEARCH METHODS

The data collection methods were informal conversations, semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions (FGD), and a reading of grey and published literature relevant to the case studies. Interview and FGD guides were drawn up for each case study and were used in a highly flexible manner, relying on the skills of the interviewer or facilitator to draw out information from respondents. The guides developed and changed as the study was underway in order to respond to new ideas and areas for investigation as data was collected. Most interviews and all FGDs were conducted in Dari or Pashto with the transcripts translated into English. Verbatim transcripts of all interviews and FGDs were typed for analysis.

Focus Group Discussions

A limited number of FGDs were used for each case study, as shown in Table 1. The FGDs were designed to encourage discussion among the participants and elicit information on opinions and norms, the different ways members of the group interact with one another, and identify the most important issues to them. Different FGD techniques were used, including showing a film about men’s engagement in women’s rights initiatives in India to stimulate conversation; using ranking techniques; and posing questions and ideas to the group.

Semi-Structured Interviews

A series of semi-structured interviews were conducted with members and representatives of different institutions, programming staff, and program target groups relevant to each case study. Both men and women were interviewed in roughly equal numbers. A set of semi-structured interview guides was drawn up for each case study, with different guides used for different categories of respondents (e.g. male advocates compared to female advocates, or staff from headquarters compared to field staff).

These FGDs and interviews were supplemented with seven informal conversations when identifying case studies and case study respondents. Respondents were interviewed individually.

Table 1: FGDS and Interviews Conducted for the Case Studies

| Case Study | Research Method | Number | Respondents |
|------------|----------------------------|--------|--|
| A | FGDs | 4 | 1 with men 1 with women 2 with men and women |
| | Semi-Structured Interviews | 15 | 10 with women 5 with men |
| B | FGDs | 5 | 2 with male elders 1 with female elders 1 with female staff 1 with male staff |
| | Semi-Structured Interviews | 13 | 4 HQ staff (2 men and 2 women) 9 field staff (4 men and 5 women) |

| | | | |
|---|----------------------------|---|--|
| C | FGDs | 4 | 2 with male elders 2 with female elders |
| | Semi-Structured Interviews | 7 | 3 HQ staff (2 women and 2 men) 4 training staff (3 women and 1 men) |
| D | FGDs | 1 | With female owner/managers of ICT companies and female employees |
| | Interviews | 9 | 3 with male owner/managers of ICT companies 2 with female owner/managers of ICT companies 6 with female employees of ICT companies |

2. STUDY ETHICS

The basic principle of “doing no harm” and not placing respondents at risk from talking to the research team was upheld throughout the research process. Before conducting either individual interviews or FGDs, informed consent was sought from respondents. The study team did their best to ensure that respondents fully understood the purpose of the study and the way the data and analyses would be used. All responses and information provided to the research team have been and will continue to be held in confidence. No names or identifying information of respondents are used in this report.

3. LIMITATIONS

It is beyond the scope of this study to provide meaningful, methodologically-rigorous data on either Afghan masculinities or male attitudes toward women’s empowerment in a more generalized way. However, the analyses of Case Studies B and C touch on this, and these areas are recommended for future research.

The two-month schedule for the study was a limitation in several ways. All the case studies were limited by a short timeframe provided for collecting data and analyzing it, which inevitably led to a lack of depth in these areas. There was insufficient time to build trust between researchers and respondents. All members of the assessment team except the Team Leader were new to this style of semi-structured qualitative, reflexive, and explorative research. There was insufficient time, too, to extensively train the team members. This led to some of the early data collected being weak, and some of the strongest data coming from the work done at the end of the study, in Herat.

In order to overcome the short duration for the new study, case studies were chosen that were already familiar to the research team. The only case study for which this is not the case is WfW-I, and as a result the depth of information from this example suffered. It was further detrimental that this was the last case study in the timetable, as investigation into WfW-I began quite late.

Additionally, although MEP has been implemented in both Kabul and Nangarhar provinces to date, the team decided to focus on the program in Kabul, as fieldwork in Nangarhar was already conducted for Case Study B. The research team assumed that data could be collected from the

urban location where MEP had been conducted for a number of years, and that this could be compared to the data provided by respondents attending a new MEP in the rural area of Kabul province. However, it proved difficult to locate respondents from the previous course, and only one FGD was conducted with a small group of men from this course, who were vague about the course purpose and contents. The team also found that MEP in the rural area was less-connected to the WEPs than other MEPs run by WfW-I. Despite these limitations, the WfW-I data has been useful to the overall findings.

4. CASE STUDIES OVERVIEW

A case study approach was chosen in order to glean information at different geographic levels (village, district, provincial, and national), as well as across different sectors and activities within the timeframe given. Four case studies were chosen to encapsulate men's engagement in women's rights and empowerment in the areas of: women's rights activism and advocacy; community-level programming, both directly and indirectly aimed at women's empowerment and rights achievement; and women's participation in urban labor markets.

Case studies were selected according to the following criteria:

- There has been some level of success in engaging men to support women's rights and empowerment in the case study activity. The research team decided that looking at positive case studies would allow them to identify the most effective ways to engage men.
- The study team, or one of its members, was already familiar with the program, organization, or sector. This was purely for pragmatic reasons, given the short two-month timeframe of the study. Case Study A was chosen because one team member was substantially involved in the work of the Afghanistan Women's Network (AWN), including being a board member at the beginning of the study. Case Study B was chosen because the Team Leader worked on the program during its first year of implementation, and therefore knows the program well. Case Study C focusing on Women for Women-International's (WfW-I) programming was the only case study with which none of the team had any contact beginning the research. Case Study D is related to the Afghanistan Workforce Development Program (AWDP), with which one team member is familiar because he previously took part in an assessment of the program.
- Each case has a geographic reach beyond Kabul.
- The amalgamation of case studies provides information on: urban and rural settings; state and non-state governance institutions; CSOs' advocacy initiatives across different sectors; and development actors that include USAID contractors and the NGO sector.

Case Study A: Advocacy for Legislative Change coordinated by the Afghan Women's Network (AWN)¹¹

¹¹ The background information here was provided and written by Manizha Wafeq.

The Afghan Women's Network (AWN), founded in 1995, is a cornerstone of Afghanistan's fledgling women's movement. It serves as a network for the growing number of women's organizations and individual activists operating in the country. AWN has a strong presence in several Afghan provinces through its secretariats in Kabul, Herat, and Jalalabad. AWN is a network of organizations, but also undertakes its own advocacy initiatives, addressing issues such as gender-based violence, women's political participation, access to justice and security, and lobbying for women's participation in peace talks. There are 112 members within AWN, 25 percent of which are male-led organizations focusing on women's needs, empowerment, and rights.

In addition to the male-led organizations within the AWN, a number of individual men work with the Network on various advocacy initiatives, at times contributing their technical skills in areas such as legislative drafting and legal reform. Some of the important recent advocacy initiatives led by AWN that have had male support include advocacy on topics such as: the Elimination of Violence Against Women law (EVAW); the guardianship law; the criminal code; actions to get justice for individual victims of abuse, (e.g. Setara's case in Herat); and the One Billion Rising Global campaign.

Case Study B: Programming – Rule of Law Stabilization Program- Informal Component (RLS-I), which involved parallel programming with men and women to achieve women's rights and empowerment¹²

From 2010 to 2014, RLS-I worked with both men and women at the community level primarily in rural areas of different provinces of the eastern, southern, and northern regions of Afghanistan. The program ended in March 2014. The overall goal of the program was stabilization through strengthening community-based dispute resolution (CBDR) mechanisms at the village and district level. Specifically, the program aimed to:

- Strengthen the links and relationships between state justice and non-state justice dispute resolution mechanisms;
- Increase elders' (both male and female) knowledge and use of Afghan law and *Sharia* principles;
- Empower women to take greater roles in dispute resolution and prevention;
- Provide support to the resolution of long standing disputes;
- Strengthen the authority of legitimate elders to resolve disputes; and
- Lessen the incidence of detrimental practices, such as *baad*,¹³ in CBDR processes.

RLS-I initiated a series of activities aimed at both men and women to do this, including:

- Meetings between state and non-state justice actors, which drew up forms for recording and registering cases resolved by CBDR mechanisms;

¹² The information provided here is from the Team Leader's personal knowledge of the program in 2010, personal communication with staff members since and the reading of unpublished presentation slides and M&E reports provided by the program.

¹³ The practice of compensating for a murder (or an accidental killing) by the killer's family giving either one or two never-married girls in marriage to the victim's family

- Meetings of elders (both male and female) from different districts aimed at creating mutually supportive networks;
- Workshops for male and female elders focused on inheritance law, family law, land rights, property law, and constitutional law;
- Discussion sessions for male and female elders to discuss specific difficulties they face and reach common solutions; and
- The formation of *spinsaary* groups¹⁴ to empower women in their roles as dispute preventers and resolvers.

All programming activities were implemented in a sex-segregated manner. This study focused on the project work in the eastern region.

Case Study C: Programming – Women for Women International (WfW-I), which provides complementary programming to gain men’s support for women’s empowerment¹⁵

Since 2001, Women for Women International has been implementing its Women’s Empowerment Program (WEP) in Afghanistan. For women in some of the poorest communities, this program is currently implemented in Kabul, Jalalabad, and Parwan, and was previously implemented in Balkh as well. The primary aim of the twelve-month program is to empower women economically; it includes a large life-skills component and an income generation course.

WEP is implemented in other fragile and post-conflict states. In the Afghan context, WfW-I also runs a Men’s Engagement Program (MEP) solely to support the goals of WEP. Staff explained that MEP is implemented when resistance from male community members is so great that it threatens the effective implementation of the WEP. The curriculum of MEP, which is called *Women’s Rights in Islam*, includes:

- Equality of men and women;
- Personal and individual rights of women;
- Women’s rights in the family;
- Marriage, divorce, and polygamy; and
- Islamic prescription and the situation of women in present-day society.

MEP also includes an introduction to the aims, objectives, and methodology of the WEP course. The first iteration took place in 2009 in Kabul city; since then, MEP it has been implemented on an ad-hoc basis where there is the greatest need and when funding is available. WfW-I’s monitoring and evaluation (M&E) system reports a greater level of success when MEP is implemented alongside WEP. As a consequence, WfW-I is moving toward systematizing the implementation of MEP so that it always operates alongside WEP.¹⁶

¹⁴ *Spinsaary* literally means “white hair” and is used to refer to elderly women in Pashtu. It is used to refer to older women in the same way that *Spingaary* (meaning white beard) is used to refer to older influential men in the community who are often charged with resolving disputes.

¹⁵ The information provided here is from interviews conducted for this study and from documentation provided by WfW-I

¹⁶ Interview with WfWI staff from HQ in USA, Kabul, March 9, 2014

This study focused on implementation of MEP in one rural district of Kabul province and one area of Kabul city.

Case Study D: The Information Communication Technology (ICT) Sector – Male support for women working in male-dominated labor market sectors

This case study was intended to focus on the Afghanistan Workforce Development Program (AWDP), a USAID project designed to address high levels of unemployment in the formal labor market and to ensure that mid-career professionals have sufficient skills to effectively participate in the urban labor market. The AWDP provides grants to training companies and partners with employers to ensure skills development for employees and jobseekers. It sets a target of 25 percent female participation in training courses. As the team began the research for this case study, significant successes in training women in the ICT sector became apparent. Two ICT companies, one in Kabul and one in Herat, were found to have employed a largely female workforce. Consequently, the team decided to focus specifically on this sector and re-search these two companies further. Both companies were started in recent years by graduates from computer studies faculties at Herat and Kabul Universities.

IV. FINDINGS

CASE STUDY A: ADVOCACY - ENGAGING MEN IN THE STRUGGLE FOR WOMEN'S RIGHTS

“If we engage men in women's issues it has some risks but if we don't engage them the risk is higher.”^{17,18}

Data was collected for this case study through conversations and discussions with women and men involved in women's rights advocacy initiatives in Kabul and Herat cities. The research team reported that most of those spoken to had not previously considered the issues around men's engagement in women's rights activism, nor the potential risks and advantages of doing so. This was the case despite a number of men having been closely involved in advocacy groups focused on legislative change, and a significant number of men working for NGOs promoting women's empowerment. Consequently, some respondents expressed appreciation for the opportunity to discuss such issues and would be willing to participate in future initiatives in this area.

This case study explores men's motivations for becoming involved in women's rights advocacy and the factors that enabled their involvement. It discusses the challenges they face and the factors that hinder men's involvement. Throughout the discussion, female women's rights activists' perceptions and opinions of men's involvement are presented alongside those coming from the men themselves. The case study found that there is significant potential for more men to become involved in advocating for women's rights through the Afghan Women's Network or other bodies, but that there are also substantial challenges that need to be overcome.

¹⁷ Interview with female women's rights activist, Kabul, Feb. 17, 2014

¹⁸ As most of the data collection was conducted in Dari or Pashto, all quotations are an interpretation of what was said in English.

Men's motivations for engaging in women's rights activism

For most of the male women's rights activists, a combination of factors motivated them to become involved in women's rights activism and advocacy. Male respondents pointed to first-hand knowledge of women's suffering. For example, an activist and former provincial council member in Herat described his previous experience working as a medical doctor in rural areas; through this work he had witnessed women's struggles and suffering first hand.¹⁹ Another example provided was a male activist in Kabul who was motivated by attending a conference for traditional birth attendants, where he learned about the high rates of maternal mortality in Afghanistan.²⁰ Another male activist from Kabul spoke about witnessing the restrictions placed on his sisters and other women during the Taliban regime as a factor motivating him to struggle for women's rights.²¹

While witnessing women's suffering and struggles made men want to do something about it, it was exposure to different ideas and lifestyles that provided them with the impetus to work toward a different gender order in Afghanistan. A small number of male activists reported that exposure to other places enabled them to see other ways of being, and that men and women could work together in different ways.²² Two prominent activists from Kabul reported that left wing political literature had inspired them.²³ Another Kabul activist reported that reading the Quran motivated him, as he realized that what the Quran said about gender issues was not what the mullahs and other cultural leaders in Afghanistan were promulgating.²⁴

Women activists reinforced the idea that exposure to other places is an important motivator for men to become involved. One prominent women's rights activist from Kabul declared that men who are genuinely committed have had exposure to societies outside of Afghanistan.²⁵ Another woman activist expressed the opinion that higher education was the key to men's genuine commitment to women's rights.²⁶ We have to be careful taking these assumptions at face value; the first person speaking is likely to have in mind middle-class, urban men who had opportunities to study and live outside of Afghanistan, while the second person is referring to a particular class of men who had opportunity to go to university. It is, however, important to recognize that exposure to different ways of being is both possible and important for poor urban and rural men. These men have very limited access to education, but some of them have changed their attitudes toward gender issues from witnessing or seeing different way of being.

