

USAID AFGHANISTAN

**The Role of Women in Afghan Agriculture:
A Literature Review**

June 8, 2016

Disclaimer: This document is a review and synthesis of available literature on the role that women play in Afghan agriculture. As such, the observations, findings, interpretations, and conclusions expressed in this paper are those of the author and of the sources cited. The views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views of the United States Agency for International Development or the United States Government.



Women sort and pack almonds at a nut market in Kabul. Photo Credit: Chemonics, *Rebuilding Agricultural Markets*, RAMP Final Report, July 2006, p. 72.

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Table of Acronyms

A4	Advancing Afghan Agriculture Alliance
ACE	Agricultural Credit Enhancement Program
ADF	Agricultural Development Fund
ADP/E	Alternative Development Program/East
ADP/N	Alternative Development Program/North
ADP/SW	Alternative Development Program/Southwest
ADT	Agribusiness Development Team
AFSA	Afghanistan Farm Service Alliance
AGRED	Agricultural Research and Extension Development [Program]
AIP	Alternative Income Project
ALP/S	Alternative Livelihood Program/South [Project]
ANDS	Afghanistan National Development Strategy
APA	Afghan Pride Association
APPRO	Afghanistan Public Policy Research Organization
AREU	Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit
ASAP	Accelerating Sustainable Agriculture Program
ASMED	Afghanistan Small and Medium Enterprise Development Program
AVIPA Plus	Afghanistan Vouchers for Increased Production in Agriculture
AWATT	Afghanistan Water, Agriculture and Technology Transfer
AWBC	Afghan Women’s Business Council
BLCU	Balkh Livestock Development Union
CDC	Community Development Council
CfW	Cash for Work
CHAMP	Commercial Horticulture & Agricultural Marketing Program
CNFA	Citizen’s Network for Foreign Affairs
CRS	Catholic Relief Services
DACAAR	Danish Committee for Aid to Afghan Refugees
DAI	Development Alternatives, Inc.
DAIL	Directorate of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock
DOWA	Department of Women’s Affairs
FSC	Farm Service Center
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
FY	Fiscal Year
GDA	Global Development Alliance
GIRoA	Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan
HED	Home Economics Directorate
HLP	Horticulture and Livestock Project
ICARDA	International Center for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas
ICRISAT	International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics
IDEA-NEW	Incentives Driving Economic Alternatives – North, East, West [Project]
ILG-NRM	Improved Livelihoods and Governance through Natural Resource Management [Project]
IWMP	Irrigation and Watershed Management Project
MAIL	Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock
MEDA	Mennonite Economic Development Associates
MFI	Microfinance Institution
MISFA	Microfinance Support Facility in Afghanistan

MoWA	Ministry of Women's Affairs
NAPWA	National Action Plan for Women in Afghanistan
NAEC	National Agriculture Education College
NGO	Nongovernmental Organization
NLP	Horticulture and Livestock Project
NHLP	National Horticulture and Livestock Project
NRVA	National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment
NSP	National Solidarity Program
OAG	Office of Agriculture (USAID)
RADP	Regional Agricultural Development Programs
RAMP	Rebuilding Agricultural Markets Program
SRAD	Southern Region Agriculture Development [Project]
SUPPORT	Services under Program and Project Offices for Results Tracking
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNEP	United Nations Environment Program
UNIFEM	United Nations Development Fund for Women
U.S.	United States
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
VFU	veterinary field unit
WCS	Wildlife Conservation Society
WEAI	Women's Empowerment in Agricultural Index

The Role of Women in Afghan Agriculture

USAID/Afghanistan Office of Agriculture (OAG)

Purpose and Parameters of this Paper

This document draws from a comprehensive review of the post-2002 literature on the role that women play in the agriculture sector in Afghanistan. It focuses on issues affecting USAID's agricultural programming and does not, in general, delve into the broader gender-equity issues facing Afghan society. Its purpose is to provide background information on gender issues, as they relate to the agriculture sector in Afghanistan, and to inform and guide the implementation of the USAID programs. It is a desk analysis, prepared by the Senior Agricultural Advisor in USAID's Office of Agriculture (OAG), and did not involve primary data collection, field research, or key informant interviews. It is limited to a review of documents available in English. This does not constitute a gender analysis or gender assessment, as defined by USAID policy guidance.¹

Executive Summary and Conclusions

Following longstanding concerns over the relatively low numbers of women benefitting directly from the projects in the USAID/Afghanistan agricultural portfolio, OAG has committed to increasing its efforts to reach women. Accomplishing this will require a better understanding of the nature of women's participation in the agricultural sector and overcoming the constraints that hamper efforts to reach and mobilize them in significant numbers. These constraints include the following:

- Women rarely own land or livestock and traditionally have had little decision-making authority on land use (e.g., what crops to grow and when), farm labor allocation, input purchasing (including access to irrigation water), or crop marketing. In remote areas, women often do not possess official identification, which can limit their access to government and donor assistance (including the distribution of subsidized inputs and access to credit).
- Women in much of Afghanistan (particularly in rural areas) face cultural norms that limit their mobility outside of their residential compounds and restrict their contact with strangers. This can virtually preclude their access to input suppliers or output markets, and thus frustrate their ability to directly commercialize their output.
- Afghan women generally are involved in small-scale unpaid activities that take place within their residential compounds, such as kitchen gardens, some post-harvest processing, and the raising of livestock and poultry production. By their nature and scale, these activities are largely subsistence, rather than commercially-oriented. Their broader labor contribution to the household's efforts in agriculture is generally non-monetized and undervalued.
- There is a stigma among some ethnic groups and in some regions of the country against women, particularly young women, working openly in agriculture, implying that agriculture work is only

¹ Paul Crawford, the author of this paper, was the Senior Agriculture Advisor for the Office of Agriculture in USAID/Afghanistan from September 2010 to September 2011 and from December 2012 to February 2016.

appropriate for elderly women or those from poor households. This means that the involvement of Afghan women in agriculture may decline in some cases, as household incomes rise.

- The ability to reach women with in-person extension messages is severely constrained by the limitations on their mobility (including in the formation of women's groups), the inability of reaching them through male extension staff, and the difficulties of recruiting and fielding female extension staff, who also face mobility constraints. Rural Afghan women also have low literacy and numeracy rates, and women in some ethnic groups may not be fluent in the primary languages of Afghanistan. These are factors that can further impede efforts to reach rural women with extension messages. (At the same time, access to information through radio, TV and cell phone is growing quickly in Afghanistan).

The existence of cultural, logistical, and security barriers to reaching women in the agricultural sector does not mean that efforts to expand women's participation in that sector should be abandoned. Rather, it means that creative efforts will be required to overcome such barriers, and the expectations, in terms of impact, will have to be calibrated to reflect the scale of the task. Specifically, the above constraints will make it difficult for USAID-funded agriculture projects to achieve economies-of-scale with respect to women's programs and will limit the "spread effects" and sustainability of such activities. Accounting for the cultural and other constraints to reaching women in Afghanistan will, therefore, require changes in staffing, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation approaches, as well as in the budgets of USAID projects. It must also be recognized by policy-makers that, for agriculture projects to effectively reach women, the cost per beneficiary will likely be significantly greater, and it will take longer and require more intensive coaching to achieve results. Further, the activities must be supported at a sufficient scale to become sustainable and even commercially viable in the long run.

It will also mean that USAID agriculture projects will have to explicitly focus on the cropping systems in which women are involved, and under the conditions in which they grow them. Women's involvement in Afghan agriculture is, at present, largely restricted to the subsistence production of livestock, horticultural crops, and household-level, post-harvest processing. Therefore, projects should encompass these types of activities. Programs focused on crop production systems in which, historically, women have not been involved as decision makers, such as wheat production and commercial-scale horticulture production, will not automatically reach women. Given that women from poorer households are more likely to be actively involved in agriculture than women from wealthier households, USAID agricultural programs will need to explicitly target poorer households, which will generally be subsistence ones.

It must also be recognized that women's roles and responsibilities in agriculture vary significantly across the country, with women in northern, western and central Afghanistan participating more fully in agriculture than those in southern Afghanistan.

USAID's implementing partners will need to work with local communities in the planning process and must be responsive to needs that the communities themselves identify. Explicit efforts should be made to identify female-headed and poorer households where women, by necessity, play a greater role in agriculture, and to design programs to explicitly address their needs. Discrete programs, or program components, will be required to reach these women. Moreover, the achievement of some USAID objectives, such as improvements in nutrition and dietary diversity, will require a central role for women in implementation. In fact, the ability to reach local women with agriculture interventions, particularly in terms of horticulture and livestock production, would likely be increased if nutrition and hygiene were incorporated into integrated programs. Nutrition interventions, which clearly fall within the realm of female responsibility in the household, could serve as an entry point and platform upon which agricultural interventions could be built.

Finally, projects should only count women as direct beneficiaries when, as a result of project initiatives, the women themselves make decisions or take steps that lead to their increased income or welfare (including labor-saving innovations). Benefitting women indirectly, say as members of a household where the income is increasing, while valuable, shouldn't count towards meeting USAID's gender targets.

USAID/OAG's Performance in Meeting Gender Objectives

USAID Afghanistan carried out a Mission-wide Gender Impact Assessment in late 2010 to determine the impact and sustainability of USAID-funded gender programs for Afghan women and girls.² This analysis concluded that USAID's Agriculture program was inconsistently or inadequately addressing gender issues and missing significant opportunities to reach more women and to have greater impact. The analysis concluded that most programs in OAG at the time were giving inadequate attention to gender considerations and failing to address priorities for women and girls that were articulated in the Afghanistan National Development Strategy (ANDS), the National Action Plan for Women in Afghanistan (NAPWA), and the U.S. Regional Stabilization Strategy.

Three agricultural projects were reviewed under the Gender Impact Assessment. These were: the Accelerating Sustainable Agriculture Program (ASAP); Incentives Driving Economic Alternatives – North, East, West (IDEA-NEW); and Afghanistan Vouchers for Increased Production in Agriculture - Plus (AVIPA Plus). In general, the Gender Impact Assessment concluded that, while these three OAG programs had had some impact for a few women, they had failed to pursue any strategic goals related to women and girls in the agricultural sector. The Assessment Team attributed the relatively low impact on women to the program's focus on commercial agricultural growth, coupled with a minimalist cross-cutting gender approach. The Assessment Team acknowledged the potential benefits to Afghanistan in promoting commercial agriculture, but pointed out that few women would be able to participate in such relatively larger-scale enterprises, and that women's home-based agricultural initiatives were as likely as not to be disadvantaged by such an approach.