Research conducted by the Team Leader of this study for the Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU) on family dynamics and domestic violence found that exposure motivated

¹⁹ Interview male women's rights activist Herat March 24, 2014

²⁰ Interview with male women's rights activist, Kabul, Feb. 16, 2014

²¹ Interview with male women's rights activist, Kabul, Feb. 18, 2014

²² Interviews with male women's rights activists Kabul and Herat, Feb. - March, 2014

²³ Interview with male women's rights activists, Feb. 2014

²⁴ Interview male women's rights activist, Kabul, Feb. 16, 2014

²⁵ Interview with woman women's rights activist, Kabul, Feb. 17, 2014

²⁶ Female women's rights activist speaking during an FGD with women right's activist, Kabul, Feb. 18, 2014

a change in gendered attitudes and behavior of men and women, regardless of class. That exposure may come from migrating to neighboring countries, watching television shows from other places in the world, or even from internal migration to other parts of Afghanistan.²⁷

Both male and female women's rights activists pointed to the private realm of the family as an important space for men to become motivated to engage in women's rights advocacy. They described this as operating in two ways. First, men were motivated to work for women's rights in an attempt to ensure better gender order for their female relatives.

*I have a mother, sister, wife and daughter— you have seen my daughter as well—and I want all females to live as humans, with human rights.*²⁸

Second, family members encouraged men to work for women's rights if other family members were also committed to women's rights and empowerment.

*The changes in me came from my father's training and talking about human rights. He said a woman is a human being as well. He told me about women's rights, which I didn't know about before 2007. My other inspiration was my mother, who was doing a great job.*²⁹

The influence of this man's father on him is similar to that reported by many women's rights activists about their fathers. Indeed, throughout this study, women reported the important positive influence of their fathers in their lives. While it is widely recognized educating women in progressive ideas is a key way to impart these ideas to children, equal attention needs to be placed on the influence fathers have over their children. A larger study researching the role that

²⁷ Smith, D. J. (2008) *Love, Fear and Discipline: Everyday Violence toward Children in Afghan Families*. AREU: Kabul and Smith D. J. (2009) *Decisions, Desires and Diversity: Marriage Practices in Afghanistan*. AREU: Kabul

²⁸ Interview with male women's rights activist in Herat on March 24, 2014

²⁹ Male women's rights activist speaking during a mixed sex FGD in Kabul, February 19, 2014

Box 1: Distrust of Men’s Motivations for Engagement in Women’s Rights Advocacy

We see that many men are engaged because of the international donor agenda. It is donor-driven motivation. When men see there is money to take up an issue... they get involved in women's rights work.

--Female women's rights activist, Kabul, Feb. 18, 2014

Other men, when they talk about women’s rights they don't believe in what they are saying they are just saying it to get some benefit or to do their job.

--Female women’s rights activist, Kabul, Feb. 17, 2014

There is another group of men who work to earn in the name of women’s rights and women’s projects.

--Female women's rights activist, Kabul, Feb. 18, 2014

I think for some it is about getting more projects and fame and getting their salary. Some might work because they have a real commitment, but some are just fulfilling their ToR.

--Female women’s rights activist Herat, March 24, 2014

male family members play in contributing to greater levels of gender equality in Afghanistan is one of the research topics recommended in this report, in the last section.

On occasion, men reported that women in their families directly encouraged them to become involved with women’s rights activism. However, women respondents in all of the female FGDs, and in an interview in Herat, reported that sometimes male activists’ female family members oppose them working for women’s rights.³⁰ Female family members’ objections are most likely linked to general accusations of sexual impropriety directed at men and women who work together. This is discussed

further below.

Distrust of men’s motivations for being involved in women’s rights advocacy and women’s empowerment initiatives

During interviews and FGDs, female women’s rights activists responded positively to direct questions about the value of men’s participation in their advocacy efforts, and many provided examples of men they had worked with whom they believe are genuinely committed to women’s rights. However, their assessments of what motivates men to engage in women’s rights advocacy reveal a significant level of skepticism. As the quotations in Box 1 illustrate, women participants in this study believe that most men are involved with women’s rights work because of opportunities to secure funding for their own NGOs, and for the recognition and opportunities that it may provide them.

Despite this attitude, it can be assumed that some men through their involvement with women’s advocacy and empowerment initiatives develop a more genuine commitment. This was pointed to by a female women’s rights activist during an all women FGD:

³⁰ Female women's rights activists FGD, Herat, March 24, 2014

Men get benefits from working with women's rights; they get projects, they find jobs. They never think spiritually, they just think they can earn from their work with women. But they get one other benefit – that their traditional mind changes; they see women working outside and they see that women don't just want rights for themselves; they want justice for both men and women. The men realize that the issues are not only about women, but about justice.³¹

While far less common, some men also accuse women of only being involved in women's rights activism for material benefits. One management-level respondent for one of the programming case studies directed this accusation toward women's rights activists based on his experience with the way women participated at conferences. Similarly, a male women's rights advocate in Herat saw most female activists as only working in the field for financial gain:

Let me tell you honestly that those women who are think they are working for women's rights are only working for money. Those women are going to the commanders [chief of police connected to ISAF] and other government employees to ask for projects and about other issues.... The work they are doing is only to make money and have a good name in society, but they have not supported women who need support.^{32,33}

It should be noted that women leveled these types of accusations at other female women's rights activists too. In a mixed male and female FGD in Herat, one woman directly accused the other participants in the FGD of only advocating for women's rights for material benefit.³⁴

Why women activists believe men's engagement is important

Despite this general lack of trust, women activists pointed to specific ways in which men were either supporting them or could be used instrumentally in the pursuit of women's rights and empowerment in Afghanistan. Women recognized men to have more influence in society and therefore to be in a better position to gain support from both government representatives and

Box 2: Men Having More Influence in Society

At press conferences, when we have a man sitting beside us talking about legal or violence issues, they are taken seriously. I heard from [different] families that when there are only women talking on the TV or at press conferences, they change the TV channel and say 'again these women', but when there are men they wait and watch the whole show.

--Women's rights activist in Kabul, Feb 18, 2014

In Sitara's case, there were more men in the events and demonstrations and as a result Sitara got treatment and sufficient funds were raised. Because of men's participation, MOWA, MoI, MoPH took it seriously. [Men] added to our numbers and it was more influential with men standing in support of Sitara too.

-- Female women's rights activist, Herat, March 24, 2014

³¹ Women's rights activist speaking during an FGD in Kabul on Feb. 18, 2014

³² Male women's rights activist, Herat, March 24, 2014

³³ It should be noted that this respondent was generally critical of most civil society initiatives.

³⁴ Female women's rights activist, FGD, Herat, March 24, 2014

the public at large. The quotations in Box 2 provide very clear examples of the perceived impacts of men's involvement in women's rights promotion, due to this greater influence. Some female activists were even more explicit in acknowledging the instrumentalism of involving men in their work. One woman who works in the area of women's economic empowerment believes men are needed in her work to engage with businessmen; she believes she gets a more positive result when she sends men to speak with men. She described "men [as] resources to talk to other men."³⁵

This 'need' for men to undertake specific tasks is largely due to the extreme sex-segregation found in most areas of social, political, and economic life in Afghanistan. The theme of sex-segregation is prominent across all of the case studies. Women respondents in all the case studies argued that without men's individual support they would not be able to undertake either their work or activism. As one woman put it, "I am present here today because my husband, father, and brother have accepted my rights. Without their support and permission, we cannot have any presence in society."³⁶

The discussion above demonstrates women's acceptance of the need for men's involvement in women's rights activism, and that this is largely due to the extreme gender hierarchies present across Afghan social organization. On occasion, women did move away from the instrumentalist argument and pointed to men's responsibility to work in support of women's rights. These women noted men's responsibility, first, because they are the perpetrators of abuse toward women. The second, more positive, approach was that all human beings have a responsibility to protect each other's rights.

It is not possible for women alone to work on these issues; men are the ones who are the perpetrators of violence to women and they are the ones who should stand against it. I am not in favor of making separate groups, where women should work for women, and men should work for men. I would work for a man if his rights were being violated and I hope men do the same [for women].³⁷

Factors hindering men's engagement in women's rights advocacy

Women pointed to a perspective they believe is hindering men's involvement: the perception that anything to do with women's rights or empowerment has nothing to do with men and is a women-only space. An illustration of this is a conference on women's economic empowerment held while the study was being undertaken, and which study team members attended. Not a single man attended despite some having been invited. One longstanding women's rights activist asserted that she had not "witnessed a single man decide to support women's rights, or take any action against violence, or advocate with women's issues. Always they are invited by women, and then they take part in advocacy programs."³⁸

³⁵ Interview with female women's rights activist, Kabul, Feb. 17, 2014

³⁶ Women's rights activist speaking during an FGD, Kabul, Feb. 18, 2014

³⁷ Interview female women's rights activist, Herat, March 24, 2014

³⁸ Female women's rights activist speaking during an all women FGD, Kabul, 18 Feb 2014

Other women at an all-female FGD discussion held in Kabul supported this perspective. Most of their comments were critical of men for not being self-motivated to become involved. However, at the same FGD, other women acknowledged the need for women activists to take responsibility for the lack of male participation and said that women themselves needed to become stronger leaders and better advocates to encourage male involvement.³⁹

Interestingly, the more negative attitudes held by female women's rights activists about men's engagement were never highlighted as a challenge or a hindering factor by the men interviewed. This may be the case simply because people had not really thought deeply about these issues before, and that men and women had not come together to discuss and overcome some of these challenges.

Men highlighted two clear challenges they faced. Both relate to the perceptions held by their peers and communities about their work on women's rights. The first and perhaps less important of these is that men reported being teased and ridiculed by other men for being involved in women's rights activism, primarily being called "womanish." A selection of quotations to illustrate this is provided in Box 3. Women activists also reported this challenge faced by men. It is important to note here that male elders interviewed for the programming case studies, who support women's rights in their villages and communities, never described being teased in this manner. Instead, they implied they gained status through supporting women's rights. This is discussed further in the examination of these cases studies.

The second challenge, which was reported by both men and women, relates to allegations of sexual impropriety being directed at male women's rights activists. This is because the very nature of their work involves working in close proximity to women.

*Such a movement is very hard in Afghanistan because men have to be very careful of their behavior in public. If you open a door in an office and there is a man and woman in there together, then it is thought that something wrong is going on.*⁴⁰

Box 3: Men Being Ridiculed for Being Involved in Women's Rights Activism

For most of the men when they work for women's rights people call them womanish and that's why they are not really interested to work for women.

--Woman in an all-female FGD, Kabul, Feb. 18, 2014

And they call men like myself, who are defending women's rights, 'womanish.'

--Man during an all-male FGD, Feb. 16, 2014

They [male activists] have their own respect in the community but there are still people who are talking about them and saying they are Khola Zana [women's aunt/ mother's sister]; they use these words to describe men who are supporting women.

--Male activist speaking in Herat, March 24, 2014

³⁹ FGD, Kabul, Feb. 18, 2014

⁴⁰ Male women's rights activist speaking during all male FGD, Kabul, Feb. 16, 2014

This was also reported as a problem, though to a lesser degree, in relation to male and female staff working closely together in the programming case studies. These allegations are a problem not only when men and women work together on women's rights, but also when men in the course of their work attempt to provide support, either legal or financial, to individual women. A male women's rights activist in Kabul recounted the following story:

*In Afghanistan, when a man supports a woman, the people think that they have a personal relationship [sexual relationship]. Three years ago, I was helping a woman who had six kids whose husband was disabled. She was the breadwinner. People thought we were having a sexual relationship. It took me three years to prove to people that this woman was not a whore.*⁴¹

Another man reported having to close his office in Kandahar due to threats related to defending women who had committed *zina*.⁴²

Again, the still quite rare situations of men and women working closely together, and the extreme sex-segregation of space in Afghanistan, is the most likely cause of accusations of sexual impropriety when men and women do work together. A female women's rights activist even said that sex-segregation at conferences with more liberal agendas has become commonplace. A couple of older women's rights activists reminisced about a past time in Afghanistan, "when men and women were working together and the spaces were not segregated and there were fewer problems and less harassment."⁴³ It is likely that these are somewhat romanticized memories, and also are primarily referring to Kabul only. Nevertheless, the recognition that the norms of the sex-segregation of space create difficulties for men and women working together is relevant.

A further challenge worth mentioning is that male women's rights activists occasionally expressed that they felt unappreciated, and that a greater level of recognition for their work would have been encouraging. Indeed, one prominent and well-recognized supporter of women's rights in Kabul expressed the loneliness he feels as a man supporting women's rights:

*I never claimed that I am leading women's rights work. I support it technically. In fact, I feel alone, and if you are alone you have to really work hard to get your point across. It is a challenge, but at the same time, a motivation.*⁴⁴

Case Study A: Conclusion

Women activists' recognition of the advantages in engaging men, even if primarily for instrumental reasons, is an enabling factor for men's continued and extended engagement with women's empowerment and rights achievement. However, the implicit distrust of men and

⁴¹ Male women's rights activist interviewed in Kabul on Feb. 16, 2014

⁴² Any sexual relationship outside of marriage; often translated as adultery but also referring to sexual relations between unmarried couples, a crime in Afghanistan.

⁴³ Female women's rights activist speaking at an all women FGD held in Kabul, Feb. 16, 2014

⁴⁴ Interview with male women's rights activist in Kabul, Feb. 18, 2014

men's motivations for involvement in women's rights advocacy is a hindrance to the enhancement of men's engagement in this area. It was rarely expressed directly, but the risks of men taking over from women in advocacy initiatives were also apparent. This again highlights the lack of trust women activists have in men's engagement. Teasing by peer groups and more serious allegations of sexual misconduct are also challenges men face when engaging in this field. Despite this, there are men already engaged in this area who can act as role models to other men.

CASE STUDIES B AND C: PARALLEL AND COMPLEMENTARY GENDER PROGRAMMING TO ACHIEVE WOMEN'S RIGHTS AND EMPOWERMENT

As my Kaka⁴⁵ asked, 'Who is taking away women's rights?' No one is coming from the sky to make problems for them. It is us men who are making problems and obstacles for them. Half of Afghans are women and they should fight for their rights. All parties should know each other's rights. We should first train the elders, and then train the women. The elders are very important and all the villagers listen to them.⁴⁶

As described in the introductory chapter of this report, the research team studied two different types of programs because they were already viewed as having been successful in engaging men in women's empowerment and rights achievement. The Rule of Law and Stabilization Program- Informal Component (RLS-I), a USAID-funded program implemented by a USAID contractor, ran for a finite time period and focused on strengthening community based dispute resolution (CBDR) mechanisms. Women for Women International's (WfW-I) Men's Engagement Program (MEP), is an NGO-implemented program that will continue indefinitely. The overarching goal of the MEP is to support the successful implementation of WfW-I's Women's Empowerment Program (WEP). These two case studies are presented in one chapter, as many of the findings are similar and lead to similar programming recommendations.⁴⁷

It is important to note that this study found challenges and weaknesses in the ways in which these programs were being implemented. Unless they are relevant to the subject of the study, they are omitted here.

Men's engagement and support to women's rights at the community level

⁴⁵ Meaning uncle but will be used to refer to both actual and fictive kin.

⁴⁶ Elder from Nangarhar district speaking during an FGD on Feb. 25, 2014

⁴⁷ There may be a slightly greater emphasis placed on RLS-I in this section. First, for practical reasons, the research team spoke to more staff and male beneficiaries from RLS-I and as such more data was collected. Second, within the areas of the programs the team focused on more men had been involved in the RLS-I program for a longer period of time. This may have been due to a mistake in selection of the research site for WfWI, as one MEP in Kabul had finished 3 years ago and it was difficult to locate participants, while the other had only begun two months ago and had therefore not had so much influence.

In working to engage men in women's empowerment and rights achievement, recognition must first be made of how men are already defending women's rights in their communities. The approach of the RLS-I program was to identify these 'spaces for change' and work within them to enhance men's engagement with and support for women's rights and empowerment.⁴⁸

The lead author of this paper previously conducted extensive research across Afghanistan on CBDR processes. This research found instances of male elders protecting women from violence in their families and from others in the community, preventing child marriage, and resolving disputes over women's access to land.⁴⁹ The findings

also confirmed that elders use detrimental practices to resolve disputes, primarily *baad*,⁵⁰ and that women's rights are not always upheld through CBDR processes.⁵¹ Research also conducted by this author on family dynamics and family violence found that male elders have some of the more just personal opinions on the position of women in Afghan society, even if they did not always act on them.⁵² Indeed, most of the family violence reported to the research team, during that study, was perpetrated by younger men. Likewise, younger men living in urban areas displayed some of the more aggressive and derogatory attitudes toward women in their families.

While certainly not conclusive, these two pieces of research point to an interesting dynamic in the construction of masculinity in Afghanistan. The idea that young men's violence and even irresponsibility are accepted and portrayed as beyond their control is in stark contrast to how older men are expected to behave. The expectation of elders revealed through these two pieces

Box 4: Male Support is Essential

From each family whose women participated in the training, their men supported and allowed them to participate. If their men did not allow them, women would be not able to attend.

--Female beneficiary of RLS-I, Nangarhar Feb. 25, 2014

In our family if men don't allow us we cannot come, even to this center. If we come without their permission, after a while we would not be able to continue... If the men don't allow us and we insist and come to the center, this will create a huge problem for us. They will beat us.

--Young female beneficiary of WfW program, Kabul, March 12, 2014

We worked very hard, and we really heard a lot of warnings from the Taliban. So that if the people (men) were not supportive of us, we would not have been able to complete the project, which was very sensitive

--Female field-staff of RLS-I, Nangarhar, Feb. 24, 2014

⁴⁸ Personal experience, Team Leader

⁴⁹ Smith, D. J. (2009) *A Case Study of Community Based Dispute Resolution Processes in Nangarhar Province*. Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit: Kabul and Smith, D. J. with S. Manalan (2009) *A Case Study of Community Based Dispute Resolution Processes in Bamiyan Province*. Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit: Kabul; Sarah Ladbury, in association with Co-operation for Peace and Unity (CPAU) and Deborah Smith (July 2010) *Helmand Justice Mapping Study*. Department for International Development Afghanistan

⁵⁰ Smith, D. J. (2009) *A Case Study of Community Based Dispute Resolution Processes in Nangarhar Province*. Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit: Kabul and Smith, D. J. with S. Manalan (2009) *A Case Study of Community Based Dispute Resolution Processes in Bamiyan Province*. Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit: Kabul.

⁵² Smith D. J. (2009) *Decisions, Desires and Diversity: Marriage Practices in Afghanistan*. AREU: Kabul

of research is to be just, thoughtful, wise, and controlled peacemakers. Further research on constructions of masculinity in Afghanistan is needed.

Male support is essential at the most basic level

Not only has previous research found community elders to support women's rights, male elder respondents in this study expressed a general attitude of support for women in their communities attaining their rights.⁵³ It should be noted of course, as one male RLS-I staff member pointed out to elders, "in the communities [interviewed], all NGOs work with women. Male elders know what to say to make NGOs happy." However he does go on to say, "in reality some do behave the way they speak as well."⁵⁴

Women staff and women elders expressed the opinion that of course men support their participation in women's rights and empowerment program activities. For many, it was simple: if men did not support the program and therefore did not give permission for women to attend, the women would not have been able to participate in any program activities (See Box 4). In this context, it is important to recognize the significance for many women of simply attending a meeting with other women. This might be a first step for some in a process of both individual and/or group empowerment. For women who never leave their villages and rarely their homes, attending a meeting with other women can initiate this first step.

There is a big difference between male family members passively allowing women to engage in empowerment and awareness and men actively supporting the empowerment of women and the realization of such rights. Nevertheless, the verbalization of support for women's rights, along with the acceptance of women's participation, demonstrates a significant amount of potential to further encourage men's engagement in this area. How men are motivated to go beyond passively allowing women's participation to active engagement is discussed below.

The last quotation in Box 4 points to male elders extending protection for women fieldworkers in RLS-I from the Taliban. This program operated in some particularly insecure districts, such as Achin and Khogyani in the east. The female staff repeatedly stressed the vital support that male elders, specifically *maliks*, provided in keeping them safe from the Taliban and enabling the activities to empower women in their communities to be implemented. Female fieldworkers in the RLS-I program also stressed the essential support they received from their male colleagues, which enabled them to implement their activities (See Box 5).

⁵³ FGDs male program participants, Kabul and Nangarhar, 12 and 19 March; 25 and 26 March, 2014

⁵⁴ Interview with senior staff member of RLS-I, Kabul, 18 Feb, 2014

Box 5: Male Colleagues' Support is Essential

When we started these workshops at village level our male colleagues helped us a lot, if they had not supported us we could not have run the project.

--Women fieldworker, Nangarhar, Feb. 24, 2014

First our male colleagues talked about the project with key male members of the community, and then we entered the village and started working there. If our male colleagues had not convinced the men in the village, they wouldn't have allowed their women to participate in our training and workshop sessions. That is why men were supportive to us, if the men did not support us we don't know if we would be alive today or not.

--Woman fieldworker RLS-I Feb. 28, 2014

Program structures and designs that allow for men's engagement in women's empowerment and rights achievement - RLS-I Parallel Programming

As described in the methodology section of this report, the RLS-I program aimed to strengthen CBDR mechanisms rather than women's empowerment or women's rights as stand-alone goals. The program from the beginning recognized that the very definition of strengthening CBDR mechanisms includes empowering women to play a larger role in dispute mitigation and resolution, and enabling and encouraging male elders to respect women's rights in dispute resolution

decisions. The project worked nearly equally with men and women, implementing nearly all the same activities for both. Virtually equal amounts of the programming budget were spent on activities with women and with men.^{55,56}

For these reasons, this form of programming is referred to here as parallel programming. It follows a gender mainstreaming approach in which women's needs, interests, and contributions are as central to the program as men's. As such, the program has no need for either a gender adviser or a gender unit to add activities for women, as these are the responsibilities of all staff from the point of design. Across most of Afghanistan, it is virtually impossible to conduct mixed-sex programming activities; thus, activities for men and women were conducted separately, with male staff facilitating activities for men and female staff facilitating activities for women.

This parallel approach to programming – with activities for men conducted a few days prior to the activities for women – served the purpose of reassuring men of the content of the activities being conducted for women. They know the ideas being shared and discussed are based on Islam and not contrary to acceptable Afghan social norms. As the two quotations from a female and male fieldworker below illustrate, once men had attended a workshop, meeting, or training, they knew the content and approved of it. They were therefore happy for women from their communities to attend the same activity.

⁵⁵ Personal communication with senior staff member RLS-I

⁵⁶ Exceptions to this are the activities that were only or largely conducted with men, such as the property law workshops and most activities to strengthen links between the state and CBDR.

*At beginning they did not want their wives to attend our program, but after they themselves attended the program, they changed their minds and respected our program and supported us.*⁵⁷

Or as one male senior staff member stated, “the more awareness about what was for women in the program, the more support was given” by men.⁵⁸

The men and women who attended the different program activities were not necessarily family members. However, having endorsement from a selection of particular men from the communities was found to be sufficient for women in general to be able to attend.⁵⁹ WfW-I found exactly the same be the case in regard to male approval for women attending their WEP.

Women for Women International: Complementary Programming

*When we train men as well as women, this supports the women’s program because men are the ones who create problems for women and don’t allow them to participate in our program. If the men get the same training, it is helpful.*⁶⁰

The two WfW-I programs studied were interrelated but separate programs: the Women’s Empowerment Program (WEP) and the Men’s Engagement Program (MEP). The two programs have separate funding streams; the current lack of funding to MEP was identified as a limitation in implementing it in as many districts as WEP.⁶¹ The lack of funding for MEP has led to the program being implemented in areas where it is deemed, by the senior management team and training staff, to be most needed. If, after a couple of months of implementation, there appears to be considerable resistance from families to allow women to attend the WEP on a regular basis, then funding permits a MEP to be started.⁶²

However, this does not seem to have always been the approach. One of the first areas of MEP implementation was a *Hazara*⁶³ area of Kabul city whose residents were described by staff as being open-minded and supportive of the program. A senior female trainer who had worked there at the time reported how successful both WEP and MEP were for the very reason that people in the area are open-minded.⁶⁴

Despite the recognition of the program’s potential to contribute to women’s empowerment, and particular success in areas where there was less resistance from male family members, senior management felt that, given the current funding constraints, the approach of implementing MEP in the areas where it is most needed is the best strategy. Both WfW-I headquarters and Kabul-based senior staff reported that implementing MEP is going to become more systematized, with the aim of implementing it alongside all WEP programs in the future.⁶⁵

⁵⁷ Interview woman fieldworker RLS-I, Nangarhar, Feb. 27, 2014

⁵⁸ Interview with senior staff member, RLS-I, Kabul, Feb. 18, 2014

⁵⁹ Interview with senior staff member, RLS-I Kabul, Feb. 20, 2014

⁶⁰ Interview with senior female trainer, WfW-I, Kabul, Feb. 24, 2014

⁶¹ Interviews with senior staff, WfW-I, Kabul, March 2014

⁶² Interviews with senior staff, WfW-I, Kabul, March 2014

⁶³ Women from the *Hazara* ethnic groups generally have more mobility than those from other Afghan ethnicities.

⁶⁴ Female senior trainer, WfW-I, Kabul, March 9, 2014

⁶⁵ Interviews with senior staff, WfW-I, Kabul, March 2014

Like the RLS-I program, the WEP and MEP are implemented in conformity with societal norms of sex-segregation, with male trainers facilitating training sessions with men and female trainers with women. However, unlike the RLS-I program, initial introductions to the communities, at least in Kabul and Parwan provinces, are led by a senior female staff member, with male colleagues from the M&E and Income Generation Departments supporting at times. This staff member reported she is the one to speak to the *maliks*, *ulama*, and other male elders to persuade them to allow WEP to be implemented in their districts and villages. She did not report any particular challenges in this regard.⁶⁶

However, the nature of women's inclusion in the program is less controversial than for RLS-I, as the districts where it is conducted are deliberately selected for their relative security. Conversations like this one between senior staff and community leaders are not continuous throughout program implementation. Consequently, it was not necessary for the WfW-I program to apply sex-segregation techniques so rigorously.

Experimental, flexible, and reflexive programming

Both programs initially took a flexible approach to programming. The first year's implementation of RLS-I included four pilot districts, with time for research in these and further districts. Based on the initial findings and potential for successes of the chosen implementation activities and their modalities, the initial programming design was adapted. For instance, one of the most successful aspects of the project in regard to women's empowerment is the formation of *spinsaary* groups. The formation of these groups was an outcome of discussion sessions with women in the two pilot districts in the Eastern Region. Field and senior management staff reported that RLS-I lost much of this initial reflexive approach and time for adaptation after the first year, as a more fixed activities were rolled out across multiple districts.⁶⁷ Nevertheless, the initial time given for research allowed staff, some of whom were promoted up through the project, to encourage a culture of reflection, and also ensured that once a fixed project was implemented it had been through some iteration of adaptation and learning.

As the WfW-I project has an indefinite life span and is funded through various different sources of core funding, it is able to continually evolve and adapt. Indeed, the very implementation of MEP was an evolution for WEP, which had been running in Afghanistan for at least seven years prior to MEP beginning. Training staff also described the early iterations of the MEP as experimental; only recently has it developed a more fixed curriculum. The male program trainers have always been given the freedom to adapt the program in consultation with senior management.⁶⁸

While all good programming should be flexible to allow time for reflection and adaptation, this is particularly important in a new area of programming, like the MEP. Programming to enhance men's engagement in women's empowerment and rights achievement in Afghanistan is new.

⁶⁶ Interview with female senior staff member, WfW-I, Kabul, March 18, 2014

⁶⁷ Personal communication RLS-I field staff and senior staff, Kabul and Nangarhar

⁶⁸ Interview senior staff member, WfW-I, Kabul, March 13, 2014

It is, therefore, even more important that any programming initiatives in this area take a very flexible and reflexive approach. USAID program contractors should be told this is the expected approach, rather than adhering strictly to the original technical proposal.

Motivating male staff to support programming for women's empowerment and rights achievement

I had no personal reaction about why we were hiring so many women. But I did have questions about what they would do in the field: what benefits would women in the field get? What was our project going to do for women? Could our project empower women and help women?.... I had an idea about women's role in this area, but what would be possible in the field, would it be achievable? Would the community accept it, would it be applicable and beneficial, and how would it be so?.... Yes, now I think it has been more successful than I ever expected.⁶⁹

At the beginning of the program, our male colleagues thought that we women were not able to run the project with them at the same level, because they did not trust us. They did not value our work. But after the implementation of the program really began, they realized that women are strong and can work like men.⁷⁰

This section discusses what motivated male staff to support women's rights and women's empowerment program activities. As the focus of the discussions was with field staff, and as the study team were only able to speak to one part-time male trainer working for WfW-I, this section focuses primarily on RLS-I.

Male staff, specifically those who had worked for the project in the first year, were asked what they thought about the project when they first began work on it. Invariably, they answered that they were unsure about what they were going to do because the project did not have a clear structure or list of activities. This made them apprehensive, but also excited to be given the opportunity to discover and explore new approaches. A number of staff were skeptical about the program overall: why was it working with informal justice, and how it could achieve anything?