OAG's gender performance subsequently improved. The IDEA-NEW project, according to its 2013 Annual Report, provided agricultural productivity training to 35,492 new beneficiaries during FY 2013, of which 4,268 were women (10.7 percent). (This was an improvement, relative to IDEA-NEW's life of project performance in providing agricultural productivity training, where, of 480,903 beneficiaries, only 9,854 were women – 2 percent of the total). IDEA-NEW has done better at reaching women with business skills training (40 percent of the FY13 trainees and 62.3 percent for the LOP trainees were women). At the same time, IDEA-NEW supported 1,208 agriculture-related microenterprises in 2013, of which 860 (or 71 percent) were women-owned.³

Similarly, the performance of the Commercial Horticulture & Agricultural Marketing Program (CHAMP) Project improved in terms of female participation in subsequent years. The percentage of female-headed households increased from 5 percent before 2013 to 9 percent in 2013. For the first three quarters of 2014, although the scale of the project was much reduced, female-headed households constituted 30 percent of those benefitting. In terms of individuals receiving training from CHAMP, the percentage of women increased from 1 percent prior to 2013, to 4 percent in 2013, and 9 percent in 2014. Of the 5,307

² USAID/Afghanistan, *Final Report, USAID 2010 Gender Impact Assessment*, produced by Checchi and Company Consulting, Oct. 2010.

³ Development Alternatives, Inc. (DAI), *Incentives Driving Economic Alternatives – North, East and West (IDEA-NEW) Annual Report- Year 5* (2013), Annex II, Performance Indicator Table.

individuals that had received business training through CHAMP during the life of the project, around 14 percent were women. This percentage increased to 21 percent in 2013.⁴

OAG's Commitment to Increasing its Gender Focus

Following the Mission-wide Gender Impact Analysis, OAG committed to increasing its gender targets, particularly with respect to the Regional Agricultural Development Projects (RADPs). The RADPs currently being implemented are:

- RADP-South, which covers Kandahar, Helmand, Uruzgan, and Zabul Provinces, awarded in October of 2013;
- RADP-North, which covers Jowzjan, Balkh, Kunduz, Badakhshan, Samangan, and Baghlan provinces, awarded in May of 2014; and
- RADP-West, which covers Herat, Farah, and Badghis provinces, awarded in August of 2014.⁵

In 2012, USAID carried out a series of gender assessments for both existing projects and for those under development. These included gender assessments for the existing Improved Livelihoods and Governance through Natural Resource Management (ILG-NRM) Project and the Agriculture Credit Enhancement Project (ACE), as well as assessments for the then planned Irrigation and Watershed Management Project (IWMP), Agricultural Research and Extension Development (AGRED), and for the Regional Agricultural Development Program (RADP).⁶ A gender assessment for the agriculture portfolio as a whole was also completed.⁷

One outcome of these gender analyses was the establishment of a target for RADP-South, RADP-North, and RADP-West, that at least 15 percent of the beneficiaries of those projects will be women. As will be discussed below, this goal has proven to be a challenge, given the nature of women's participation in the agricultural sector and the current social constraints that hamper efforts to reach and mobilize them in significant numbers.

Complicating this has been the somewhat contradictory mandate that USAID focus on crops that maximize the impact of USAID's investments in the agriculture sector. In April of 2011, USAID funded a study by Dalberg Development Advisors that reviewed USAID/Afghanistan's agriculture strategy and

⁴ Roots of Peace, *Commercial Horticulture & Agricultural Marketing Program (CHAMP) Quarterly Report* – July-September 2013, Annex B.; CHAMP Annual Report for 2013; and CHAMP Quarterly Report – July-Sept. 2014.

⁵ RADP-East, which will tentatively cover Nangarhar, Logar, Laghman, Kapisa, Parwan, Wardak, Ghazni, and Kabul Provinces, has not yet been awarded (as of January 2016). Reference is made in this document to gender analyses carried out for two other USAID-funded projects, the Irrigation and Watershed Management Project (IWMP) and the Agricultural Research and Extension Development Project. Although these projects were launched in 2012, a number of implementation issues led to their cancellation in 2014. Replacement projects are in the designing or procurement stage.

⁶ These were: (1) Suzanne Savage, et. al., *Gender Analysis: Afghanistan Agricultural Credit Enhancement (ACE) Program*, February 28, 2012; (2) Stephanie Brennan, et. al., *Gender Analysis: Regional Agriculture Development Program (RADP) Afghanistan*, May 10, 2012; (3) Vic Getz, et. al., *Gender Analysis: Improved Livelihoods and Governance through Natural Resource Management Project (ILG-NRMP)*, June 26, 2012; (4) Mary Worzala, et. al., *Gender Analysis: Irrigation and Watershed Management Program (IWMP)*, July 31, 2012; and (5) Lauryn Oates, et. al., *Gender Analysis: Afghan Agricultural Research and Extension Development (AGRED) Project*, August 2012.

⁷ Saraya Media and Communication, *Gender Assessment of U.S. Agency for International Development Agriculture Programs*, July – August 2012.

made recommendations aimed at maximizing the impact of investments by the U.S. government in the sector.⁸ The major recommendation was that USAID focus its resources on two objectives: (1) increasing wheat production in northern Afghanistan, in order to increase food security; and (2) increasing the production and marketing of high-value export crops, with particular focus on almonds and raisins (and to a lesser extent other dried fruits and nuts). The Dalberg team based its latter recommendations on the fact that almonds and raisins were high value crops, with large and growing markets for which Afghanistan had some competitive advantage. However, such a limited crop focus undermines USAID's efforts to reach its gender targets, as women are not currently heavily involved in the production of wheat, raisins, or almonds. At the same time, investments that directly benefit women will not necessarily "maximize the impact of USAID's investments in the agricultural sector," at least to the extent that such impact is measured in terms of economic returns to the sector as a whole.

The RADPs have tried to address their gender objectives in several ways. For the most part, they have not shifted from the focus on high value crops that they have selected. However, RADP-South has paved the way by directly working with the Directorate of Women's Affairs (DOWA) to establish a women's demonstration farm and training facility in Kandahar. Both RADP-South and RADP-North have also incorporated into their strategies significant programs to provide training to women in both agricultural production and in health and nutrition.

Constraints to Female Participation in Agricultural Activities

The position of women in the Afghan family and society has been shaped by socio-cultural factors that are rooted in gender discrimination. These socio-cultural pressures define the ability and willingness of women to play a role in agriculture production. Rural Afghan women frequently live within family compounds, often for most of their lives. Their ability to work outside of the compound is severely restricted, as is their ability to move around the village or to travel outside of it. These restrictions result from the cultural imperative of protecting the honor of the family. These factors differ, both within and across households, depending on a number of factors, including the age and social situation of the women (i.e., unmarried, married, widowed), the wealth and assets of the household, the composition of the household in terms of the number, age and sex of those members available for various kinds of labor, and the level of social stigma and economic returns attached to particular activities for certain groups of women.⁹

Women in rural Afghanistan contribute most of their labor time in unpaid family activities, such as cooking, cleaning and child care. The composition of the household, and in particular the ratio of women to men, affects the activities that household members carry out. Women are less likely to work in crop agriculture, if there are enough men in the household to provide for its needs. On the other hand, where there are few men in a household, the responsibilities of women will increase. Likewise, the number of females in a household is important. For example, the ability of a household to keep livestock will depend on whether or not there are enough women in the household to look after the livestock, as well as carry out the other domestic chores and agricultural tasks required.¹⁰

Traditional constraints on mobility affect the level of involvement of women in agriculture. These constraints vary by ethnic group and geographic region. A 2010 study of gender equity issues under the National Solidarity Program's (NSP) Community Development Committees (CDC) involved interviews

⁸ Dalberg Development Advisors – *Afghanistan Agricultural Assessment and Framework Development* (prepared for the USAID/Afghanistan, Office of Agriculture), April 22, 2011

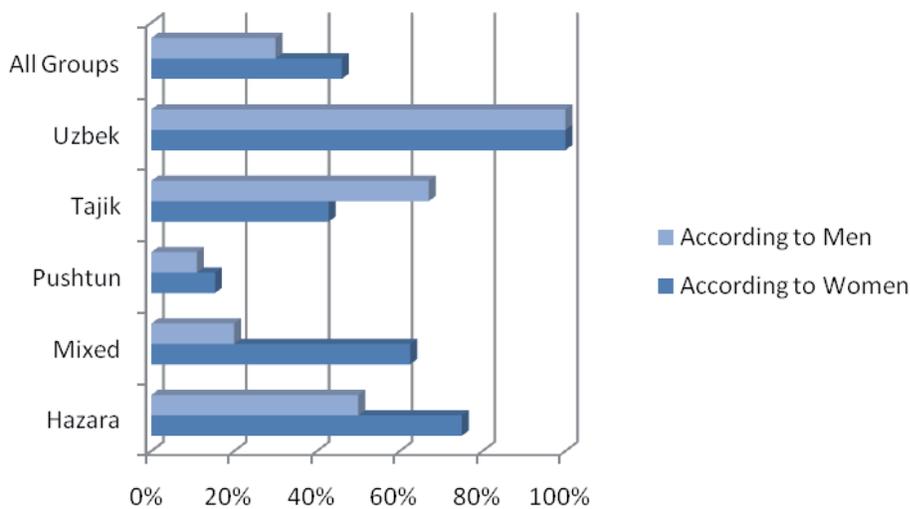
⁹ Grace, *Gender Roles in Agriculture*, p. 16. See also Grace and Pain, *Rural Women's Livelihood*, pp. 262-266

¹⁰ Grace, *Who Owns the Farm*, p. 10. See also World Bank, *The Role of Women in Afghanistan's Future*, p. 56

with 438 men and women from 11 districts in 7 provinces.¹¹ In those interviews, respondents were asked whether women could travel beyond the boundaries of the community with or without a *mahram*, or escort (see Table 1). Based on the results, Uzbeks had the greatest mobility, followed by Hazaras and Tajiks. Pashtun women had the lowest mobility beyond the village. However, women often felt they had more mobility than men would acknowledge.¹²

In her study, Grace found that Ismaili women in the Badakhshan village that she examined were free to move within the village and were able to sit with men from other households in meetings and to graze their animals and to work on land. Similarly the Shi'a Hazara women in Bamyan were freer to move around and so could take animals to pasture. Even in these locations, however, it was not considered acceptable for Sunni women to take animals for grazing. Instead they hired someone, or if they were poor, their children would graze the animals.¹³ Wakefield reported that, in Panjao, a four hour walk to collect grass was considered normal and acceptable, since a girl or woman would be unlikely to come across strangers during this time. At the same time, a woman would have to get male approval and a male escort for a trip to visit a friend or relative outside of the village, where she would be likely to encounter strangers.¹⁴

Table 1: Can Women Travel Beyond the Village with or without a Mahram?



Source: Azarbaijani-Moghaddam, *A Study of Gender Equity through the National Solidarity Programme's Community Development Councils*, p. 8

One factor that defines the limits of a women's mobility is the remoteness of the area and the distance from other ethnic groups and outsiders. The size of a village and its proximity to the district center affects a woman's mobility. In smaller villages women have greater freedom of movement, because the neighbors are well known. The closer the village is to a district center or major road, however, the more limited the mobility of the women inside the village.

¹¹ These were Nangarhar, Paktia, Parwan, Daikundi, Jawzjan, Herat, and Kandahar Provinces.