⁶⁹ Interview with senior management staff in Kabul, Feb.18, 2014

⁷⁰ Interview with female fieldworker, Nangarhar, Feb. 27, 2014

The greatest degree of skepticism was reserved for the program's approach to working with women. The general opinion was that women have no role in the *jirga* system, so what could this program achieve with women?⁷¹ One man assumed when he first started working that the program must be all about women's rights, as there were so many women working on the program.⁷² Male staff's attitudes ranged from concern—but also excitement—about how the program would work, to feelings that the program—and especially the activities for women—was a waste of time and money⁷³

Box 6: Evidence of Women's Bravery

It happened when they saw our hard work and activities; when we worked step-by-step together with them, it changed their attitudes. Men were working in the waliswali and women did the activities in the maliks' houses. They had a university professor to teach, and women did the training by themselves. We were searching for places in the villages and distributing the lunch by ourselves, but men did not do such work. Because of that the men were telling us that you are heroes.

--Female fieldworker, Nangarhar, Feb. 27, 2014

By God's grace, the men changed over time. In the beginning they never trusted that women can do a good job, but after they saw our hard work they told us that we are very brave.

--Female fieldworker, Nangarhar, Feb. 27, 2014

When our male colleagues saw how fast and hard we women worked, they were motivated to support us. Therefore, we women worked very hard and carefully, and we did not make any mistakes in our activities.... Regarding the support of male staff for us, men were very helpful; they had very good and close connection with Maliks, and other key residents of the villages. Before that, when we used to go the field, our male colleagues would make appointments for us, and they would talk with the Maliks about our trip into their villages.

--Female fieldworker, Nangarhar, Feb. 24, 2014

Through conversations with male and female staff who worked on the program in the first year, it is clear that the provision of evidence was the most important factor motivating male staff to support programming activities aimed at women's empowerment and rights achievement. Evidence of female staff's capabilities for the work, the situation on the ground in the communities, and evidence that activities with women make a difference, have been vital. An environment where men and women work together allowed for this evidence to be easily shared. Complementing this reflection period, the initial flexibility of the program allowed the Afghan field staff to make considerable contributions to the implementation modalities of the program. This sense of ownership and influence over the program was another key motivating factor, not only in regard to activities with women, but for the program overall.

The evidence of women's capabilities that seems to have been the most important in garnering men's support was their ability to work in insecure districts. Male staff respondents frequently

⁷¹ Interview and FGD discussion with senior staff and male field staff, Kabul and Nangarhar, Feb. 2014

⁷² Male field worker FGD, Nangarhar, Feb. 23, 2014

⁷³ It should be noted that these more extreme negative opinions were reported either in informal conversations rather than in the FGD with male staff or individual interviews or were reported as the opinions of others.

reported how impressed they were with women's bravery, as illustrated by the quotations in Box 6.

Male staff also reported that female staff informally sharing of their experiences in the field was a key to providing evidence of their capabilities. They shared these experiences initially during the research period, during which time the evidence being collected for CBDR showcased examples of women already playing a role in CBDR processes.

At first I was very surprised that women were involved in the jirga system, CBDR, and traditional dispute resolution (TDR), because I already knew that women are not involved in jirga discussions. When I entered practical work in this project, I saw that women are actually involved in the jirga indirectly.⁷⁴

The research period at the start of the program was a key factor to overcoming assumptions and myths for the program implementers/researchers. In particular, when working in rural areas of Afghanistan, even urban Afghan staff may assume that all illiterate, rural women are ignorant victims and/or that all rural men are ignorant and brutish, with no respect for women's rights.⁷⁵ These myths are particularly important to overcome when working to enhance men's engagement in women's empowerment and rights identification.

The research period allowed male and female field staff to identify women in the communities who were already influential in dispute resolution processes in their communities, and even acting in these roles. It also allowed male staff to identify men in the communities who were sympathetic to working on women's rights and garnering a greater role for women in CBDR processes.⁷⁶ The WfW-I program also has a small research process that takes place at the start of MEP. Questionnaires are administered to the participating male community members to assess their existing knowledge of women's rights according to the *Sharia*. These periods of research and piloting allowed programming activities to respond to field staff's experience on the ground, as well as the expressed desires of community members participating in the program.

Ultimately, these pilot/research periods also encouraged field staff to experience more involvement, influence, and ownership over the programs. They reported that they had had a very big part in designing the program and that their ideas were accepted. Some WfW-I training staff believe the MEP was developed from their own experiences implementing the WEP, and requests they personally received from female project participants. In fact, the MEP⁷⁷ had been implemented in several countries prior to Afghanistan. That should not dismiss or invalidate the sense that on both programs staff felt sufficiently involved that they saw themselves as

⁷⁴ Female fieldworker during FGD Nangarhar, Feb. 24, 2014

⁷⁵ For a discussion on the representation of Afghan women as victims see Smith, D.J. (17 September, 2011) *Women and Reconciliation (2): The dangers of representing women as victims*. Afghan Analysts Network Blog <http://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/women-and-reconciliation-2-the-dangers-of-representing-women-as-victims>

⁷⁶ This identification of such men and women was only mentioned by one respondent to the research; the author's personal experience of having worked on RLS-I for the first year informs this perspective.

⁷⁷ The MEP program was previously called the Men's Leadership Program and is still referred to as such on WfW-I's website.

having played an important role in the design, implementation, and outcome of activities to engage men, which served as a key motivating factor.

Essential job requirement: male staff involvement in women's empowerment and rights achievement

Because the word 'justice' is a real word, and it is a word that everyone alive loves, and everyone tries to work to achieve. So we sat with ulama and we explained our agenda. They showed interest and said they support us in this matter. Therefore, we could absorb their confidence, and after that we talked with the elders of the area because our program was for the men from different classes. We were talking with the ulama, elders, and judges because they were governmental people, so we wanted to convince them.... Well, after convincing them and showing them our programs, they knew about women's rights in the framework of Islam. If there had been any obstacle, it was removed.⁷⁸

The quotation above describes how, at the start of the project, one of the main roles for male fieldworkers were to explain the activities to male community elders in order to gain their approval prior to implementation. One of the first steps was to convince male community members to allow the women from their communities to participate in the project. As activities developed, male staff members were required to persuade male elders to accept women's participation in dispute mitigation and resolution in their communities.⁷⁹ This process, by which male staff members persuade male participants of the value of women-focused components of the projects, also persuaded the staff themselves.⁸⁰

Similarly, through their work responsibilities, male staff learned more about women's rights and how to implement activities to support them. For example, one senior staff member explains how what was theory became reality for him:

Before joining RLS-I, I believed in a role for women in society: in the family. For me, what changed was how to apply the idea, how to work in the community. These are the new ideas I got from working on the project. Before, my commitment was theoretical. ... Some staff were not familiar with working this way – where the budget is equal for men and for women. Their knowledge increased, their perspective changed, and they became more accepting of working for women and of giving them a chance.⁸¹

Other male staff reported learning more about Islamic perspectives on women's rights through their attendance at workshops facilitated by professors of *Sharia* from Jalalabad University.

Male and female working relationships, challenges, and opportunities

⁷⁸ Interview with male fieldworker, Nangarhar, Feb. 27, 2014

⁷⁹ Female staff and female elders recounted many stories of elders supporting women to resolve disputes in the communities.

⁸⁰ Interview with senior staff, RLS-I Kabul, Feb. 20, 2014

⁸¹ Interview with senior staff, RLS-I, Kabul, Feb. 18, 2014

Overall, men and women reported having strong working relationships with each other, as the quotations in Box 7 illustrate. Female respondents attributed this to men and women being treated and valued equally in the program.⁸² This strong working relationship and the informal sharing of information – as described in the quotations below – was vital in motivating male staff to support the women’s empowerment and rights achievement components of the program. Without these strong work relationships, the male staff would not have been able to see the evidence discussed above that convinced them of the value of women’s rights and empowerment programming. As described below, simple things like where staff is allowed to sit can impact male-female professional interaction in the work place:

Box 7: Working Relationships between Male and Female Staff Members

When I first started with RLS-I I felt very happy that women and men are working together, and that they are in the same positions. There was no discrimination between men and women.

--Female fieldworker, Nangarhar Feb. 23, 2014

We have not faced any kind of problem with female staff but instead we supported each other. Please trust that that we had a very good team and we were always supporting each other.

--Male fieldworker, Feb. 23, 2014

Our male colleagues were very supportive; most of them were university graduates in Sharia Law and Law faculties. They always encouraged us and supported us in our programs. We had mutual respect for each other and they [men] always told us that we were very brave and hard-working people. Always we had good collaboration with each other.

--Female fieldworker, Feb. 27, 2014

I can give you a big example: we were all working and mixing in one room. We were reporting to them, and they were reporting to us.⁸³

Seating men and women in one room was a deliberate strategy to ensure this informal exchange of ideas and experiences. Since in most Afghan offices men and women eat lunch and take tea breaks separately, having a mixed work space may be the only way to ensure that male and female staff shares ideas and experiences freely, outside of formal meetings.

While relationships in this particular office of the RLS-I program between men and women were reported to be good and productive, two issues were raised as presenting potential obstacles. The first is described as ‘special treatment’ being given to women informally by management and in more formal policy directives. The second is the hints at and allegations of sexual impropriety when men and women work so closely together.

The special treatment was not necessarily a disputed issue. Both male and female staff voiced an expectation that certain concessions should be provided to women, such as being able to leave the office to attend to personal matters. Women were allowed to leave the office earlier than men during the winter (in order to get home before dark) and during Ramadan. Both men

⁸² Interviews female fieldworkers, RLS-I, Nangarhar, Feb. 2014

⁸³ Male fieldworker, RLS-I, FGD, Feb. 23, 2014

and women reported that management paid more attention to women's needs, and both accepted this as normal.

*More attention was paid to women inside the office. More attention was given to the female staff, but it is normal; we are used to this. There was more attention and special treatment given to the women.*⁸⁴

The men with whom this issue was discussed did not see this as a problem, and indeed said it was fair, as women had more domestic work to do. One man stated: "When I go home, my dinner is prepared. When women colleagues go home, they have to prepare dinner."⁸⁵ This same man reported assisting women more with their reports and other written work than men, and in one case deliberately without letting their manager know. He again thought this was just, as women generally have had fewer opportunities for higher education than men.

However, in two important areas, the special treatment caused a problem for male-female work relations. One area discussed by respondents was when female staff took advantage of drivers by demanding they provide transportation for personal errands. Another way this could affect programming is the possibility that a female supervisor gets special privileges. The study team explored the subject generally and informally with a couple of men, asking whether they would be happy if their supervisor was a woman and she was allowed to leave earlier than them. After some thought, they reported feeling this would be less acceptable. On the RLS-I project there were no Afghan female managers and no Afghan women with supervisory responsibilities over men. However, these perceptions draw attention to a dynamic that could lead to women being seen as unsuitable for promotion. Unfortunately, this area was not explored enough in this study, but it merits further research.

The other area that causes challenges for male and female staff is allegations or rumors of sexual impropriety among staff. While this was rarely mentioned by those interviewed for the programming case studies (as this was an issue raised during the advocacy case study), it is likely to be an ongoing problem to engage men further in women's rights and empowerment, and therefore warrants some discussion here. The two quotations below illustrate that there was fear among staff of such accusations, and that some staff had moderated their behavior in order to avoid any form of teasing in this regard:

*I want to tell you a real thing: I never wanted to do any negative actions against my sisters (co-workers) that they would be disturbed by, and I never wanted to have close ties with them.... I can give you my phone and there you can see that there is not any number of my female co-workers.*⁸⁶

⁸⁴ Interview with male senior staff member, RLS-I, Kabul, Feb. 18, 2014

⁸⁵ Male senior-staff member, RLS-I, Kabul, Feb. 18, 2014

⁸⁶ Interview with male fieldworker, RLS-I, Nangarhar, Feb. 27, 2014

One more issue about the relationships between male and female staff is we were very nice to the men. But after a while, we realized that when we act nicely to men, they were saying bad things about us. So after that, we stopped talking to them, only hi and hello, no more than that. I should say not all of them, because there were some very good men also who always showed respect toward women.⁸⁷

Male program participants' motivations for engaging in and offering support to achieve women's empowerment and rights in their communities

This section identifies the key factors motivated male program participants, of both programs, to support women's rights and empowerment within the context of projects' goals. Most of these motivating factors were comparable for both projects.

a. Targeting the right men

While it is expected that the right men to target on the RLS-I project would be elders (as they are the ones involved in dispute resolution), it is less clear-cut for WfW-I's program. With the program having been designed to complement and gain support for the implementation of the women's engagement program, it might be thought that the best approach would be to invite male family members of the women participants, who might otherwise restrict their attendance. However, WfW-I believes, and learned, that it is important to include those with the most influence as well. They have criteria that 20 percent of participants should be *mullahs*, 20 percent community elders, 20 percent members of district *shuras*, and the remaining 40 percent be family members. The rationale

presented by WfW-I for taking this approach is that male community members follow the lead of their community leaders. Therefore, if community leaders change their behavior, others will follow.⁸⁸ Elders themselves explained the appropriateness of their inclusion in the target group during a FGD conducted in Nangarhar (See Box 8).

Box 8: Male Elders Pointing to the Authority and Influence They Hold in Their Communities

If an elder does anything [to give women their rights] everyone will give rights to them, and if an elder does not do anything and sits at home, the whole village will not do anything. Let's be honest with each other: if I do not give my daughter rights then no one will give them to her.

--Male elder FGD, Feb. 25, 2014

The men are decision makers in our society so more focus should be given to males first and then to females, according to the Sharia law and Islam. If an elder says anything then everyone will accept it.

--Male elder FGD, Feb. 25, 2014

If I as a malik start something and then another person like Malawi sahib starts something, then the whole village will do it.

--Male elder FGD, Feb. 25, 2014

Various respondents, including staff and female elders, recommended that young men also be targeted, with some expressing a desire for women's rights in Islam to be taught in schools. While these suggestions may be highly worthwhile, program designers argue that programs

⁸⁷ Interview with female fieldworker, RLS-I, Nangarhar, Feb. 27, 2014

⁸⁸ Interviews with a male and female member of WfW-I's senior management team, Kabul

have finite resources and timescales; for maximum impact given those restrictions, it is best to target those who have the most authority within target communities, they say. Given the constructs of masculinity referred to above, elders are also likely to be one of the most receptive groups to this information. Perhaps most important is that elders have the capacity and authority to act on the new knowledge and awareness they accumulate. This in itself is a significant motivating factor for ensuring male support for women's rights and empowerment. Younger men may not be in such a position.

I was only 14 years old when the Enqilaab [revolution] started and there was no education at university or madrassa. But the Rule of Law Project has supported us in such a way that if you talk with me about legal issues it is like I have graduated from a university. I can answer all the questions. If not 100 percent, I can answer your questions 80 or 70 percent, and I can debate with you easily. If you ask about inheritance, I can answer your question with 100 percent assurance. I trust myself that I have learned a lot about family disputes.⁸⁹

A wife has rights if she wants to separate from her husband, and there are steps on how she can get her rights from the husband. It is possible in different ways, such as the seven steps for divorce, separation, etc... If a man and woman are not interested to be together or marry, then they can abolish their engagement. You see there are a lot of posters from the teacher on the walls. We have learned all these issues and they are very interesting to us. Even some times, I teach my students about my studies.⁹⁰

It was clear during the data collection for this study that gaining knowledge was a motivator for male elders to engage in women's rights through these projects. The study found that there were three crucial factors for making knowledge an ongoing motivating factor, which were affected by the type of knowledge and the manner in which it was delivered: 1) knowledge about women's rights must be overtly about women's rights in Islam; 2) whomever delivers the knowledge must be viewed as an expert and have some status; 3) the manner in which the knowledge is delivered should not only be participatory, but also grounded in the lived reality of participants' lives.

Conducting the delivery of knowledge in an overtly Islamic framework serves two purposes: first, it encourages men to become involved in programming activities; and second, it gives men ammunition to support women's rights in their communities. RLS-I field staff reported that there was some resistance initially to the project in most communities. Staff pointed out how explaining that everything would be conducted according to *Sharia* principles⁹¹ was the first step in gaining male elders' acceptance:

⁸⁹ Male elder RLS-I, FGD in Nangarhar, Feb. 25, 2014

⁹⁰ Male elder WfW_I MEP, FGD in Kabul, March 19, 2014

⁹¹ It is important to note that the project would of course only condone *Sharia* as and when it is consistent with Afghan law. Indeed, elders often interpret Afghan state law and *Sharia* to be the same things as opposed to customary law (See the collection of papers by D J Smith for AREU on CBDR)

*For me, all the lessons are very interesting, especially the women issues, like the issues that are about divorce. But to be honest, all the lessons are very good and interesting. There is not lesson that is against the Sharia.*⁹²

The elder, in the quotation below, explains that learning according to *Sharia* gave him the legitimacy and supporting arguments to enforce this knowledge in his community:

*I went to them [three brothers] and asked the brother who would not give the inheritance [to his sisters], ‘Why don't you want to give them their right?’ The man said it is our tradition and people will talk bad about us. I said to him, “do you believe in Allah?” He said he did. So [I said], “If you believe in Allah, why don't you accept his orders and rules and regulations. We are Muslims and we should obey all of Islam’s rules. Who are you not to give to someone what Allah has given to a person, and who are you not to give to your sisters? You will be punished by Allah for your action.’ The person was really impressed and said he would agree to my decision.*⁹³

This last quotation highlights that the knowledge provided through any program about women’s rights needs to be relevant to program participants, rather than simply knowledge in abstraction. WfW-I’s MEP has a very specific link to the WEP, and is designed to ensure that men permit and support women’s activities on this project as an outcome of their knowledge accumulation. The design of RLS-I also demanded that elders bring cases they were actually resolving to discussion sessions and workshops for discussion and consultation with experts on *Sharia* and Afghan law.

The relevance and value of the knowledge elders received through this program motivated them to support women in achieving their rights, as evidenced by elders’ stories of their regrets about previous decisions they had made, and situations where they are returning to and revising such decisions. Two examples of this are provided in Box 9.

⁹² Male participant WfW-I MEP FGD in Kabul, March 12, 2014

⁹³ Male elder and jirgamaran speaking during an FGD in Nangarhar, Feb. 25, 2014

Box 9: Elders Regret Previous Decisions

I decided in a jirga about an inheritance issue between brothers and sisters 12 years ago, but now again that jirga has referred back to us for another issue. No, I think the decision I made 12 years ago was wrong and now I do not accept it....There were four people in the jirga and I was writing stuff down and my signature is there. It was a dispute between cousins about land. There was another issue about the sister's rights to the land as well, and during that time the sister was not married. We were not aware they had a sister as well. At that time, we distributed the land among the cousins and did not distribute any part to the sister. At that time (laughing) that Mollawi Sahib is there with maliks, the issue was decided, but now it is not good and not according to the Sharia. My other friends were asking me to please sign it, as we made a good decision at that time and we all agreed, but now I am the one who does not accept it. They ask me, why I do not accept this? I told them, no, it is not according to Sharia and it is all due to the trainings that I have received from the Rule of Law Project.

--Male Elder FGD, Feb. 25, 2014

The decision was wrong, as we did not separate any land for her part of the inheritance. She was the daughter of the family and had a right to the land... I will block the decision as long as that lady does not get her rights. We have made this one of our top priorities, and we have a responsibility to conduct such trainings to other elders in the community so that they also learn something.

--Male Elder FGD, Feb. 25, 2014

Indeed, male elders spoke with pride when recounting how they had supported women's rights and made decisions in favor of women in their communities. In contrast to the men spoken to in the advocacy case study, they never reported being teased by peers for defending women's rights. Instead, there was an implication that using *Sharia* principles to defend women's rights could raise status. In a similar manner, a *spinsaary* recounted how she persuaded her husband to accept her involvement in dispute resolution in the community by arguing that it would increase the family's status.

If my husband did not allow me, I could not do anything for people. I explained to him why I want to work [to resolve disputes] and why I want to work for the women. It is really good for me that I work among people as an elder, and everyone knows me and respects me, because we can get some position and have some authority in the community.⁹⁴

As discussed above, resolving disputes in a just manner and maintaining peace and protecting the weak are all expected masculine characteristics for older Afghan men. Defending women's rights can easily sit beside these other characteristics as a desirable masculine characteristic for this group of Afghan men.

Showing respect to these influential men in their communities is also important when programs make decisions about who facilitates workshops, courses, discussion sessions, and so forth.

⁹⁴ Women elder speaking during FGD in Nangarhar, Feb. 25, 2014

This was also raised, if not discussed in great detail, for both programs. One elder expressed the opinion in relation to the RLS-I program that the workshops were conducted by people who were “not small,” but who were from the courts and university teachers. This appeared to be an important motivating factor for him.⁹⁵ A WfW-I trainer is from the community, and there were some clear advantages to this. For instance, the trainer himself reported that men would come to seek his advice outside of the course on matters of women’s rights in family law. However, one senior staff member at WfW-I raised concerns that she felt the trainer was too close to the community and therefore would compromise too easily in terms of attendance and who attended the course.

b. Perceivable change, for the better, in family and community life through women’s empowerment

Programming for women’s empowerment should achieve perceivable positive changes to family and community life in order for male community members to support it. Two areas of change recognized as important motivators for men are changes in women’s behavior in the family, and a positive outcome for the community overall. Men and women working together to elicit change is also important.

Field staff working on both programs expressed the opinion that working on issues of women’s rights and empowerment is not simply about raising awareness of women’s rights in Islam, but of women’s responsibilities as well. Motivating men has to move beyond a dichotomous representation that portrays men as aggressors and abusers of women’s rights and women as passive victims. Both the WfW-I program and the RLS-I project therefore acknowledge that responsibility lies with both men and women. Interestingly, most of those who argued this perspective were women. (See Box 10)

It should be noted that some of the things said by field staff, trainers, and female respondents verged on blaming women for their husbands’ bad behavior, accusing the women of not showing the men enough respect or not doing their domestic work correctly. Programs or projects promoting aspects of women’s responsibilities alongside men’s in achieving women’s rights must tread a careful line, lest the messaging come across as either solely blaming men for the abuse of women’s rights, or blaming women for causing men to abuse their rights.⁹⁶

⁹⁵ Male elder speaking during FGD Nangarhar, Feb. 26, 2014

⁹⁶ It is common in Afghanistan for male violence to be blamed on a woman in the family; for instance, if wives behave ‘correctly’ and mother-in-laws do not encourage sons to be violent, men would not be violent. For a discussion of this issue see Smith D. J. (2009) *Decisions, Desires and Diversity: Marriage Practices in Afghanistan*. AREU: Kabul

Box 10: Women's Behavior Change Motivating Men

The change in the behavior of women (villagers) motivated the men (villagers) to allow their wives to attend trainings and learn about their rights. Therefore some of the men (villagers) were requesting us to invite their wives as well in the trainings.

--Female fieldworker in FGD Staff RLS-I

Now the men are very happy because those women who are illiterate, they were not able to count (1.2.3...), but now they know how to spend money and how to do planning. Now they know based on their income how they should spend money. This gives very good impression to the men in the family.

--Female participant of WEP, Kabul, March 12, 2014

They are very happy and allow us to attend the classes because now we have learned about a lot of issues, like preventing a new birth (family planning). At the beginning, the females were not aware of such issues. Now people are happy and thankful for such courses.

--Female participant of WEP, Kabul, March 13, 2014

Our men are very happy and satisfied from this program, because the training that is very good for us and our behavior has changed towards our husbands.

--Female participant of WEP, Kabul, March 12, 2014

The approach that resonated most with this study's respondents is one in which men and women work together to improve the overall well-being of the community, including support for women's rights and empowerment. For WfW-I programs, this related primarily to men's and women's relations in the context of the family and domestic arena, as this was the focus of much of the WEP program.

Women said that from the time men joined these classes, their behavior changed a lot. In the past, when a man came home, everything had to be good and ready for him, but now he helps us with the house chores too. We had some women who

*didn't have good behavior with their husbands either, but when they came to classes they changed, so men and women are happy.*⁹⁷

Another trainer pointed to the idea of men and women improving their economic status in partnership with each other:

*Men have the same problems as women. We can include husbands and wives in our training and can teach them how to build their business. We must create some more work for men, because if a woman can't sell her products, her husband should sell them; or if the man goes to the bazaar, his wife must be in the store and they must help each other and improve their business.*⁹⁸

The RLS-I project similarly enhanced the way men and women were able to work together to resolve disputes. Male elders sought the support of *spinsaary* if investigations inside a household needed to be undertaken. While these processes existed prior to the program, the program was able to strengthen them and give men and women more confidence in working together like this. The area most often recounted during FGDs is that male elders, and specifically *maliks*, provided support to *spinsaary* in their resolution of disputes. Several instances of this were shared with the study team. These examples provide evidence both of how men engaged

⁹⁷ Interview with female WfW-I trainer, Kabul, March 12, 2014

⁹⁸ Interview female WfWI trainer, Kabul, March 9, 2014

in and supported women's empowerment through program activities, and how men and women worked together to defend women's rights.

One such story is presented in Box 11. While this is quite an extreme example of abuse, female FGD participants relayed stories of less-abusive cases in which *maliks* and other elders had supported them in resolving disputes. It was clear that the men were needed to support women's empowerment as resolvers of disputes in the community until such a time that women's authority in this area is more fully established.

One reason provided to explain why male elders support women in their dispute resolution is that their specific roles benefit the whole community. The quotation below from a member of a explains how the group had to prove their capabilities to the village before they were accepted:

*I said before, when I joined the spinsaary group, we were introduced to the malik as a group of women that has been created to solve disputes among women. At the beginning, people did not trust us. But after we tried hard and solved problems among villagers they started to trust and allowed us to do this work.*⁹⁹

It is specifically disputes related to children¹⁰⁰ and women, as well as disputes that happen within the more private realm of the family, that women receive support from men to resolve. Disputes that involve women, particularly if they are not resolved within the village and are therefore escalated to the district level, are viewed as bringing shame on the village and specifically its elders. *Spinsaary* demonstrated their ability to resolve such disputes and prevent them from reaching district-level authorities, and was therefore a key motivator for elders to support them in their activities. The quotation below points to how *spinsaary* involvement in dispute resolution was seen as maintaining village honor:

*One village woman came to me and told me in a very quiet way that two women were fighting with each other, and they had applied to woliswal, but instead of that they should come to you and solve the problem with you. When I heard that I was shocked that women would take such a small issue to the district level. After that I went to malik and told him the story. He told me it is not good that women take such small things out of the village. It was good that he called the district and told them to not accept the case, and he turned them back to the village. After that, the malik appreciated our (spinsaary group) and told me I had done a great job.*¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ Female elder speaking during FGD Nangarhar, Feb. 25, 2014

¹⁰⁰ Many disputes in Afghanistan, even those that lead to the deaths of several adults, begin as fights between children. One example was a fight over a game of marbles in a district of Nangarhar that resulted in the deaths of four adult men from the children's families when they joined the fight (per field staff RLS-I Nangarhar 2010)

¹⁰¹ Female elder speaking during FGD Nangarhar, Feb. 25, 2014

Box 11: Story of Male support for Women’s Empowerment in Dispute Resolution

There is another hard and sad story, of what an old woman did to her daughter-in-law. She tied up and imprisoned her [daughter-in-law] next to the gate like a dog. She gave only a little food to her daughter-in-law, like a dog. Her daughter-in-law looked very dirty and her clothes looked very old. I asked the old woman, why do you make and do such unbelievable and cruel behavior with your daughter-in-law? When I talked with that old woman about why she was treating her daughter-in-law in that manner she said that when her son got married her son-in-law’s family got 100,000 Afs and therefore they had to borrow money from people who the family had not been able to pay back. And because of that her son had gone to Kandahar to work with the Afghan National Army. When I told the old woman to stop such cruelty, she did not pay attention to me and told me, it’s not your business and go away from here.

Therefore, I do need a man to help me to solve a problem of this kind in the village. After that I went and I asked malik to help me and he called the young woman’s husband When the young woman’s husband returned he promised to malik that he would give 2000 Afs per month to his wife. I followed up on that for one-and-a-half month. The husband also promised the malik that his family would not make any more problems for his wife. The malik told him he should give us some letter of guarantee. The husband’s mother and father signed a letter and put their fingerprints on the paper to sign it. After that I gave that letter to malik and told him to keep it. So I took that case seriously and solved the problem for that woman.

--Female elder, Nangarhar, Feb. 25, 2014

While discussed less often, benefits to the whole community were also an important factor in motivating men in the WfW-I’s MEP, as a senior staff member described:

We had one example in Nangarhar, where we were teaching animal husbandry.... One elder said that before the course they were blind and they didn’t know their rights and roles were in Islam, and now they see what those are, and also women’s rights and roles in the community and family. The men want the men’s program extended; they want more of it.¹⁰²

It is far more likely that men will support programs that enhance women’s rights and empowerment if programming has positive outcomes for men, women, and the entire community. To paraphrase a senior RLS-I staff member, “men aren’t going to support rubbish programming for women – they have had enough of that.”¹⁰³

Case Studies B and C: Conclusion

The examination of these case studies found that male engagement in women’s rights and empowerment – like all gender mainstreaming approaches – needs to be part of the initial design of any program, project, or activity, rather than an after-thought. This review of programming case studies has highlighted specific ways in which male staff can be motivated to engage in and support women’s rights and empowerment. The most important is providing evidence of female staff capabilities, and what these types of programs can achieve to improve the quality of life. Similarly, the accumulation of knowledge is a key motivator for male program participants. The way in which new knowledge is provided to elders is especially important, and

¹⁰² Interview with senior staff member, WFWI, March 13, 2014

¹⁰³ Interview with senior staff member, RLS-I, Feb. 20, 2014

should be delivered within an overtly Islamic framework. Finally, in order for men to support women's rights and empowerment activities, there must be perceivable benefits to not only individual women, but also their families and larger communities as an outcome of program initiatives.