¹² Azarbaijani-Moghaddam, *A Study of Gender Equity through the National Solidarity Programme's Community Development Councils*, p. 8.

¹³ Grace, *Who Owns the Farm: Rural Women's Access to Land and Livestock*, p. 13.

¹⁴ Wakefield, *Gender and Local Level Decision Making: Findings From A Case Study in Panjao*, p. 28

The mobility of women is linked to perceptions of whether it is safe for women to go outside alone, with younger women more restricted than older women in this respect.¹⁵ Travel by women outside of the village is, in many areas, inconceivable and socially precluded. The close quarter seating required in rural public transportation largely precludes rural women from using such services.¹⁶ Some locations within the village are considered acceptable under cultural rules. These might include the family's land, health centers, and other neighbor's homes during ceremonies. The definition of places where women can and cannot go, as well as where and to what extent they must wear covering garments, varies depending on the social status and age of the female, and on the views of the main authority of the house. Increased age often brings wider freedom of movement, while higher social status can bring more restrictions.

When women engage in agricultural work, they tend to work alongside their male family members or other women. In the primarily Uzbek village in Samangan that Wakefield studied, for example, women would not go to the open fields without their husbands because the landowners – Pashtuns from a nearby village with whom there had been conflict from time to time – were considered outsiders. As a result, the village's women were “hidden.” Similarly, Wakefield found that, while women in the village would socialize with each other, they would not socialize with women from another village. They would wear a burka when they left a village, but within the village the women knew the routes to take to avoid interactions with men from the village, using paths between compounds that could not be seen from the main road. Wakefield was told that unmarried women, especially if near the age of marriage, were less likely to be allowed to undertake agricultural tasks outside the house. Even women who were newly married were not permitted to go outside. One of the women interviewed by Wakefield's research team said that women would hide themselves from their male in-laws until they had had several children. Even visiting their families in neighboring villages was problematic. They had to have permission to go work in their fields or gardens. If a woman needed to go and collect water, she had to find a mahram (normally a male relative who serves as her guardian) to serve as chaperon. If the men were in the fields, a woman could, however, go to the fields with a group of five or six women without a mahram.¹⁷ (It should be noted that the above findings were drawn from a case study covering of a single village in Samangan province, and are not necessarily representative of the province or the region, much less all of Afghanistan.)

In general, women in poor households, or households with a low worker/dependent ratio, tended to participate in more agricultural tasks outside the home. If the need is great enough, women may, in spite of the prevalent social norms, even engage in wage work on other peoples' land.¹⁸ Women from poor or landless families are often forced to seek work outside of the family (for example, as cleaners, seamstresses, or laborers). Having to do so is seen as dishonorable for them and their families, although this social criticism is tempered when the women have no other options for supporting their families.¹⁹

Schloeder reported in her study on women pastoralists that Kuchi women (and probably rural women in general) have limited access to female healthcare providers, and thus a women with a female health issue would likely forego treatment unless her family believed that her situation was serious enough to warrant hiring a vehicle to transport her to a clinic employing a female physician.²⁰

¹⁵ Wakefield, *Gender and Local Level Decision Making: Findings from A Case Study in Panjao*, p. 29

¹⁶ Afghanistan Public Policy Research Organization (APPRO), *Gender and the Agricultural Innovation System in Rural Afghanistan: Barriers and Bridges*, p. 26

¹⁷ Wakefield, *Gender and Local Level Decision Making in Samangan*, pp. 12, 22.

¹⁸ World Bank, *Afghanistan National Reconstruction and Poverty Reduction - the Role of Women in Afghanistan's Future*, p. 56.

¹⁹ Gilmour, *A Woman's Work: Exploring Gender Roles and Agriculture in Charikar, Afghanistan*, p. 18.

²⁰ Schloeder, et. al, *Women as Partners in Pastoral Production in Afghanistan*, p. 59.

While recognizing the above constraints, it should also be kept in mind that the situation facing women in Afghanistan is changing – perhaps more in urban areas than in rural, and certainly more quickly in some regions than others. The 2010 study of gender equity issues under the NSP’s CDC programs concluded that, while mobility constraints were identified and perceived to be a ‘constant’ rather than “variable” problem, it was a constraint that could be alleviated over time. The report pointed out that, in some areas, professional women, such as teachers, have greater mobility, and that women’s mobility improves, even in Pashtun areas, as a result of the possibility of earning an income.²¹ Thus, while USAID’s projects must be cognizant of the constraints that need to be overcome, they must, at the same time, be sensitive to the changing social dynamics within the country.

GIRoA and MAIL Policies and Programs Regarding Women in Agriculture

The Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (GIRoA) has expressed full support for the goal of improving the conditions of women in the country. In March 2003, GIRoA ratified the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. On January 4, 2004, the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan was approved, guaranteeing equality for all citizens. As part of the 2006 Afghanistan Compact, GIRoA pledged that it would strengthen female participation in all Afghan governance institutions, including elected and appointed bodies and the civil service, in line with Afghanistan’s Millennium Development Goals. In 2007 GIRoA developed the *National Action Plan for the Women of Afghanistan (NAPWA) 2008-2018*.²² NAPWA is GIRoA’s main vehicle for guiding policies and commitments to advance the status of women. The Ministry of Women’s Affairs (MoWA), established in 2002, has the lead in coordinating NAPWA implementation.

Gender is recognized as an important cross-cutting issue in the MAIL Master Plan, in the Agriculture and Rural Development Sector Strategy, and in the National Agriculture Development Framework. These documents express MAIL’s commitment to “promoting and supporting the mainstreaming of gender issues in all its programs and projects with the aim of providing increased opportunities for women to participate in and benefit from agricultural development processes.”²³

The NAPWA recognized that “the current situation of women in the country presents a serious challenge to human development and that the women of Afghanistan are among the worst off in the world, both in comparison to Afghan men and with women of most countries.” The NAPWA report included a substantive overview of the status of women and the constraints that they face in Afghan society and the Afghan economy. The Millennium Development goal is to have 33 percent of civil servants be female by 2015 (and 50 percent by 2020).²⁴ Though laudable, this will be a challenge for the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock (MAIL), given the nature of its responsibilities and the characteristics of the agriculture sector. As of August 2015, MAIL has 8,974 employees located throughout Afghanistan. Of these, 623 are women (just under 7 percent).²⁵ MAIL leadership positions are largely staffed by men (including the Minister, three Deputy Ministers, and the heads of 32 directorates). Only two directorates are headed by women, the Home Economics Directorate and the Horticulture Directorate.

There is a shortage of women extension workers in the provinces, districts, and villages. MAIL’s Extension Directorate has 678 employees across Afghanistan. Of these, 678 are men and 21 are women. Fifteen of the female employees are in MAIL headquarters in Kabul and the six are posted in the

²¹ Azarbaijani-Moghaddam, *A Study of Gender Equity*, p. 14.

²² GIRoA, *National Action Plan for the Women of Afghanistan (NAPWA) 2007-17*, p. 1

²³ Ministry of Agriculture Irrigation and Livestock (MAIL), *Gender Mainstreaming Strategy*, p. 1

²⁴ Ministry of the Economy, *Afghanistan Millennium Development Goals 2012*, Dec. 2013, pp. 49.

²⁵ USAID Promote: Women in Government, p. 11.

provinces. Agricultural extension service coverage in Afghanistan overall is limited, and extension to women is almost negligible. Most extension services that reach women are operated by NGOs or donor projects and not directly by MAIL. Many of these former efforts are not even coordinated with MAIL.

The limited agricultural research taking place in Afghanistan also largely excludes women, as either researchers or beneficiaries. The MAIL Research Directorate has 357 employees, of which 11 are women. Of the Research Directorate staff, 117 are in Kabul, of which 8 are women in managerial and technical positions. The Research Directorate has 240 employees in the provinces, of which only three are female.²⁶

The Gender Unit of MAIL has 3 full-time staff members (a Gender head and two managers) at central level. However, it has no staff at the provincial level. They report directly to the Director General of Policy and Planning. The key responsibilities of the Gender Unit include:

- Liaising and coordinating with the Gender Units in other ministries, MoWA, donors, civil society and other relevant stakeholders regarding gender issues in the Ministry;
- Facilitating and coordinating the implementation of MAIL's gender mainstreaming strategy in all departments and across programs and projects of the Ministry;
- Reviewing and monitoring the implementation of policies, programs, and regulations for gender sensitivity and response to women's concerns; and
- Providing gender specific advice and training to MAIL staff; and producing annual reports on the contribution made by MAIL to women's development and gender equality.

The Gender Unit has virtually no regional presence, and does not implement agricultural projects for women. Nor does it appear to be heavily involved in planning, monitoring or collaborating with other departments, or systematically engaged with externally funded projects (for instance, the Horticulture and Livestock Project had its own Gender Unit, with strong capacity, but limited linkages to MAIL's Gender Unit). The majority of the Gender Unit's focus is on building greater gender equality into the MAIL staff and its operations.

MAIL's Home Economics Directorate (HED), which was established in 2006 as a Directorate in the General Directorate of Agriculture Extension, implements most of MAIL's field outreach to rural women. The HED's Program is largely supported by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). Its key role is "to improve the food security, livelihoods and well-being of farm households." HED staff have worked with rural women and have run a number of female-specific projects in a number of areas, including crop diversification, animal husbandry, kitchen gardening, food processing, and nutrition training (including cooking demonstrations). These projects have been effective and well-received by local communities. HED Units, consisting, in principal, of two officers at each provincial DAIL, have been established in 24 Provinces. There are no HED units in 11 provinces due to cultural and security issues. Currently HED has 57 staff members, 18 at MAIL's headquarters and 39 in the provinces. At a central level, HED consists of three sub-directorates or sections: Nutrition Education; Household Food Security; and Rural Youth and Women's Cooperatives. HED has established some 64 female cooperatives at the provincial level. One such is a demonstration center in Kabul, where HED staff work with an 80-woman producer group on increasing vegetable production.

²⁶ This information on MAIL's staffing comes from the CBCMP gender team.

In May of 2014, MAIL established a Women's Empowerment Working Group, with technical and financial support from USAID. This Gender Working group conducts regular coordination meetings involving MAIL implementing partners, donor representatives, and line ministries, to discuss gender issues as they relate to MAIL and the agricultural sector. It serves as an Advisory Committee to MAIL's leadership on gender topics, and will assist the Home Economics and Gender Directorates in the design and planning of MAIL programs and projects. The MAIL Deputy Minister chairs this Working Group, with the MAIL Home Economy Director, MAIL Gender Manager, CBCMP II gender specialist, and the ACE/ADF gender advisor serving on a secretariat for the Group. The members of the Gender Working Group have made a number of recommendations aimed at more effectively addressing gender issues within MAIL and in the agriculture sector. These include the need to:

- Develop a new MAIL organizational structure that would facilitate the identification and recruitment of more female civil servants.
- Encourage more women to study and work in the agriculture sector through, for example, the establishment of a formal partnership between MAIL and Afghan universities. This might include, for example, bringing training opportunities to local areas, rather than concentrating training opportunities for women in Kabul; increasing the transparency of trainee selection; and including a fair quota for women's inclusion in all training opportunities.
- Improve the status of women working within MAIL, including their capacity to reach leadership positions. This could involve identifying bright Afghan women, providing them with the necessary training and deploying them in the leadership positions in MAIL and the DAILs. Learning opportunities, such as workshops or study tours abroad, could enhance the capacity of women in MAIL by adopting practical measures that make it easier for women to participate.
- Work with MAIL Implementing Partners to reach a common understanding of terms, such as gender mainstreaming and women's empowerment strategies, and incorporate those strategies into program designs, including how to measure progress in their achievement.