CASE STUDY D: THE ICT SECTOR - MALE SUPPORT FOR WOMEN WORKING IN A MALE-DOMINATED SECTOR

This case study, focusing on women's employment in the information and communications technology (ICT) sector, is different from the previous advocacy and programming case studies because the ICT sector does not have an explicit aim to empower women or help them achieve their rights. Nevertheless, women's economic empowerment and increased opportunities for women in the labor market are widely recognized as important factors in changing gender hierarchies. ICT is a male-dominated sector globally, but in Afghanistan it appears to be an industry attracting more and more women.

This case study considers women's engagement in the sector, as well as how men have facilitated or hindered women's employment and career progression. However, it is important to contextualize this by exploring gender dynamics in the sector more generally, including attitudes toward women's employment in the ICT industry. Consequently, the case study analysis begins by briefly describing the support women received from family members. The next section examines why women are attracted to study computer science and pursue careers in this field. The third section explores how women got their jobs at the two software development companies in which most of the respondents work. The third section discusses why male owner/managers of these companies were motivated to employ a largely female workforce. The fourth section discusses assumptions about women's capacity for ICT work. The final section explores respondent's hopes for the future and their recommendations for how to enhance women's prospects in the industry.

Why women chose this sector

The women respondents gave a variety of reasons for why they had been attracted to studying and working in the ICT sector. For some, it was because they felt it was a sector where women were needed, and that through working in the sector they could support other women with ICT needs. One woman reported that it was because there were already quite a few women working in this sector.¹⁰⁴ Others believed it would allow them to gain paid employment without overly challenging gender norms; because it was a neat and clean job that was desk-based or even home-based, and did not require women to work 'outside.'¹⁰⁵ One woman reported studying this subject because she felt it was important for women to know about ICT so that as mothers

¹⁰⁴ This is contradicted by the opinion of others who still think very few women are working in the ICT industry. Overall there are mixed opinions on numbers and how common it is for women to study computer science and work in the industry. It is not possible using the qualitative explorative data collected for this study to even make an estimate as to numbers. However, based on the opinions of those spoken to, ICT is a sector that more and more women are attracted to studying and working in.

¹⁰⁵ The term 'outside' was frequently used by respondents to this study, who are referring to work done outside of the office or home rather than literally outside.

they can help their children use ICT. For a couple of women it was simply wanting to know how computers work; sheer curiosity that in one case had driven one particular woman to take computer science classes after she had completed her undergraduate degree in another subject. Only one woman of those spoken to reported the potential to earn a high income as a motivating factor for entering the field.

For one woman, she pursued a job in ICT because her mother worked in the field and had encouraged her daughter to study computer science. This is the only example of a woman directly reporting a female role model, her mother, as being the inspiration behind her work in the ICT sector; although one other woman said seeing her mother and aunts going out to work made her want to earn her own income and to become independent. The lack of reference to role models probably reflects the fact that ICT is a relatively new sector in Afghanistan, and so few women have yet to reach career heights in this industry.

Family support

The family has not been a unit of analysis for this study, nor has the study focused on men supporting the empowerment of women in their families. Nevertheless, in this case study, as with the other case studies, female respondents discussed the support they had received from family members, and identified support from male family members, as essential for their success. While the question was asked in a general way, female respondents overall placed greater emphasis on the support they received from male family members, particularly fathers, over female family members. It is difficult to tell whether the reality is that these women received more support from their male family members than from females, whether they were influenced to provide this answer because of the subject of the study, or whether it is because power in the family is held by males and consequently these women realize that without the support of their fathers (or other male family members) they would not have been able to study or pursue their careers.

Fathers' level of formal education was highlighted by the women as influencing whether their father supported them or not. Some reported that because their father and other members of the family were educated they had been supported in their chosen field of study and career. However, others reported that a lack of education among relatives was the motivation. Masooma,¹⁰⁶ in Herat, reported that her father is uneducated but always says, "just because I didn't study is not a reason you should not." In another example from Herat, Saleema reports that her family is educated, "even my mother who is a housewife." She contrasts this with her father's brother who did not have an education, and says that because of this he did not bring up his children properly and does not care about their education. Attitudes toward education are important because there is often an assumption that educated Afghans have more liberal attitudes toward women's rights than their uneducated counterparts, which is not necessarily the case. This assumption can restrict approaches to women's empowerment and rights achievement.

¹⁰⁶ All names have been changed.

Women also provided concrete examples of the support they receive from male family members. For example, fathers sometimes pick up their daughters from university or from work, particularly if they had to work late. In one example, a woman reported that her father not only collects her and takes her home, but he also takes her female colleagues home. The same woman, who is a company owner/manager, explained how her father ensured that her husband would not prevent her career progress:

Before I got married, my father was supportive and then he invited my now-husband over to negotiate my freedom. My father told my husband, “look, my daughter had the freedom to choose and she works sometimes late at night and she comes home late. I have never had a problem with that. Do you have a problem with that?” My husband told him he was also fine with the way I live my life.¹⁰⁷

Another woman in Kabul reported how criticism of her career and lifestyle by other members of the community did not bother her because her family, and her father in particular, was dealing with it on her behalf.

Brothers were mentioned by a couple of women as being particularly supportive, identifying courses for their sisters to attend. In one case, it was the woman’s brother who found her her first job. Mothers were also referred to as supportive, even if less often. One woman reported that her mother exempted her from all housework so she could focus on her studies. The woman (mentioned above) pointed to her mother, who also works in the ICT sector, as being an important source of motivation and support. Women highlighted the influence of aunts and uncles as well.

How women were employed by these companies

While male family support is clearly crucial due to gender hierarchies in Afghanistan, in all but two cases the women secured jobs through their own networks and capacity. All but two of the women interviewed had studied computer science as their undergraduate degree. Interestingly, the only two women who had not studied computer science were the two owner/managers of ICT companies. Attending university with men in the Herat and Kabul was vital to the women establishing and cementing networks that have allowed them to secure employment or further their careers in the ICT sector. Further, women have been able to access new networks through ICT trainings. Not only did the opportunity to study alongside men increase the women’s networks, it also provided an opportunity for the men to see women’s capabilities in this area of work, which convinced male classmates to employ these women when they set up their own companies. In both companies studied, a key female already connected to the company’s owner/managers further assisted the employment and career progression of other females.

¹⁰⁷ Woman company owner/manager, Kabul, March 12, 2014

Six partners (five men and one woman), who had all met at university, initially set up the company in Herat. The two female employee respondents in Herat also met the company owners at university. It is important to note that the female partner was forced to give up her work after marriage. In addition to doing software development, this company provides training and receives funding from USAID's Afghanistan Workforce Development Program (AWDP) for its training activities. The female respondents who were employed by the company had all attended one of these trainings.

The six young women who worked at the software development company in Kabul had all met while working at a previous company as software developers.¹⁰⁸ One of the company's owner/managers, Basir, also worked with them at the previous company. One of these young women, Jamila (and perhaps others), had been at university with the three software development company owner/managers. While they were working together at the previous company, Basir was also running software development training courses through a grantee of the AWDP program. Through Jamila he encouraged the other five girls to attend the training. By this point, these six young women had decided that they wanted to set up their own company, but felt they lacked the financial capital and business development skills to do so. Basir and his two owner/manager partners had just registered and set up their software development company, so they persuaded these six women to come and work for them. The women were the only employees of the company at that stage. Basir argues that his connection to Jamila from university was the key to bringing other women into the company.

Male company owners' motivations

In both cases, men who owned and managed the two companies that employed relatively large numbers of women knew of the women's skills, as they had either been at university with them or had been involved in providing training to them. However, just knowing the women's abilities is unlikely a sufficient motivator to employ these young women in a sector that is traditionally male-dominated. As the quotations in Box 12 illustrate, while women's capacity is important, women's acceptance of lower salaries compared to men, and being perceived as harder workers, are also very important factors motivating these men to choose to employ women over men. It simply makes good business sense.

¹⁰⁸ While the introduction to these women was through the ICT company in Kabul, none of the six women are still working there, as the company is struggling and has had to lay them off. All except one are still working in ICT, but we kept the research primarily focused on the ICT Company as this had been identified as part of the positive case study.

Box 12: Motivations for Employing Women: Women are Cheaper and Harder Working

One of the reasons we hire women is their capability: they are gentle and delicate in their approach to the product. Men do not have this capacity to build a good and attractive product design. Therefore, in the design section, we have hired only women, who can make a very well-designed product for the company. Also, they require a lower salary, which is good for the company. One web-site payment is much less than if we paid a man.

--Male company owner/Manager, Herat, March 23, 2014

It has its own reasons [that we employ women]. Women can do things that men cannot. For example, I cannot work from home. I am interested in working from 8 – 4, but later than that I want to go and enjoy my life with friends. But women can work even during the night. For example, we have given work to women who are interested in working during the night.

--Male company owner/Manager, Herat, March 23, 2014

The problem is that men have more expectations. If you hire a man to work, you need to pay him a lot of money, and we are not able to pay them that amount of money. Economically, the company is not in a situation to pay that much, but with less than a month's worth of money, we had women who were interested to work for us and who could do the work the same [as a man].

--Male company owner/Manager, Herat, March 23, 2014

Because women are harder working and work honestly, but also because women are good managers and they conduct their work in a good manner.

--Company owner/manager Kabul, March, 2014

The manager of the training company in Kabul – which also helps trainees find jobs – concurred that women will work for less money. Because of this, he said, it is easier to find jobs for women after their training courses. He said some women will accept lower salaries than they earned at their previous jobs, but men would never do this. However, opinions of women's willingness to work long hours and so on vary. One of the women owner/managers directly contradicts the man cited in Box 12, who asserts that women are more likely to work late into the evenings than men:

We have girls working in software, as database and web developers. When I am hiring, I think as a business person and see the profit in hiring boys who will work late, and boys are more accepted [in the industry].¹⁰⁹

As the quotations in Box 12 make clear, there is a business imperative for company owner/managers to employ women. However, the male owner respondent also seemed to genuinely support women's advancement in the ICT industry. At times respondents reported that their method of operation matched women's needs, with advantages to the company. This was the case for the company in Herat that had a female workforce working from home. One of the owner/managers reported that this provided an enabling environment for women, and allowed them to undertake both paid work and domestic responsibilities, as well as comply with societal norms that demand women stay at home. However, in an interview with the other partner in

¹⁰⁹ Woman owner/manager, Kabul, March 12, 2014

the company, it was made clear that it was also less costly for the company to have its employees work at home. Indeed, their office is far too small to have all the staff work from there. Men would not be happy to work from home as societal norms demand that men go 'out' to work.

The same manager reported contacting potential female employees' families to persuade them to allow them to work with his company. He made it clear that he recognized the problems that women face in undertaking paid employment.

The women employees also reported that the men they worked for are generally supportive and created a good working environment. In the case of the company in Kabul, they have moved offices, partially because the men working in the area around the first office were harassing the women working there. However, there were other issues with the first office, so the harassment was not the sole reason for moving. Still, the company is very reliant on these women, who are very skilled and working for a very low salary.

In the example of the Kabul Company, it is not quite as simple as employing women because they are more cost-effective. This group of six women made a conscious and strategic decision to work for this company for a low wage. The women themselves wanted to set up their own company, but recognized they did not have the business knowledge to do so. Seeing that their male contacts had already registered their new company, they decided to work for this other start-up as a good way to learn about establishing their own business in the future. It was reported that the male company manager/owners are supportive and encouraging of the women and let them run their projects independently. The team of six women reported learning to work independently and gaining both new technical skills and the knowledge to set up a company.

In summary, male company owners/managers have mixed reasons for employing women in their ICT businesses. These include: their knowledge of women's demonstrated ICT skills in the field; women agreeing to work for less money; women being perceived as harder working; and, last but not least, the research team agreed these men have a genuine personal commitment to encouraging greater numbers of women to work in this sector. One of the female employee respondents felt the men in the ICT industry were likely to be supportive because this is a young sector dominated by a younger generation of men who are more open minded:

I think the young generation is more open-minded than the older generation, and since this is a new field, I think the younger generation behaves more open toward it and doesn't divide it between boys and girls.¹¹⁰

Female employee respondents also believe that their employment (albeit with lower salaries) has provided them with an opportunity to prove themselves. While no one said it directly, the implication was that women would be chosen over men in this sector because of their low

¹¹⁰ Woman employed in the ICT sector in Herat, March 23, 2014

salary demands, not because of their skills. This is explained below, by one of the young women who work for the ICT Company in Kabul:

*I see a change in men who work in the ICT sector. At the beginning, they thought women are not working equal to men in this field, but later on, when they saw we are working in a very good way, they changed. I also think that women are working harder than men. We proved this when working [at the company]. When we were working with [the company], they said that if we give these six girls a task they do it in a very good way and in a short time. They wanted to find a really difficult job for us to see if we could do it or not. But they couldn't find anything that we couldn't do!*¹¹¹

Assumptions regarding women's capacities in the ICT industry

The opinion expressed in the first quotation in Box 12 above points to an assumption about women's capabilities compared to men. The male owner/manager quoted argues that women are better at design because they have a "gentle" and "delicate" approach to it. These types of assumptions about male and female abilities within the ICT sector came from all respondents, both male and female, and are divided into two types: assumptions about women's 'natural' capabilities compared to men; and assumptions about what women could do because of their position in society.

Assumptions about women's natural capacities

The assumptions regarding distinct natural abilities among men and women were voiced by both male and female respondents. The assumption by the man in the first quotation in Box 12 is shared by one of the female company owner/managers from Kabul, Shukria, who also argues that most ICT work is too hard for women, and that women are just good at the 'soft parts', like web-designing. Indeed, these two owner managers, one male and one female, had the least confidence in women's abilities outside of the design field. The Kabul focus group discussion provided an opportunity for other women in the ICT sector to convince Shukria that she is wrong in her opinions about women's natural capabilities. An excerpt from the FGD is provided in Box 13.

In this conversation, Shukria starts by believing women are not capable of working successfully in software development and coding, which was the primary area of work of most of the other women at the FGD. Their personal experience of being successful in this area allows them to challenge her. Despite this, they themselves also rely on essentialist presumptions about women's characteristics to argue they are even better than men at coding. This – that either men were better than women or women were better than men – was a common theme throughout all discussions during this case study.