Despite the Gender Unit's efforts, female staff members at MAIL continue to face discrimination in their attempts to access training opportunities, or even to fully utilize their existing skills and expertise. Their technical qualifications tend to be weaker. However, in training activities, women's needs are poorly accommodated. Many in senior positions within MAIL perceive women's participation in agriculture in a narrow sense, primarily limited to kitchen gardening. They fail to recognize both the existing contributions that women make in the agricultural sector and the potential for increasing their productivity.

Despite the problems discussed above, MAIL is making progress in dealing with gender issues. An August 2015 assessment, conducted by the USAID-funded PROMOTE Project, evaluated the gender-related mandate, political will, capacity, resources, and processes of 23 Afghan ministries and agencies. The objective was to identify viable potential partners for the placement of female interns. Of the 23 ministries and agencies reviewed, MAIL received the highest overall score. The rankings were based on a scale of 1 to 10 in various categories. MAIL scored 10 in six categories: (1) commitment to accept, train and mentor interns; (2) willingness to hire female interns in full time positions after the internship; (3) capable Human Resources Directorates; (4) the availability of mentors will to coach interns; (5) availability of vacant positions in the Tashkil; and (6) strong record of service delivery. MAIL scored somewhat lower in a number of other categories, including on safety and security, separate facilities (e.g., space, daycare, rest rooms), the capability of its gender unit, and its past record of hiring females (as a

percentage of total staff). MAIL was one of only five ministries that had developed their own separate gender policies.²⁷

Women' Share in the Agricultural Workforce

Women play a critical role in agriculture and livestock management, although, given the limited socio-economic survey data available, the estimates of the level of that involvement have varied. In the absence of recent and substantive analyses of women's contribution to the sector, it is quite possible that their role is underestimated in the literature. There are two types of family labor – labor that contributes to household livelihoods, such as subsistence farm work and domestic duties, and labor that generates income in cash or kind. The variation in estimates of women's "share" in the agriculture workforce may, in part, be due to differences in what is counted.²⁸ It is also likely that the role of women in agriculture, at least in some regions, has been increasing during the past decade. It is also important to not lose sight of the fact that rural women have additional responsibilities within the household, apart from agriculture, including child rearing, preparing meals, and other domestic duties. These responsibilities can be very time consuming and constrain women's involvement in agricultural activities and their ability to take advantage of income-generating opportunities.

According to GIRoA's *National Action Plan for the Women of Afghanistan 2007-17*, women make up approximately 30 percent of those working in the agricultural sector.²⁹ This was also the figure cited by the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) *Afghanistan Factsheet 2008*.³⁰ The 2010-2011 *State of Food and Agriculture Report* of the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) estimated that the female share in agricultural production was 32.1 percent in 2010 (as opposed to 28.5 percent in 1995).³¹ Malapit and Bardasi calculate that women comprised close to 40 percent of the *labor force in rural areas* (which presumably encompasses more than agriculture).³² One often cited source, which apparently originated from a gender analysis conducted for USAID's Rebuilding Agricultural Markets Program, estimated that women comprise 65 percent of the agricultural workforce.³³ This estimate was attributed in March of 2004 to a senior advisor in what was then the Ministry of Agriculture and Animal Husbandry. However, this estimate does not appear to be supported by statistical data.

²⁷ USAID Promote: Women in Government, p. 23.

²⁸ Stites, *Afghan Women, Afghan Livelihoods*, p. 199. The *National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment 2011-2012* has an extensive discussion of employment, including labor force definitions, pp. 27-34.

²⁹ GIRoA, *National Action Plan for the Women of Afghanistan 2007-17*, p. 64

³⁰ UNIFEM/Afghanistan, *Afghanistan Fact Sheet, 2008*. This is also the figure cited in Afghanistan Public Policy Research Organization (APPRO), *Gender and the Agricultural Innovation System in Rural Afghanistan: Barriers and Bridges*, 2011. The UNIFEM Fact Sheet for 2010 put the figure at 47 percent. In citing this revised statistic, UNIFEM referenced the 2005 National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment (NRVA), but provided no explanation of why the estimate had changed from the 2008 Factsheet.

³¹ FAO, *2010-2011 The State of Food and Agriculture: Women in Agriculture – Closing the Gender Gap for Development*, p. 113

³² Malapit and Bardasi, *Women's Employment and Asset Ownership in Afghanistan, 2007-08*, p. 2

³³ Rojas, *Recommendations for Integrating Gender in the Rebuilding Agricultural Markets in Afghanistan Program (RAMP)*, pp. 4, 10. This 65 percent female participation statistic has subsequently been cited in numerous documents, including the International Finance Corporation's *Gender Entrepreneurship Markets (GEM) Country Brief: Afghanistan 2007*, and the World Bank's *Afghanistan Gender Mainstreaming Implementation Note Series, No. 2: Gender in Developing the Agriculture and Livestock Sectors*. The 65 percent statistic has also been used for USAID talking points and was even cited in the 2012 Gender Analysis for the RADP Program, which was prepared for USAID by Checchi and Company. However, no statistical evidence supporting this 65 percent estimate could be found.

In Afghanistan, according to the *National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment 2011-2012*, some 6.6 million are employed. Of these 5.9 million are men and 1.3 million are women. The labor force participation rate (i.e., the share of the working age population that is currently employed or unemployed) for the nation as a whole is 80 percent for men and 19 percent for women. In other words, for the nation as a whole, 81 percent of women do not participate in the labor force at all.³⁴ The 2011-2012 NRVA breaks down the Afghan labor force by activity status (employed, underemployed, and unemployed) and by sex. The underemployed category includes individuals that are in need of additional work to sustain a living. The figures presented in Table 2 indicate that women constitute 19.2 percent of the rural workforce. However, this data measures paid employment or self-employment (a person was employed if, during the survey's reference period of one week, he or she was in paid employment or self-employed and worked at least eight hours).³⁵ Of the women employed, 7 percent were employed in farming and 47 were employed in the livestock sector. In 2013, the World Bank estimated that 47 percent of rural women participated in the work force and that women constitute 43 percent of the agricultural work force. This estimate was reportedly based on the earlier 2007/08 NRVA Report.³⁶ The data in the 2011/2012

Table 2: Rural Labor Force by Activity Status and Sex

	Labor Force Participation Rate	Fully Employed	Under Employed	Unemployed	Total	Percentage of Total
Rural Non-Kuchi		3763	962	424	5149	
Male	82.1	3208	733	256	4197	81.5%
Female	19.3	555	229	168	952	18.5%
Kuchi		326	107	24	457	
Male	91.4	246	69	15	330	72.2%
Female	36.6	80	38	9	127	27.8%
Total Rural		4089	1069	448	5606	
Male		3454	802	271	4527	80.8%
Female		635	267	177	1079	19.2%

Source: Central Statistics Organization, *National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment 2011-2012*, p. 30.

NRVA Report does not appear to support these estimates. However, the 2011/2012 report doesn't have clearly comparable data and there may be definitional differences underlying these calculations. There are only a handful of field studies that provide quantitative information on the role that women play in Afghan agriculture. Principal among these are studies carried out by the Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU), including Grace, *Gender Roles in Agriculture*;³⁷ Grace, *Who Owns the*

³⁴ Central Statistics Organization, *National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment*, p. 27.

³⁵ Central Statistics Organization, *National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment*, p. 27-33.

³⁶ World Bank, *Women's Role in Afghanistan's Future – Taking Stock of Achievements and Continued Challenges*, pp 98-100 (graph 19); and GIRoA, *Natural Risk and Vulnerability Assessment (NRVA) 2007/08*, p. xviii. The World Bank's, *Understanding Gender in the Agricultural Value Chain: The Cases of Grape/Raisins, Almonds, and Saffron in Afghanistan*, p. 1, asserts that "women form an estimated 54 percent of Afghanistan's agricultural workforce," citing the NRVA 2007/08 study. However, as discussed above, this is a misreading of the findings of the NRVA, which actually says that 54 percent of rural women are in the labor force.

³⁷ Grace, *Gender Roles in Agriculture: Case Studies of Five Villages in Northern Afghanistan*. Kabul: Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, 2004.

Farm; ³⁸ three case studies by Wakefield on *Gender and Local Level Decision Making*; ³⁹ a 2006 case study by Duchet and Duchier of agriculture in the Baharak valley of Badakhshan Province, ⁴⁰ and a 2013 survey by the International Center for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas (ICARDA) that explored the gender division of labor in crop and livestock production activities and non-farm activities in seven villages each in Nangarhar and Baghlan Provinces. ⁴¹

Women, particularly in rural areas, are often confined by cultural norms to working within the private space of the household. Men, on the other hand, operate in the public domain, interacting with the outside world on the family's behalf, and are charged with protecting and providing for the family. These traditional gender roles result in the division of labor within the household, as well as in the gender segregation of tasks along product value chains. Women and girls are delegated tasks that can be performed in or around the household. Wakefield reported, for example, that both Afghan men and women, when asked to describe women's roles in the household, were likely to say 'housework', a term that encompassed activities, such as the preparation of food, cooking, baking bread, cleaning, the supervision and early socialization of children, and the caring for sick and/or elderly relatives. ⁴² However, the female role may also include recurrent and daily agricultural activities that take place in or near the compound, such as seedbed preparation, weeding, horticulture, fruit cultivation, animal husbandry, and crop processing activities (e.g., cleaning and drying vegetables, fruits, and nuts for domestic use and for marketing). ⁴³ On the other hand, the activities carried out by men, such as land preparation, planting and fertilizer application, are usually accomplished within a specific, limited time period during the crop season. Though in some cases the labor contribution by women may equal or exceed that of men, the women's work tends to be less visible and accorded lower value. ⁴⁴

The scope of women's participation was illustrated in an analysis conducted by Maletta, based on information collected under the Nationwide Risk and Vulnerability Assessment (NRVA) that was carried out in July-September 2003 by the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development. The NRVA survey interviewed 13,000 households in 1853 villages. Three women's "wealth groups" were studied at each village, comprised of medium and better off, poor, or very poor households (these wealth groups were defined at the village level to take into account that absolute wealth levels may differ from village to village). In all, Maletta studied the reports from 5301 wealth groups. The members of these wealth groups had been asked whether women worked during the past year in selected activities. The results are presented in Table 3. Overall, 20.5 percent of women reported working in the agricultural sector. Some activities were mentioned only rarely. A mere 31 female wealth groups (0.6 percent) declared that women in that particular group had worked the previous year in planting crops. Only 8 wealth groups indicated that members worked in irrigating crops (0.16 percent). Women had worked shepherding livestock in only 12 of the wealth groups (0.2 percent). Only 314 of the 5103 groups mentioned that

³⁸ Grace, *Who Owns the Farm: Rural Women's Access to Land and Livestock*, Kabul, Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, 2005.