¹¹¹ Woman ICT company employee, Kabul, March 6, 2014

While debate surrounded women's and men's capabilities as website designers and software developers, one area that was almost universally purported *not* to be a suitable area of ICT for women to work is networking. Even some of the most ambitious young women in the case study said networking is not really for women, or that women are not attracted to it. Networking was described as too physically demanding. As one highly ambitious young woman in Kabul argued, she did not want to work in networking because it is 'mannish' work that requires setting up equipment and physical strength: "You have to use a hammer and screwdriver!"¹¹² One of the female company owner/managers from Kabul, Fawzia, described women's abilities

Box 13: Excerpt from FGD with Women Discussing Women's Capabilities

Company owner: The ICT field is a neat job for women and this attracts them.

Shukria: No this is not a neat and easy job We should not forget that men are doing a better job in coding and software development because those are difficult for women. But you are right that in graphic design girls do a better job. Men have a natural color blindness so they might not do a good job selecting colors.

Company owner: And men are not able to recognize beauty?

Employee: Did you say... that men are better at writing codes? But this is untrue. When we worked atgirls were doing a better job of coding, their codes were more organized.

Employee: When writing codes, if the rules and regulations are not observed, the second developer will never understand those codes. Usually boys do not observe that and they write mixed codes but girls do it more carefully.....

Shukria: Yes, coding is like embroidery: not only should the front look nice and neat, but so should its back.

Employee: Women are very neat and their codes can be understood and read by anyone.

Shukria : But there are certain ICT services that men pay more attention to.

Company owner: Because men have more opportunities to learn and to practice, but women are restricted by their social roles and responsibilities.

Employee: Yes men have more opportunities to practice. When we were at university, the girls used to go to class and leave the university as soon as the class was finished but the boys did not leave, and they used to stay and spend time in the library and computer labs.

--All Women FGD March 15, 2014

and perceptions of their abilities in cyber security as having similar limitations. However, she believes it is up to women to overcome these restrictions and gain acceptance.

*Cyber security is tough and hard because it needs ladders and we must connect the security cameras and we must be in some high places... It is not that women cannot do that... It depends on the situation because women will not go up the ladder.*¹¹³

Later, in the same conversation, she revealed that she has actually done the 'heavy' side of ICT work, laying cables, and insisted she is better at it than a man with whom she works. This is

¹¹² Employee in the ICT sector, Kabul, March 6, 2014

¹¹³ Female company owner, Kabul, March 15, 2014

another example of people, men and women, needing proof of women's capabilities in the sector in order to employ them in a variety of tasks and support their advancement (rather than assuming their capability). This proof, in the case of women, can come from their own experience of undertaking tasks, or for both men and women in witnessing other women complete tasks successfully.

Some of the young women working in the ICT sector seemed to be debating with themselves the tasks women can and cannot do, even during interviews and the FGDs. The quote below is from one of the young women who worked for the company in Herat. She discussed whether women can or cannot undertake networking. She said it is not for women, but as the interview progresses, she began to change her mind. She came to the conclusion that women can in fact do these tasks, and like many of the other young female respondents, believes it is up to women to take on such tasks and prove to themselves and to others their potential and capabilities.

We have three sections: software, database, and networking. Networking is not good for girls, so girls think it is not for them... That section requires more power and physical strength... well, it doesn't need so much strength but it is physical work, and you have to be present on the site to fix the network or computers, and this is not culturally good for girls. I think it is not about physical strength but more that the situation doesn't allow it... I can work from home or online, but for networking you have to be present... I don't think a girl would like to climb the roof to fix a dish antenna for the Internet, because people don't think it is good for a girl so she will not try this... Yes we can change this, but it will take time until girls decide to prove themselves in all kinds of work, and accept whatever people say about them.¹¹⁴

The focus group discussion with women working in the ICT sector followed a similar pattern in that there was initial resistance from some participants about women's capabilities and potential to work in certain areas, but after discussion most started to agree that women could work in any field they choose.

Assumptions regarding women's employment limitations due to gender structures in Afghanistan

Discussions of women's potential as website designers, software developers, and to a degree their capacity for networking work all relate to perceptions about women's 'natural' characteristics. Perceptions about women's ability to provide technical support to different organizations and to undertake marketing and sales roles are influenced by women's position in gender structures, specifically the sex-segregation of public spaces. Normative restrictions limiting women's access to male-dominated spaces increase harassment of women in such spaces, increase fears of harassment or physical attack, make some women feel uncomfortable entering such spaces, and encourage employers to prevent women from entering such spaces.

¹¹⁴ Employee in the ICT sector, Herat, March 23, 2014

Like most areas of the ICT sector, women's potential to fulfill these roles was under discussion and opinions were not fixed. In both these areas, for some it is women's fears that prevent them from undertaking these tasks, while others expressed the opinion that men are resistant to women undertaking these tasks. Fawzia, one of the female company owners, explained that other people will not accept women fixing their computers. For a male company owner, however, women working in the industry do not want to go to offices and fix peoples' computers:

Box 14: Perceptions of Women's Capacity to Work in Marketing

So our problem is doing our promotion and marketing activities, going out, talking to clients. But they are mostly paying attention to our appearance and our clothing.

--Young female employee, Kabul, March 15, 2014.

Boys are more familiar with the market. Boys can easily go to the shops, private schools, private hospital, and all private sector places to do their promotion and show their demos and make people aware of existing computer software that can make their business life easy. Since many Afghans are not aware of the IT facilities, it can take a long time to make them understand, and it is not appropriate for a girl to go outside and meet with various kinds of people for extended periods of time.

--Female employee, Kabul, March 5, 2014.

We have a lot of challenges. When we decided to start our own company, everybody told us it is difficult for girls to go and get a license, to do marketing and promotion work outside of the office.

--Female employee, Kabul, March 6, 2014

As I said, women can easily work like a man in coding sector... [but] if we ask the women to go to the ministries and fix their laptops or their connections to the Internet, the women will not do this as they are afraid of the environment. Therefore, men get the most positions.¹¹⁵

One of the young women who had previously worked for the Kabul-based company is now working at a government training institute, which is part of the Ministry of Education. She is primarily responsible for laboratory computers, but wishes to have a larger role in helping staff when they have problems with their computers. She reported that staff do not call her, and instead always ask her male colleagues. She is aiming to change this situation:

I am in the process of removing one challenge in my work environment. I am trying to convince my male colleagues and prove that I am as capable as a man and I can go and fix their computers.¹¹⁶

Perceptions about women's ability to conduct marketing and sales are one of the biggest challenges for the young women in Kabul who wanted to set up their own company (See Box 14). However, respondents did not agree that their gender is the only reason marketing is a struggle for them. The woman quoted last in Box 14 recalled a story of a trip a group of young women made to a hospital to introduce their software. She described the difficulties they faced because potential clients were not interested or did not have time for them. She attributed these "excuses" to the fact that they are women. However, one of her female colleagues sees the situation

¹¹⁵ Interview with male owner/manager of ICT company in Kabul, March 5, 2014

¹¹⁶ Interview with young woman ICT company employee, Kabul, March 10, 2014

differently, and believes it is related to a broader problem of people not understanding ICT and the benefits it can bring to their organizations. When asked why it is easier for men, one of her colleagues said it is because men are taken more seriously.

Fawzia, who owns her company with a male partner, explained that initially she was responsible for finding new projects and marketing, while her partner was responsible for technical aspects of their work. She stated very strongly that women can do marketing, and that she was able to overcome the challenges that were presented to her:

When I was going to the Ministry of Defense, it was unacceptable for them to see a woman coming to sign a contract or make a business deal. Even though they didn't like that I am a woman, they would respect me and quickly finish my paperwork. There are a lot of women who get projects by fulfilling a lot of other expectations, but I never did that – I had a man-like style... I did not feel shy, not talking in a nazdana¹¹⁷ manner, and I used to be very strict, direct, and tough.... Yes, it worked in the beginning. Men thought I was one of the nice girls, but later they would see that I was very tough and they would respect me more and work with me in a better way.^{118,119}

However, as the interview progressed, Fawzia said she has experienced problems when talking to potential clients. She attributes this to her being a good Muslim woman and wearing hijab, and as a consequence clients are uncomfortable asking for a bribe. To overcome this, they decided that her partner or a marketing officer should be the one who goes out and meets potential clients.

Fawzia and Shukria (the other woman who owns her own company in partnership with her husband) both agree that women can visit and deal with certain clients. They provide examples of NGOs and banks as places woman can go. They also, however, agree that construction¹²⁰ and trading companies are businesses with which women cannot.

It was more my husband who dealt with the business, with the outside kind of companies where there are more men. But with NGOs and organizations, it is easy for a woman to work too... Some of our clients are from trading companies, and it is very difficult for me to talk to those people, as I don't know if the client is a good man who will behave respectfully towards a woman. For example, we are starting a new section for content development for websites, and we don't want to hire a woman for this section, because we are not sure if a woman is able to safely go to a construction company to talk to them in order to develop the content and text for their website. Girls in the marketing section can be harassed by the male company owners.¹²¹

¹¹⁷ Nasdana is a difficult word to translate, but essentially means a child who is treated as special and precious. An only girl in a family of many boys might be brought up to be nazdana, for instance. A child who doesn't like to get their hands or clothes dirty could be referred to as nazdana. When using the word to talk about an adult it means that an adult is behaving like a nazdana child. The word is usually used to refer to girl children but can be used for boy children too.

¹¹⁸ Woman company owner/manager, Kabul, March 12, 2014

¹¹⁹ Nazdana means childish or spoiled

¹²⁰ Fauzia then goes on to provide an example exception to construction companies not being a good place to go.

¹²¹ Female company owner, Kabul, March 13, 2014

Whereas the young women in Kabul who wish to set up their own company believe that potential clients do not take women seriously, and Fawzia feels clients believe women would not be treated the same as men, Shukria actually thinks women are not physically safe if they try to market to men in certain industries. This threat to women's personal safety was also raised by one of the male company owners from Kabul. He feels it would be unsafe for women to work in the provinces outside Kabul.

Box 15: Change Will Come from Women Themselves

We girls have to work hard to prove that a girl can also work as a software developer. When we worked at [company name] and another company, others offered us work then. It was very encouraging that people have started accepting girls as software developers.

--Female employee, Kabul, March 10, 2014

As I said, it depends on women to come out to prove themselves; and this way people will slowly start to accept them... Mostly men, but also women, because they also don't think highly of women who are working outside

--Female employee, Herat, March 23, 2014

I think women themselves should change, and present themselves more seriously. I mean, women should go out with more confidence and should not feel weak.

--Female employee, Herat, March 23, 2014

I think it is directly dependent on women. Women have to show their ability to them [men in ICT]. They need to recruit girls to show how good they are... We can convince them by using technology and science. We must show them our work ability.

--Female employee, Kabul, March 6, 2014.

Without having spoken to potential clients of ICT services or conducted a sufficiently broad survey of the ICT sector, it is difficult to assess whether clients would in fact be very resistant to women marketing ICT products. It is also difficult to assess how much of the resistance to women working in this sector is based on real experience, or merely misplaced assumptions. Despite this, it is clear, whether based on reality or merely assumption, the limitations women face in freely moving in male-dominated public spaces is a particularly strong hindrance to women's progress in the ICT sector.¹²²

Case Study D: Conclusion

This case study provides cautious hope that men are willing to not only accept but also encourage women's entry into the ICT sector. The male company owners, both through networks established at university and through training courses employed and supported young newly-graduated women in their ICT companies. While some of the business reasons for doing so – such as women accepting lower salaries – may not benefit women in the long term, hiring them

¹²²It should be noted that no one thought women lacked marketing or client liaison capacity per se. The company in Herat specifically employed women to market their products to girls' schools; others expressed the opinion that women should market to female-dominated businesses. The male company owner/managers in Herat wanted to set up a sister company staffed by women to offer ICT services to women. In suggesting this they obviously felt the best way forward for business would be to comply with norms of sex-segregation. However, in the long term this approach would only serve to segregate women in the ICT sector

provided women an opportunity to convince men in the ICT sector of their capabilities. Opportunities for women to establish networks within the sector, and secure employment where they can prove their capabilities in a range of ICT services, is crucial to both gaining men's acceptance and women's career progress.

While women working in the industry face challenges and discrimination, examples were provided indicating positive change. For instance, one of the young women in Kabul said that when her classmates were applying for jobs at university, she was receiving more offers than her male counterparts.

The young women in Kabul and Herat expressed hope for the future, but were also very clear that it is up to women themselves to ensure they are accepted and progress in the ICT sector. The quotations in Box 15 show how strongly these ambitious young women felt about this.

V. CONCLUSIONS

This report is an exploration of men's engagement in women's empowerment and rights achievement. It aimed to identify ways in which men's engagement can be enhanced, through an examination of case studies of advocacy initiatives, programming activities, and the urban labor market. Within the limited two-month timeframe for data collection, reflection, analyses, firm conclusions cannot be reached. Despite these limitations, certain themes evolved from the case studies.

Knowledge and exposure motivates men to support women's rights. This could be knowledge of women's suffering, challenges, and capacities, or exposure to different lifestyles, literature, and the media, or migration within and outside of Afghanistan. Support from family, especially male members, is essential for women to participate in activities outside the home. The sex-segregation of social space creates both challenges and opportunities. Further research is needed to explore these themes, as well as the construction of Afghan masculinity, in greater depth and breadth. Recommendations on how this should be undertaken are given in the next section.

Cross-Cutting Themes

1. Knowledge and evidence of women's capabilities

Knowledge was an important motivator for male women's rights activists in Case Study A. Knowledge of women's suffering and exposure to alternative ideas about gender relations was an impetus for these men to become involved in supporting activism around women's rights. Exposure to different ideas and ways of living – which may come from education, migration, opportunities for travel both within and outside Afghanistan, the media, and literature – inspired Afghan men from all different social groups to support women's rights and empowerment.

Potential areas for working with women proved to be a motivator for male staff working in programming, as highlighted in Case Study B. Likewise, evidence programming activities' the successful outcomes for individual women, families, and communities garnered support from male community members. Knowledge of women's rights according to Islam was perhaps the most important motivator for engaging elders from the communities in Case Studies B and C. The provision of knowledge of women's rights in Islam was found to be most useful when connected to implementable activities, rather than merely knowledge in abstraction.

Evidence of women's capabilities in the work environment was important for motivating male staff in Case Study B to support program activities aimed at women's empowerment and rights achievement. Similarly, initial and ongoing proof of women's capabilities in the ICT field was the overriding motivating factor for male company owners/managers to employ women in their businesses in Case Study D. Women in Case Studies B and D clearly recognized they had to prove themselves to the with whom they men they work in order to gain men's support for their work activities. The young women who work in the ICT sector expressed the opinion that it is their responsibility to prove their capabilities (to men and women).