³⁹ Wakefield, *Gender and Local Level Decision Making: Findings from a Case Study in Panjao*, Kabul: Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, November 2004; Wakefield, *Gender and Local Level Decision Making: Findings from a Case Study in Samangan*, Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, March 2005; and Wakefield, *Gender and Local Level Decision Making: Findings from a Case Study in Mazar-e Sharif*, Kabul: Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, December 2004.

⁴⁰ Duchet and Duchier, *Rethinking Women's and Farmers' Programmes to Improve Household Economy in Rural Afghanistan: A Case Study of the Baharak Valley of Badakhshan Province*, 2006

⁴¹ Tavva, Srinivas, et. al., *Gender Roles in Agriculture: The Case of Afghanistan*, *Indian Journal of Gender Studies* 20(1), pp. 111-134.

⁴² Wakefield, *Gender and Local Level Decision Making in Mazar-e Sharif*, p. 9.

⁴³ World Bank, *Afghanistan Gender Mainstreaming Implementation Note Series, No. 2: Gender in Developing the Agriculture and Livestock Sectors*, p. 2.

⁴⁴ World Bank, *The Role of Women in Afghanistan's Future*, p. 55

women in the groups had worked at harvesting crops (6.15 percent). Another 466 wealth groups (9.1 percent) indicated that women collected wood, and 609 wealth groups had reported members working in 'other farm work' (11.9 percent).⁴⁵

The Maletta study presented in Table 3 also found that the economic activity of women depended on the wealth of the households. Women from wealthy families were much less likely to work in the agricultural sector, with 6.9 percent of women from wealthier households, 24.1 percent of women from poor households, and 30.3 percent of women from very poor households reporting working in agriculture. Some non-farm activities, such as embroidery or tailoring, were practiced more frequently by those with a medium or better level of wealth.⁴⁶

Table 3: Percent of Female Wealth Groups Reporting Women Working

	Wealth Level			Total/ Average
	Medium/ Better off	Poor	Very Poor	
Number of female wealth groups	1701	1701	1701	5103
No female activity reported	53.3	39.3	38.3	43.6
Women reported in any work sector	46.7	60.7	61.7	56.4
Women in the agricultural sector	6.9	24.1	30.3	20.5
Planting	0.3	0.9	0.8	0.6
Irrigation	0.2	0.1	0.2	0.2
Harvest	2.6	7.3	8.6	6.2
Shepherds	0	0.2	0.5	0.2
Gathering firewood	3.1	10.1	14.5	9.2
Gathering other wild products	0.6	0.9	2.2	1.3
Other farm work	4.5	15	16.3	11.9
Women in other sectors	44.1	50.8	51.5	48.8
Embroidery	14.9	8.5	4.7	9.4
Handicrafts	12.2	15.9	11.8	13.3
Weaving (mostly carpets)	17.8	21	14.8	17.9
Making clothes	29.6	20.6	12.6	21.0
Domestic service	1.6	8.3	25.3	11.8
Relief work	0.1	0.8	0.8	0.6
Other non-farm work	1.1	2.1	2.9	2.1

Source: Maletta, Hector, *Gender and Employment in Rural Afghanistan, 2003-2005*, Journal of Asian and African Studies, Volume 43(2), p. 179.

Grace found that, in the villages she studied, there was a stigma attached to women working on the land, as it denoted that a family was poor. Therefore, the richer the household, the less likely it was for women

⁴⁵ Maletta, *Women at Work: Gender, Wealth, Wages and Employment in Rural Afghanistan*, p. 6.

⁴⁶ Maletta, Hector, *Gender and Employment in Rural Afghanistan, 2003-2005*, *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, Vol. 43(2), p. 187. Lyby, also found that gender segregation can increase with economic progress, with the strict observation of *purdah* norms being a sign of social status. He reported that when microfinance led to greater wealth in a family, this could result in men becoming more restrictive with respect to the movements of their wives. See Lyby, *Microfinance and Gender Roles in Afghanistan, A Study Report*, p. 3.

to work on the land. Grace went on to suggest that, to the extent that such a social stigma existed, it needed to be taken into consideration by programs seeking to increase the overall involvement of women in agriculture, since the economic benefits derived from such participation could be partially offset by perceived social costs.⁴⁷

In Afghan agriculture there is a well-defined division of labor by age and gender. In a study of seven villages (two from Badakhshan, three from Bamyan, and two from Kabul province), Grace found that men were mostly responsible for plowing, irrigating, sowing, harvesting, threshing, separating the wheat from the husk, and cleaning the seed. Men also brought fodder and water for the animals in winter. In the villages she studied, Sunni women tended to be less involved in agriculture because of their more limited mobility. Nevertheless, they did undertake weeding and cultivating vegetables. In addition to these tasks, some women (particularly Ismaili women from some villages) were involved in removing stones from the land, harvesting, gathering the crops into bundles, threshing, and cleaning the seed. Women from both ethnic groups were responsible for livestock activities, including feeding and milking the animals, cleaning the animal shelters, producing dairy by-products, spinning wool and selling small animal by-products inside the village. In Bamyan, women brought grass in summer to feed the animals, sometimes twice daily.⁴⁸ Grace found that there was a gender differentiation in crops, with very few women working in wheat fields, while some horticulture crops (e.g., melon production) were seen as being more of a female crop, most likely because they were cultivated closer to the compound.⁴⁹

Evidence from surveys in Laghman, Ghazni, Badakhshan, Bamyan, Paktiya, Helmand, Faryab and Saripul provinces reported that women and girls engaged in a number of farm-based activities, ranging from seed bed preparation, weeding, horticulture, and fruit cultivation, to a series of post-harvest crop processing activities, such as the cleaning and drying of vegetables, fruits, and nuts, both for home consumption and for sale.⁵⁰ In her research, Grace was told that women with young children did not want to plant crops, which took place when the weather was very cold, since they would be unable to take their children with them if they did these tasks.⁵¹

The relationship between poverty levels and women's involvement in agriculture was also recognized by Kerr-Wilson and Pain in their analysis of three villages in Laghman province. Women did not normally work in agriculture in the wealthiest village, which lay in the valley and had more arable land and livestock (and even had electricity supplied by two water mills on the river). In the second village, which was situated on the plain further from the river and was poorer, with less arable land and fewer resources, older women would work as farm laborers. In the poorest village, which was situated higher up in the valley slope, women of all ages worked in the fields.⁵²

On the other hand, Ashrafi's 2009 study of 360 rural households in villages in Badakhshan, Bamyan, and Kabul Provinces reported that the women in the villages studied were involved in agriculture to a significant extent. In one village in Badakhshan, women were said to do as much agricultural work as men. In a Bamyan village, Ashrafi reported that women were involved in all agricultural activities, except for plowing, planting, and irrigation.⁵³

⁴⁷ Grace, *Gender Roles in Agriculture*, p. 7. See also Grace and Pain, A. *Rethinking Rural Livelihoods in Afghanistan*, p.35.

⁴⁸ Grace, *Who Owns the Farm*, pp. 6-7.

⁴⁹ Grace, *Gender Roles in Agriculture*, p. 7.

⁵⁰ World Bank, *Afghanistan National Reconstruction and Poverty Reduction - the Role of Women in Afghanistan's Future*, p. 55.

⁵¹ Grace, *Who Owns the Farm*, p.11.

⁵² Kerr-Wilson and Pain, *Three Villages in Angilar, Laghman: A Case Study of Rural Livelihoods*, p. 2.

⁵³ Ashrafi, Hedayatullah, *Gender Dimension of Agriculture and Rural Employment: Special Focus on Afghan Rural Women's Access to Agriculture and Rural Development Sector*, pp. 10, 28.

A 2013 study of seven villages each in Baghlan and Nangarhar Provinces sponsored by the International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT), reported that, in the two provinces, men provided 80 per cent of agricultural labor for crop production, while women only contributed 13 per cent (with children provided the remaining 7 percent).⁵⁴ On the other hand, off-farm activities, such as purchasing inputs (seeds, fertilizers and chemicals) and marketing, were found to be almost exclusively the domain of men. Men were also responsible for land preparation, plowing, applying fertilizers and pesticides (although some of this labor was done by children). Women's involvement was primarily in threshing, hauling and cleaning the harvested crops (the women's contribution exceeded that of men only in threshing and hauling in Nangarhar Province).

With respect to livestock, ICRISAT found that women played a much more important role, with the division of labor by gender almost equal overall. In Baghlan Province, men contributed 44 percent of the labor for various livestock related activities, while women contributed 43 percent (children accounted for 13 percent). In Nangarhar, men were responsible for 52 percent of the livestock labor, while women contributed 39 percent (and children 9 percent). The activities with the highest female contribution were the tethering, feeding, watering, and cleaning of animals, the cleaning of the shelter, and waste disposal. Men were responsible for buying feed and taking animals to market (although women played a significant role in selling eggs and meat – 50 percent in Baghlan and 30 percent in Nangarhar). Most of the livestock-related activities where women were predominant were carried out inside the acceptable workspace of the compound.

Gilmour, in her 2004 study of three villages in Charikar District in Parwan Province,⁵⁵ found that, in one village, Todomdara Sofla, women were involved in most aspects of cultivation, including planting, seed collection, watering, weeding, and harvesting. Their activities remained, however, subordinate and tied to the activities of the men, who were seen as the true farmers. Nevertheless, Gilmour found that women in this village were wholly responsible for some aspects of cultivation, particularly weeding and collecting seeds for use in the following season. By contrast, a few kilometers away, in Eastern Sadaqat, a village closer to the provincial urban center of Charikar, women rarely ventured outside of the family compound and the social opprobrium for a woman that worked in the open fields was heavy. Eastern Sadaqat's proximity to the urban center (and thus strange men), combined with easier access to hired labor and financial resources by Sadaqat households due to that proximity, likely explains this stricter adherence to traditional customs.

In both cases, Gilmour found that all of the agricultural activities that took place within the household or compound were the sole responsibility of women. These included: (1) planting and maintaining small gardens within the compound; (2) tending livestock; (3) cleaning, storing, and packaging produce and seeds; (4) sun drying vegetables for home use; (5) collecting and drying fruits grown within the compound; (6) sorting vegetables for either home use or for sale; (7) separating wheat from chaff and, in some cases, grinding wheat into flour; and (8) milking animals and making dairy products.

Whether a woman belongs to a landed or landless family affects the agricultural activities she will carry out. Few women work on the land of others and, where they do, this tends to be done largely by the very poor. Women from landless families may work with their husbands as sharecroppers on the land of others. However, if the men of the family do not own land or do not work as sharecroppers, it is unlikely

⁵⁴ Tavva, *Gender Roles in Agriculture: The Case of Afghanistan*. This ICRISAT report did not provide a gender breakdown by specific crops, but rather presented amalgamated figures for crop production.

⁵⁵ Gilmour, *A Woman's Work: Exploring Gender Roles and Agriculture in Charikar, Afghanistan*, pp. 59-64.

that women will have any physical access to agricultural land, since villages generally do not contain common land that can be cultivated.⁵⁶

Land Tenure Constraints

Women's lack of ownership of productive assets, particularly secure land tenure, is also a serious impediment to improving the productivity and income of women working in agriculture. It is difficult for women to obtain land and livestock other than through inheritance. This is partly because the land market in Afghanistan is limited. However, even if more land were available to purchase, the lack of income generating opportunities and the lack of credit for women would make it highly unlikely that they would be able to purchase it.⁵⁷

At the same time, although Islamic law grants widows and daughters inheritance rights (divorced women have no rights to their husbands' property) this legal right to inheritance is typically bypassed. Few women, particularly daughters, inherit in practice. Given that the amount of land available is limited, it is generally bequeathed to sons. Daughters cannot easily exercise their land inheritance rights, even if they so desired. There is often a fear of damaging their relationships with their brothers, who, by tradition, are expected to play an important protective role for them throughout their lives.⁵⁸ Even if a woman retains inherited land, her male relatives would still normally control it, determining what to cultivate and deciding whether to rent it out or sell it. The AREU Rural Livelihoods Monitoring Project found that, among 360 households it studied, only 1.87 percent of women owned land by themselves, and only 11 percent of women owned livestock individually, and these were almost all widows.⁵⁹ The World Bank reported that a woman will often renounce her inheritance to her brother before marrying, in order to keep the land in her birth family's possession. If she carries the land into her marriage, she will be expected to sign it over to her husband.⁶⁰ (Note that Afghan widows often do not marry because, if a widow married someone outside of her deceased husband's family, her husband's family could take the children from her to raise them themselves).⁶¹

Grace found that, in the five villages in northern Afghanistan that she studied, women were rarely considered to jointly own the land and few females inherit land from their parents in practice. When a woman was widowed, however, she did have certain rights over the land, and several widows involved in the study were sharecropping out their land, mostly to male relatives, and receiving what appeared to be the correct share of the crop. It did not appear that these women had full ownership rights, however. They were not permitted to sell the land, since it would ultimately be passed on to their sons or male relatives. A widowed woman was also more likely to retain management control of the land, if she had married a man from the same village, since, even if she returned to her parent's household following widowhood, she would still be residing in that village.⁶²

Local customs regarding women's inheritance rights differ among ethnic groups and regions. In a study of land relations in Faryab province, Wily noted that, while cases of female inheritance were recorded among Tajiks, no instances of widows inheriting land or houses were found among the Arab and Pashtun

⁵⁶ Grace, *Who Owns the Farm*, p.8

⁵⁷ Grace, *Who Owns the Farm*, p.14.

⁵⁸ Grace, *Who Owns the Farm*, pp. 17-23 contains a thorough description of the factors constraining women's inheritance of land and livestock.

⁵⁹ Grace and Pain, *Rethinking Rural Livelihoods in Afghanistan*, p. 24.

⁶⁰ World Bank, *Women's Role in Afghanistan's Future – Taking Stock*, p. 69.

⁶¹ Gilmour, *A Woman's Work: Exploring Gender Roles and Agriculture in Charikar, Afghanistan*, p. 74.

⁶² Grace, *Gender Roles in Agriculture*, p. 5-6. This study covered three villages in Daulatabad district in Faryab Province and two villages in Sayyad District in Saripul Province.

communities. Female land ownership was not common among Uzbeks, either.⁶³ In a survey of fifteen villages, only ten cases (2.5 percent) of women owning land were recorded. While not all of the female landowners in this survey were widows, sisters commonly surrendered inherited land to brothers.⁶⁴

Regional and Ethnic Variation in Agricultural Participation

Women's roles and responsibilities in agriculture vary across Afghanistan. Women from non-Pashtun backgrounds in the eastern, central, northern and western parts of the country are much more involved in farming than women in the Pashtun areas in the South. A baseline social assessment of MAIL's National Horticulture and Livestock Project (NHLP), which profiled agricultural practices in 23 provinces, found that women in Baghlan, Daikundi, and Panjshir were more involved in cultivation than in many other provinces.⁶⁵ In Nuristan, as well, women participate more fully in agriculture and are responsible for more substantial agricultural work. One estimate claimed that women in Nuristan Province contribute 90 percent of total labor in agriculture.⁶⁶

In southern Afghanistan, it is considered shameful for a woman to plough a field or harvest wheat. However, in some parts of Kunar, Laghman and Nuristan women do this work.⁶⁷ While the general perception is that wheat farming is the exclusive responsibility of male farmers, women in Bamyán, Badakhshan, and Panjshir provinces share equal responsibility for wheat farming and other agricultural activities.⁶⁸ The greater role that women tend to play in agriculture and livestock production in Badakhshan is a function of more equitable gender relations in that province than in most other areas. A survey conducted in several districts in Badakhshan by Actionaid (2001) indicated that women and men in that province contributed similar time to agricultural activities, with men focusing on land preparation, planting/sowing, and fertilizer application, while women were involved more in recurrent daily activities, such as weeding. In addition, following the harvest, women in Badakhshan were instrumental in drying, cleaning and preserving crops.⁶⁹

The regional differences in women's participation in agriculture are demonstrated by Maletta in Tables 4 and 5. Participation of women in agriculture-related activities (such as harvest, other farm work, and gathering wood) is extremely low in the South and Southwest. Only in the Northeast and East do women participate to a significant degree in the harvest (13.0 percent and 15.8 percent respectively). Similarly, only in the North and East is wood gathering significant (21.8 percent and 23.8 percent of women participating, respectively).⁷⁰ Further, as can be seen in Table 5, the participation of women from medium and better off households in harvest activities is low, being nil in the North, West Central, South, and Southwest areas of the country. The participation of women from all wealth groups in harvesting activities is low in the South and Southwest.

⁶³ Wily, *Land Relations in Faryab Province: Findings from a Field Study in 11 Villages*, p. 51.

⁶⁴ Wily, *Land Relations in Bamyán Province: Findings from a 15 Village Case Study*, p. 70. See also World Bank, *The Role of Women in Afghanistan's Future*, p. 64-65.

⁶⁵ Samuel Hall Associates, *The Social Assessment of National Horticultural and Livestock Project*, pp. 55-101.

⁶⁶ MoWA, *Women and Men in Afghanistan: Baseline Statistics on Gender*, p. 31-32. See also Liz Alden Wily, *Looking for Peace on the Pastures: Rural Land Relations in Afghanistan*, p. 39-40.

⁶⁷ Azarbaijani-Moghaddam, *Gender Awareness and Development Manual, Resource Material for Gender Trainers*, p. 51

⁶⁸ USAID, *2010 Gender Impact Assessment*, p. 53

⁶⁹ World Bank, *The Role of Women in Afghanistan's Future – Taking Stock of Achievements and Continued Challenges*, p. 55

⁷⁰ UNEP, *Women and Natural Resources in Afghanistan*, p. 6-7.

Table 4: Women's Participation in Selected Activities in 2002-2003 (in percent)

	Any Work	Harvest	Other Farm Work	Embroidery	Handi-craft	Weaving	Tailoring	Domestic Service	Gathering Wood
North	90.2	2.3	20.3	19.3	24.4	42.1	27.9	30.1	21.8
Northeast	80.9	13.0	21.1	20.4	13.8	19.2	28.5	18.8	6.8
West	79.9	4.1	8.1	6.8	5.8	46.5	21.6	12.0	4.5
West Central	45.0	6.1	6.9	3.0	1.3	17.7	13.9	8.7	2.6
Central	33.8	7.1	8.3	6.5	4.3	9.2	16.9	3.2	3.4
South	13.7	0.1	1.6	2.2	2.7	2.5	8.1	1.4	2.1
East	39.0	15.8	21.3	0.7	0.1	0.0	3.3	11.8	23.8
Southwest	52.7	0.0	0.2	8.9	50.5	0.2	46.9	0.2	0.0
Total	55.2	6.2	11.9	9.3	13.0	17.8	20.8	11.7	9.1

Source: Maletta, *Women at Work: Gender, Wealth, Wages and Employment in Rural Afghanistan 2002-2003*, p. 9.

Table 5: Percent of Female Wealth Groups in Each Wealth Level Reporting that Women in the Group Harvested Crops in 2002-2003, by Region

	Wealth Level			Total/Avg
	Medium/Better off	Poor	Very Poor	
TOTAL	2.6	7.3	8.6	6.2
North	0.0	3.6	3.2	2.3
Northeast	7.8	14.2	16.9	13.0
West	1.0	3.0	8.5	4.1
West Central	0.0	9.0	9.1	6.0
Central	3.1	8.6	9.7	7.1
South	0.0	0.4	0.0	0.1
East	6.7	19.5	21.2	15.8
Southwest	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0

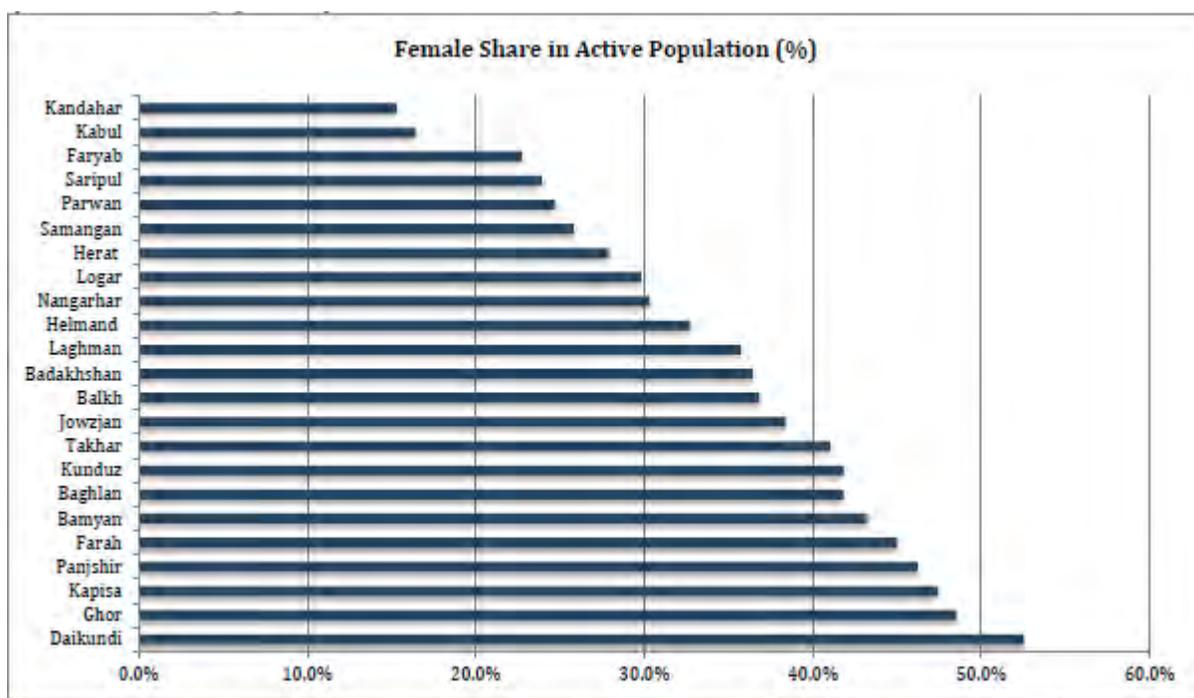
Source: Maletta, *Women at Work: Gender, Wealth, Wages and Employment in Rural Afghanistan 2002-2003*, p. 10.