2. Familial support

Within the given timeframe, the research was not able to analyze gender dynamics in the family or household. However, in all the case studies, it found that support from male family members is an existing and essential requirement for women to work. In Case Studies B and C, the women participating in programming activities maintained that without support from male family members none of them would be able to attend any activities. Young women working in the ICT sector pointed to male family members who had supported them in achieving their educational goals and were continuing to support them in reaching their career goals.

3. The sex-segregation of social space

Both programs explored in Case Studies B and C conformed to norms of sex-segregation, and indeed this is strongly recommended for programming at the community level. However, the strict norms of sex-segregation of space in Afghanistan were identified as causing problems for male and female staff working together, for male activists working with and for women, and to a degree for the young women working in the ICT sector. The rarity of mixed-sex environments outside of the household in much of Afghan society leads to accusations of sexual impropriety when men and women work together. The seriousness of such allegations, even if only rumor, cannot be stressed enough in a country where sex outside marriage is illegal. The replication of sex-segregation norms in the workplace is not recommended, as this will lead to the segregation of women workers. As with 'special treatment', for women in the work place, this may lead to women being viewed as unsuitable for promotion.

4. Constructions of Afghan masculinities

The study touched on notions of masculinity in Afghanistan. In Case Study A, urban-educated, male women's rights activists feel peers challenge their masculinity for being involved with

women's rights. By contrast, male elders in rural areas of eastern Afghanistan appeared to gain status for defending women's rights in their communities. The study drew on previous research to hypothesize a distinction between the characteristics seen as masculine in older men (being just, wise, and calm) and those expected in young men (lacking control). A further exploration of constructions of masculinity in Afghanistan is needed.

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

This section presents recommendations based on the findings of the four case studies, as well as on good programming practices that are applicable beyond engaging men in women's empowerment and rights achievement. Each set of recommendations is preceded by the particular findings. Due to the explorative and brief nature of this study, some of the recommendations are made hesitantly and with the caveat that they should be tried on an experimental basis initially. The most confidence is in the recommendations related to programming, as the author comes with personal experience of working to gender mainstream programs and to encourage male program staff in enhancing women's empowerment and rights achievement through programming initiatives.

General

The study found that there are already men engaged in and supporting women's empowerment and rights achievement. Therefore, there are already spaces for engagement with men that can be built upon and expanded. Engaging men as gendered beings can create a shift in understanding gender and aid in designing programs and projects that are truly gender-mainstreamed.

- Any project, activity, or campaign to engage men in women's empowerment and rights achievement should first identify the spaces where men are already engaged. While a new subject for investigation, it is not new for men to engage in supporting women's empowerment and rights in Afghanistan. If existing spaces of engagement are recognized, projects, campaigns, and other activities can build on these rather than starting in a void. This is likely to engender greater levels of success.

Case Study A

The study found that knowledge can be a great motivating factor for men's engagement in women's empowerment and rights achievement. The study also found that unfounded accusations of sexual impropriety between male and female coworkers are a hindrance to men's engagement. Female women's rights activists are generally supportive of the idea of more men becoming involved in advocacy for these issues, but there is significant distrust, which limits men's ability to engage in advocacy for women's empowerment and women's rights achievement. Given these findings, the following recommendations are offered:

- Particular efforts should be made to invite men to conferences and other events concerned with women's rights to overcome the idea that gender issues are only relevant to women.

- Trust-building activities for male and female women’s rights activists and civil society leaders should to be funded and implemented.
- Men who already engage in women’s rights and empowerment should be recognized; perhaps annual awards for male supporters of women’s rights, making sure elders from rural and remote areas of Afghanistan are considered, should be held.

Case Studies B and C

The study committed to providing two sets of recommendations at the beginning that relate to programming:

- a. Recommendations aimed at encouraging USAID implementing partners and civil society organizations to motivate male staff to engage in women’s empowerment and rights achievement through programming and project implementation.
- b. Recommendations providing guidance to projects and activities on how to engage male beneficiaries and target groups to work toward greater levels of gender equality.

This study found that projects do not need to focus specifically on women’s issues to engage men in women’s empowerment and rights achievement. Agender mainstreaming approach can incorporate men’s engagement in women’s empowerment and women’s rights during the design process of a program, rather than as an add-on. Programming to encourage men’s engagement in women’s empowerment should be evidence-based, and, knowledge is the most important motivating factor for men to engage in women’s empowerment and rights achievement. As such, the following recommendations are offered:

- Projects must allow sufficient time for research, reflection, and adaptation. USAID should make it clear that this is an expected approach, and that adapting projects and activities once implementation has begun is acceptable.
- Programming to engage men in women’s rights and empowerment should follow either a parallel or complementary approach, and should be part of program design.
- If donors and implementers want to encourage men to support women’s rights and empowerment, they must first demonstrate their own commitment to this by truly implementing gender mainstreaming:
 - Projects must be designed to take into account men’s and women’s needs, interests, and contributions to program outcomes equally, rather than adding on activities for women as an afterthought.
 - Programming budgets should be spent roughly equally on activities for men and women.
- Opportunities must be provided for male and female staff to formally and informally share information so that male staff learn about female staff’s capacities.

- ‘Special treatment’ for female employees should be viewed cautiously with the aim of treating male and female employees equally in all regards.
- Information about women’s rights, provided to engage male community elders, should be delivered within an Islamic framework.
- Information delivered should be related to the local reality, and men who are receiving knowledge about women’s rights must have the opportunity to implement what they are learning.
- The most appropriate men in any community must be targeted; often this will be community elders.
- The outcomes from engaging men in women’s rights and empowerment should have positive outcomes for women, families, and the community.

Case-Study D

In the ICT sector, young male entrepreneurs are generally accepting of hiring women when it makes good business sense. However, assumptions about men’s and women’s capabilities and about women’s ‘special needs’ are a significant hindrance to women’s advancement in labor markets. University and training courses allow women to create their own networks to increase opportunities in labor markets. and USAID projects like AWDP can create opportunities for women by setting targets and conditions for trainings they fund. As such, the following recommendations to engage men further in women’s economic empowerment are provided:

- Opportunities for women to create their own networks and become part of existing networks of men and women working in different employment sectors need to be encouraged. Training provision in certain employment areas, as has been implemented by AWDP, is one such type of opportunity.
- Campaigns to overcome stereotypes related to both male and female ‘natural’ capacities could be undertaken with the support of different media bodies.
- Opportunities are needed for women to demonstrate their capabilities – be this through supported workplace placements, or through using the media to present discussions with women about their careers.
- Male leaders of industry and business should be brought together at a ‘high status’ conference to discuss how they can best support women’s advancement in the private sector.

Further Research

In-depth, qualitative research should be undertaken to further explore the themes found in this report. Research on the following is recommended:

- Why certain male family members support the empowerment of women in their families while men in other families cannot/ do not, and identifying how familial support can be increased.
- Finding innovative ways in which the hindrances presented by sex-segregation can be overcome. This should be part of a larger research project looking at gender dynamics in different urban work environments. This would assist in identifying ways in which men and women can work together to enhance women's career development.
- A series of case studies looking at masculinity in different environments, such as the household, the family, the local community, universities, different workplaces, and the ANSF.

**Note: Not only would these studies contribute to work on gender issues, but also to stabilization and peace-building initiatives.*

ANNEX I: EXAMPLES OF GLOBAL BEST PRACTICES

This annex provides a snapshot of networks and organizations that work on men's engagement in women's empowerment and rights achievement and a small selection of programming approaches.

MenEngage boys and men for gender equality¹²³ (<http://menengage.org>)

MenEngage is a global network formed between 2004 and 2005, as a result of meetings between local and international NGOs and UN organizations exploring ways of working together toward gender equity. It is currently a global alliance made up of 35 country networks, spread across different regions of the world. It is the largest network of organizations working in the field of men's engagement in gender issues.

MenEngage members work collectively and individually for gender justice. MenEngage members collaborate specifically in the following areas:

- Sexual and reproductive health and rights
- HIV and AIDS prevention and treatment
- Reducing violence against women and girls
- Challenging homophobia and advocating for LGBTI rights
- Reducing forms of violence between men and boys
- Addressing the role of boys and men in child sexual exploitation, sexual abuse, and trafficking
- Promoting men's positive involvement in maternal and child health and as fathers or caregivers
- Efforts to change macro-level policies that perpetuate inequalities

¹²³ Information provided here is taken from the MenEngage website and the MenEngage strategic plan 2012 - 2016

The Executive Committee of MenEngage is made up of leading men's engagement organizations representing different global regions, for example:

- Promundo – representing the Latin American Alliance
- Sonke – representing the Sub-Saharan African Alliance
- Cariman – representing the Caribbean Alliance
- Centre for Health and Social Justice – representing the South Asian Alliance.

MenEngage adopted the MenCare Campaign initially begun by Promundo and Sonke and launched it in Africa, North America, Latin America and South Asia.

MenCare: A Global Fatherhood Campaign¹²⁴ (www.men-care.org)

The mission of the MenCare Campaign "is to promote men's involvement as equitable, non-violent fathers and caregivers in order to achieve family wellbeing and gender equality". In South Asia Men Care is active in India and Sri Lanka.

MenCare strives to work with women's rights organizations, local NGOs, UN partners as well as directly with mothers, women and men. The campaign recognizes that men's limited contribution to care work, including the care of children contributes to gender inequality and is a major barrier to women's empowerment. The campaign promotes 10 ways in which men need to be engaged as care givers;

1. Engage Men starting in the Prenatal Period and in Childbirth – men need to be seen as allies in safe childbirth by health professional, women and men themselves.
2. Increase Men's participation in Care Work – boys need to be taught to do domestic chores and boys and men need to be encouraged to take on their fair share.
3. Actively Promote the Benefits of Involved Fatherhood (beyond being the breadwinner) – in violent settings, young men who have found positive identities as involved fathers are often able to get out of violent gangs
4. Engage Men in Child Health – unintentionally community health program reinforce the notion that it is not men's role to participate in maternal or child health
5. Build on Men's Play with Children – the most common daily activity men carry out with children is play
6. Engage Men as Allies in their Children's Education – reducing gender inequality in educational attainment continues to be a key issues for empowerment women and girls in many parts of the world – and men need to play a clear role in this effort
7. Encourage men to show affection toward children – children who have emotionally close relationships with their fathers... show better mental health

¹²⁴ Information provided here is taken for the Men Care website, the Men Care Prospectus and the Men Care Booklet. Some of it is paraphrased information and parts in italics are direct quotations.

8. Engage men in preventing violence against women and children and helping children recover from violence – In terms of violence against women, engaging men to understand the effects of their violence on children as well as on women... is key to breaking cycles of violence
9. See fathers as allies and role models for gender equality – simply by being present in the lives of children in caring responsive ways, men contribute to gender equality. For girls, having a close, positive relationship with a father or father-figure who promoted their ambition and achievement is associated with healthier, less subservient relationships with men and a higher sense of control of their bodies and their sexuality.
10. Encourage fathers involvement when they don't live together – in some settings as many as a quarter to a third of children do not live with their biological fathers, for reasons that may include migration, as well as, separation and divorce.

The MenCare Campaign uses the media, parent education programs and specific advocacy activities to promote these messages and engage men, institutions and policy makers.

Promundo¹²⁵ (www.promundo.org)

Promundo, a Brazilian NGO, founded in Rio De Janeiro in 1997 works internationally to engage men and boys to promote gender equality and end violence against women. For example Promundo recently worked with WfWI in the Democratic Republic of Congo to implement the LOGiCA program which aims to increase operational knowledge of how to engage men in SGBV post-conflict programming in Sub-Saharan Africa. Promundo and WfWI worked together on this project to train 20 men community facilitators to implement the men's leaderships program, what in the Afghan context is the MEP, as explored in Case Study C of this study.

Promundo conducts research to build a knowledge base on global masculinities. The organization develops, evaluates and scales up gender transformative interventions and policies and carries out international advocacy to achieve gender equality and social justice. For examples, Promundo has implemented the International Men and Gender Equality Survey (IMAGES) in Latin America, Eastern Europe, Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia. They implement the Living Peace program based in East Africa, which address the effects of trauma on men and women and works to transform masculinities in post-conflict settings and find positive alternatives to violence. They are part of the Men Care Campaign.

EMERGE Empowering Men to Engage and Redefine Gender Equality¹²⁶

EMERGE is a program being implemented by CARE International Sri Lanka. Its aim is to work with men and boys to promoted attitudes and behaviors respecting gender equality and diversity and overcoming gender-based violence. It started to be implemented in 2010 and is ongoing. The program works closely with the media, religious leaders, the private sector and other stakeholders to achieve the following objectives:

¹²⁵ All information provided here is taken from Promundo's website and Women for Women International – DRC Final Report Prepared for Promundo (February 2014) *Learning of Gender and Conflict in Africa (LOGiCA)*.

¹²⁶ The information provided here comes from CARE's EMERGE website <http://www.care.lk/e-m-e-r-g-e/> and conversations with EMERGE staff conducted by Anand Parwar one of the team members.

- Men and boys demonstrate leadership to actively promote gender equality in areas where CARE operates
- The wider public understand and appreciate men's and boys' roles in promoting equality and are engaged in advocating for this process
- Selected households where Care operates exhibit equitable decision making and access to resource

To achieve these goals the project has undertaken the following approaches:

- It collaborates with existing youth and community development initiatives
- At community level it engages with youth developing their capacity to make personal changes and promote gender equity among their peers
- It works with spouses to challenge gender stereotypes and norms at household level
- EMERGE has also joined with MenCare described above
- It promotes knowledge generation and dissemination for use by other program in Sri Lanka

Parivartan Coaching Boys in to Men¹²⁷

This program implemented by the International Center for Research on Women (ICRW) South Asia Regional Office in Delhi operated in 2008 – 2012. It is a Mumbai, India based program which aims to reduce gender-based violence by working with men and boys through cricket coaching. It was based on a US program call Coaching Boys in Men which engages sports coaches as positive role models and trains them to deliver message to male athletes about gender equality and against violence to women.

The Mumbai based program engaged cricket coaches and mentors in schools and communities to:

- Raise awareness about abusive and disrespectful behavior
- Promote gender equitable non-violent attitudes
- Teach skills on how to speak up and intervene when witnessing harmful and disrespectful practices

The Parivartan Program both learned the following lessons and was judge successful in applying them as follows:

- Start young; ideas must be challenged at ages when they are first being constructed
- Work with men as partners not viewing them only as obstacles.
- Men often want to change but are constrained by rigid social norms
- There was a positive shift in athletes, coaches and mentors attitudes toward gender equality and gender based violence
- These group education activities were a successful way to bring about this positive shift in attitudes and opinions

¹²⁷ Information provided here is taken from ICRW.org/where-we-work/parivartan-coaching-boys-men

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