There is, more broadly, ethnic variation in the role of women in society. For example, nomadic Kuchi women have more independence and freedom of movement than settled Afghan women. Kuchi men are often absent from Kuchi encampments, because they are herding animals or engaging in wage labor. Therefore, women may be left alone in their camps for considerable periods. As a result, Kuchi women undertake a broader range of herd and camp management activities, in addition to their household tasks. Although men or boys would normally be responsible for the daily shepherding of livestock, women are responsible for fetching water for household consumption. Since Kuchi families normally keep herds and encampments away from villages and cultivated land, this often requires them to walk long distances to obtain water, and exposes them to contact with men who are strangers to them. On average, Kuchi

women spend between 30-40 minutes per day fetching water. However, in some provinces, women spend two hours day travelling to fetch water for the camp.⁷¹

The Baseline Social Assessment of the NHLP⁷² produced the following table with estimates of the female share in the "total active population" by province (i.e., not just agriculture). This further illustrates the variation in women's participation across regions.

Table 6: Female Share in the Active Population



Source: Ministry of Economy (2011), « Provincial Briefs », based on the results of the NRVA 2007/8, Kabul, June.

Female-headed Households

While the supply of adequate labor within the household may mean that women do not have to cultivate land away from the family compound, vulnerable women (e.g., widows, women with disabled husbands, and those with no adult children to support them) often do have to assist with the production of labor-intensive crops. Female-headed households that do own land generally rent it out or sharecrop it. This may be due to a lack family labor or to the time needed to cultivate the land themselves, a lack of farming experience, or to the fact that their direct management would not be viewed as culturally acceptable.⁷³

Widows are the core landholding groups among women, although they may hand over their shares to their sons. In any case, a widow's land share remains within the family holding. Where the widow is not

⁷¹ Roe, Alan, *Kuchis and Water Use in Afghanistan*, pp. 7, 16.

⁷² Hall, Samuel, *Social Assessment of the National Horticulture and Livestock Project (NHLP)*, p. 34. Note that, in the narrative of this report, referencing this graph, indicated (p. 34) that "Women represent approximately 54% of the agricultural workforce in Afghanistan." However, this statement appears to be an error, since it is contradicted by the graph. The graph indicates that only in Daikundi Province does the percentage exceed 50 percent. Moreover, the table refers to the female share in the active population, not their share in the agricultural workforce.

⁷³ Grace and Pain, *Rethinking Rural Livelihoods in Afghanistan*, p.21.

living with her sons, the land may remain more definitively her own property. Widows rarely, if ever, farm the land directly, although they may influence how the plot is cultivated and by whom.

According to the 2011/12 NRVA, only 0.7 percent of households are headed by women.⁷⁴ This is down from an estimate of 2 percent in the 2007/08 NRVA.⁷⁵ This remains a critical concern, however, since a significant number of these female-headed households do not include income earning male members and the women themselves often have no sustainable income. Consequently, their households are particularly vulnerable to economic shocks. Female-headed households are poorer than male-headed households and constitute a disproportionate percentage of landless households (most likely reflecting the loss of land entitlements by women to male relatives after the loss of a husband).⁷⁶

Women's Non-Farm Work

Women also work in the home-based informal economy in activities, such as carpet weaving, embroidering textile goods, making dresses and tailoring, and making handicrafts and shoes.⁷⁷ Table 3 (on page 20) provides a breakdown of the participation of rural women in these activities by wealth group. Specifically, nearly half (48.8 percent) of the 5,301 wealth groups surveyed reported that members performed non-farm work, including 21 percent in tailoring, 17.7 percent in weaving (mostly carpets), 13.3 percent in making handicrafts, 9.4 percent in embroidery, and 11.8 percent providing domestic services. With the exception of providing domestic services, the better off wealth groups reported a higher percentage of women undertaking such tasks than did the very poor wealth groups.

While these activities do generate income, with the exception of carpet weaving, this income is very small and unlikely to be sufficient to support a family. This is, in part, due to the fact that most women are not linked to markets and lack business and marketing skills.⁷⁸ Even household income from carpet weaving has suffered in recent years from declining terms of trade, as open borders have led to increasing competition from Pakistan, and as refugees have returned with carpet weaving skills.⁷⁹ The domestically-produced carpets need to be of a high quality to compete economically with Iranian and Pakistani carpets. However, access to higher quality wool has been a constraint to carpet production in the past.

There is little opportunity cost associated with female labor on the farm. This is due to the absence of alternative income generating opportunities that are culturally appropriate. As a result, income generated by women from such activities is almost universally regarded as subsidiary and secondary to wages earned by men. Women's agricultural labor is, in general, economically undervalued. In some cases, women are paid even less than children for work in the field (possibly because children are less restricted socially). Women across Afghanistan receive wages that are three times lower than those for men. MoWA indicated that women's wages were 51 percent of those of men for planting, 61 percent for harvesting and 50 percent for other farm work. At the same time, women engaged in making handicrafts earn only 41 percent of what is paid to men, and 53 percent for weaving or gathering firewood.⁸⁰

An analysis by Homira Nassery of the USAID-funded Rebuilding Agricultural Markets Program (RAMP) in 2005 argued that handicrafts and textiles were not particularly economically viable and that

⁷⁴ GIRoA, *National Risk and Vulnerabilities Assessment – 2011/12*, p. 13.

⁷⁵ GIRoA, *National Risk and Vulnerabilities Assessment – 2007/08*, p. xviii.

⁷⁶ World Bank, *The Role of Women in Afghanistan's Future*, p. 70.

⁷⁷ Wright, *Afghanistan Female Home-Based Workers: Isolated and Undervalued*, p. 5

⁷⁸ Grace and Pain, *Rethinking Rural Livelihoods in Afghanistan*, p.34.

⁷⁹ Stites, *Afghan Women, Afghan Livelihoods*, p. 202.

⁸⁰ GIRoA, *Women and Men in Afghanistan – Baseline on Statistics in Gender*, p. 32.

development programs focusing on handicrafts and textiles (apart from carpets), even if they were traditional and thus 'safe' domains for women to operate in, could simply further marginalizing them. Handicrafts were originally undertaken purely for family use or as gifts to be exchanged at life ceremonies in Afghanistan. The economic returns (again except for carpet weaving) are very small, largely because the goods produced do not have a high monetary value. Part of the problem is that the concentration of women within a limited number of available income-generating activities, combined with their lack of organization and bargaining power, reduces their earnings levels. Further, with no strong internal or external market for these handicrafts, there is little real income potential, particularly given the limited time that women can invest in such activities and still meet the demands of intensive domestic duties. Nassery concluded that, since most women learn these basic skills from their mothers, and since market demand is limited by existing home production, and taking into account the existence of formidable Asian neighbors who have a considerable comparative advantages in the sector, the promotion of handicrafts and textiles is not a promising development avenue for Afghan women.⁸¹ Further, she argued, in a social sense, such activities did not appear to be highly regarded by men or even, in some cases, seen as work. Thus increased involvement in such activities was considered unlikely to lead to increased decision-making power or well-being on the part of the women of the household.

Carpet weaving, on the other hand, while economically viable and, at least for some landless households, the main source of income, can be very taxing. Girls begin carpet weaving from as early as age eleven. It is a very lengthy and physically difficult process, taking on average one year for one person to make a nine-meter carpet. Grace reported that some women reportedly ate opium as a means of lessening the pain and enabling them to stay awake while weaving carpets.

Women are less able to weave carpets in winter due to the cold, as they often have no room large enough and warm enough to weave in. At the same time, weaving in the spring may conflict with the agricultural tasks that the women must do. In a household with only one woman, she may have to weave carpets as well as do housework, often weaving late at night by oil lamp. Where a family has several female members of different ages, the older women will often carry out the housework tasks, look after the children and spin the wool, in order to free up the labor of the younger, more productive women to weave for long periods of time. Older women are involved in some carpet weaving, but can only do this for shorter periods of time, due to both poor eyesight and body pain. The ability of a household to generate income from carpet weaving, therefore, will depend on the size and age composition of that household. Grace reported that, at a *shura* in one of the villages she studied, the question was asked whether women would always weave carpets. A man replied that, if households did not need the women to weave carpets, they would no longer do so, given the physical difficulties of the work.⁸²

Despite the economic contribution women make to the household through carpet weaving, it remains unclear whether an increase in carpet weaving would benefit them. Men are exclusively responsible for the sale of carpets and for transactions with traders associated with carpet production. It is not clear that the increased economic contribution would lead to greater decision making power on the part of the women weavers, or give them greater access to income, or ease their workload. Nor is it clear that efforts to expand carpet production would not have the perverse impact of increasing the opportunity costs of sending girls to school.⁸³

⁸¹ Nassery, Homira, *Gender Status Report, Rebuilding Agricultural Market Systems (RAMP)*, July 31, 2005, p. 3

⁸² Grace, *Gender Roles in Agriculture*, pp. 11-16

⁸³ Grace, *Gender Roles in Agriculture*, p. 16

Women's Education

Lack of education, particularly a lack of literacy and numeracy, reduces the productivity of rural Afghan women and hampers their organizational and entrepreneurship abilities.⁸⁴ Wakefield encountered a widely held perception that a woman's place was in the home and that they were unable to understand issues beyond it.⁸⁵ There also exists in some quarters a perception that formal schooling is irrelevant in preparing girls in rural communities for their adult roles as wives and mothers. From this perspective, there is little perceived value of educating a daughter, since she will be married off and leave the family. Similarly, having an educated daughter does not necessarily convey any perceived benefit in terms of marriageability in a rural society where education levels are so low and where marriage commitments are made when girls are very young.⁸⁶

The lack of schools (i.e., distance to the nearest school) and lack of female teachers are critical constraints to increased female enrollment, as is the inability of older girls to walk to a school that might lie beyond the village limits. Security is a concern, particularly given the targeting of girls' schools by opponents of the present government. Poverty is also a factor affecting school attendance and retention rates. Unfortunately, children from the poorest households are often unable to attend school because they are relied upon by their family to earn income by engaging in menial labor, both on- and off-farm. Since girls below the age of ten can be mobile, while their mothers and older female household members aren't, they may serve as important lifelines for the household, by begging or engaging in low paying labor activities outside the home.⁸⁷ These constraints would suggest that USAID and other donors need to be careful to develop initiatives that do not, by increasing the demand for, or burden on, household labor, encourage the withdrawal or withholding of girls from school.

At the same time, Shrafi, drawing upon a survey of 360 households in Bamyan, Badakhshan, and Kabul Provinces, discussed women's knowledge levels and their motivations to attain knowledge. He concluded that it should not be assumed that women do not perform certain tasks simply because they don't have the necessary knowledge or skills. For example, he reported that some of the women surveyed said that they did not know how to plant seeds, but were not interested in learning. They expressed a concern that, if they did learn, this work would then become their responsibility. Another woman surveyed indicated that she had once wanted to learn to plant seeds, but that other women in the village had told her not to do so, because then they would also have to do this work. In a third village, the women said that they knew how to plant seeds, but that the men didn't know that they knew, for the same reason – that the women would have then had to do the work, and "what would be left for the men to do?" Because their work is largely unremunerated and because they must divide their time between other household tasks, such as domestic chores, child-rearing, or caring for the elderly, rural women have few incentives for increasing their productivity, given the current socio-economic framework.

The professional training of women in agriculture is also limited. The 2012 RADP Gender Analysis reported that there were 223 female students in the 45 agricultural high schools (grades 13 and 14) across the country (out of a total of 7,923 students), or 2.8 percent. The Afghanistan Technical Vocational Institute, meanwhile, reported that it has 44 female students in its Horticulture program, for a total of 314

⁸⁴ According to the 2011-2012 NRVA (p. 71), adult female literacy is 37.9% for urban areas, 10.4% for rural areas, and 1.2% for Kuchi. For women, youth literacy (the rate for those 15-24 years of age) is 60.1% for urban areas, 22.5% for rural areas, and 1.6% for Kuchi.

⁸⁵ Wakefield, *Gender and Local Level Decision Making in Samangan*, pp. 2-3

⁸⁶ World Bank, *Afghanistan National Reconstruction and Poverty Reduction - the Role of Women in Afghanistan's Future*, pp. 32, 39.

⁸⁷ Chemonics, Afghanistan Alternative Livelihoods Program/South (ALP/S), *Economic Safety Net and Gender Analysis*, p. 4.

current female agriculture students enrolled. No other private universities are reported to have agricultural programs.⁸⁸

With respect to university-level training, the RADP Gender Analysis, citing the Ministry of Higher Education, reported that there were 270 female students studying agriculture at the university level in 2011, out of a total student population of 8,280 (or 3.26 percent). The breakdown is presented in Table 7. It is noteworthy that Nangarhar University, with over a thousand students in the Faculty of Agriculture, had only one female student in that faculty. The Agricultural Faculties at Kandahar, Khost, Paktiya, Kunar, Laghman, and Helmand Universities had no female students (out of a combined population of 1,937 students).⁸⁹ Of the 219 professors on the agriculture faculties of Kabul, Nangarhar, Balkh, and Herat universities, only 13 were women (6 percent).

Table 7: Female University Students in Agriculture Faculties in Afghanistan 2011

University	# Female Students	# Male Students	Total	%
Kabul	72	851	923	7.80
Herat	64	679	743	8.61
Bamyan	36	500	536	6.72
Balkh	29	602	631	4.60
Takhar	15	378	393	3.28
Baghlan	14	422	436	3.21
Faryab	13	322	335	3.88
Badakhshan	8	185	193	4.15
Kunduz	7	376	383	1.83
Alburoni	5	394	399	1.25
Ghazni	4	309	313	1.28
Parwan	2	42	44	4.55
Nangarhar	1	1,013	1,014	0.10
Khost	0	366	366	0.00
Kandahar	0	431	431	0.00
Helmand	0	181	181	0.00
Kunar	0	153	153	0.00
Laghman	0	151	151	0.00
Paktiya	0	655	655	0.00
Total	270	8,010	8,280	3.26

Source: Brennan, *Gender Analysis: Regional Agriculture Development Program (RADP) Afghanistan*, p. 50

The identification of qualified women willing and able to go for overseas training has been problematic, for religious or cultural reasons. Of the 57 students sent to India to pursue MS degrees under the USAID-funded Advancing Afghan Agriculture Alliance (A4) Project, only one was a woman. Of the 12 students sent to Purdue University for MS degrees under A4, only three were women, and two of those received degrees in English, rather than in an agricultural discipline.

Part of the reason for the low participation of women in the faculties of agriculture is that agriculture is not a preferred career option for educated women. They tend to focus, rather, on obtaining degrees in medicine, pharmacy, education, and the sciences. One obstacle faced by young women studying

⁸⁸ Brennan, *Gender Analysis: Regional Agriculture Development Program (RADP) Afghanistan*, p. 12.

⁸⁹ Brennan, *Gender Analysis: Regional Agriculture Development Program (RADP) Afghanistan*, p. 50.

agriculture is family opposition to daughters working in rural areas that are perceived to be “unsafe” for women. As a result, those women who decide to study agriculture or engineering are frequently unable to complete the fieldwork required in the second or third year of the program. This, in turn, hampers their chances of obtaining a field position, such as that of an agricultural extension worker.⁹⁰

The AGRED Gender Analysis found that, compared to MAIL, many university agriculture faculties had a generally more progressive stance with regard to the inclusion of women as both students and faculty, and were making a deliberate effort to mentor female students into faculty positions. As noted above, one problem identified was that agriculture was generally not the first choice in terms of academic focus. Female students interviewed remarked on the fact that agriculture has “good job prospects and opportunities for advancement within the field, *such as moving into teaching positions*” (italics added), which reinforces the theme that female university graduates aren’t particularly drawn to agricultural extension as a career. Nevertheless, the near term job prospects for female graduates should be excellent, given the number of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) struggling to recruit qualified women for women-only training programs, in addition to the recruitment needs at MAIL and the Directorates of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock (DAILs).⁹¹

Gender and Economic Decision-Making within the Household

Gender research has consistently shown that men and women in a family have different priorities for spending. Women are more likely to spend money on education, medical expenses and children. Men tend to purchase property and productive resources (e.g., agricultural inputs, equipment, etc.). Thus, the impact of additional income for the household depends on who controls the income and the budget.

In Afghanistan, the household head or father is, by far, the most important decision maker. Monetary transactions appear largely outside the female domain.⁹² The use of income, if any, from agricultural produce is controlled by men in most Afghan families. For example, Afghanaid’s studies from Badakhshan indicated that, in spite of the fact that men and women tended to spend equivalent amount of time on agriculture and livestock activities in that province, decision-making on expenditures remained the man’s prerogative.⁹³ The same applied to the income generated through the sale of wood, which was the second most important source of income recorded from studies in mountain villages in Laghman.⁹⁴ In the joint households that characterize rural Afghanistan, where more than one family lives together, resource control and allocation decisions generally rest with the head of the household, most often the father or the oldest brother.⁹⁵

It is often stated by community leaders, husbands and fathers that women have no interests of their own – or that the interests of women are the same as theirs. It is also commonly accepted that the needs and interests of a family take precedence over those of the individuals within it. A common sentiment expressed by village men during Wakefield’s research into gender and local-level decision-making was that women didn’t have any problems.⁹⁶ The lack of education and social isolation of rural women in Afghan society reinforces this indifference to their concerns.

⁹⁰ Perini Management Services, *Irrigation and Watershed Management Program Gender Implementation Plan*, p. 3.

⁹¹ Oates, *Gender Analysis: Afghan Agricultural Research and Extension Development (AGRED) Project*, p. 16-17.

⁹² GIROA, *National Risk and Vulnerabilities Assessment – 2007/8*, p. 100.

⁹³ World Bank, *The Role of Women in Afghanistan's Future*, pp. 123-124.

⁹⁴ Nassery, *Gender Status Report, Rebuilding Agricultural Market Systems (RAMP)*, July 31, 2005, p. 8.

⁹⁵ Grace, *Who Owns the Farm*, p.11.

⁹⁶ Wakefield and Bauer, *A Place at the Table: Afghan Women, Men and Decision-Making Authority*, pp. 3-4.

The constraints on female empowerment in Afghanistan are not necessarily universal. Echavera, in a study of the impact of microfinance in Balkh Province (in the outskirts of Mazar-e-Sharif), found that women in the community that he surveyed "were able to have an overt influence on household decision-making processes and often disagreed openly with male household heads. They were involved in decisions ranging from day-to-day choices to taking loans and even buying pieces of land with them—an activity that typically falls under men's area of responsibility. However, more often than not it was the oldest member of the household who had ultimate control over resources and made final decisions, albeit usually in consultation with the rest of the family."⁹⁷

While, elsewhere in the world, USAID has had considerable success promoting the empowerment of women through economic development interventions in agriculture, this will be a significant challenge in Afghanistan. In particular, USAID and its implementing partners will need to be cognizant of the risks to women that could result from the outside interventions that they support. For example, as will be discussed below, much of the microcredit provided to women is used for activities controlled by men in the households – investments in which the women of the household may have little or no say. While this access to credit might provide greater status to women within the family, it also poses a risk. Not all of the investments made with the microfinance credit received will be successful, and this could potentially leave women in the vulnerable position of being obligated to repay the loans with a spouse who may not share responsibility for the obligation. The potential for domestic conflict in such a situation is not insubstantial. This concern is supported by statistics from a study by the organization Global Rights, which showed that the level of domestic abuse was greatest when the woman had a monthly income and the husband didn't.⁹⁸

Donors should not automatically assume that increasing the economic participation of women in agriculture will lead to their increased empowerment or role in household or community decision-making. At the same time, this intra-familial power dynamics is a highly sensitive subject that should be approached by outsiders with great care and be carried out gradually. It is unlikely that USAID's agriculture projects will be able to directly affect the allocation of resources and decision-making within rural households. Changes in this area will only result from education and the gradual sensitization of both men and women to the importance and value of women in Afghan society in general, and the value of their contributions in the agriculture sector in particular.

While changes in intra-familial power dynamics in rural households will be very difficult for USAID agricultural projects to directly affect, much less measure, it must be recognized that increasing the empowerment of women is fundamental to their being able to play a broader role in Afghanistan's economic growth. However, building capacity and changing community and individual perceptions takes time. While gender equality may be a long term goal, it is an outcome that is not achievable in the short-term. Nor is it a change that would be welcome under the current status quo.⁹⁹

Efforts are underway in the development community to attempt to directly measure women's empowerment and inclusion levels in the agricultural sector. One tool to accomplish this is the Women's

⁹⁷ Echavez, Zand and Bagaporo, *The Impact of Microfinance Programmes on Women's Lives: A Case Study in Balkh Province*, p. 20.

⁹⁸ Global Rights, *Living With Violence, Living With Violence: A National Report on Domestic Abuse in Afghanistan*, p. 18. According to the Global Rights study, 87.2 percent of Afghan women experienced at least one form of physical, sexual or psychological violence or forced marriage, and 52.4 percent of the women surveyed reported physical violence in their marriages, with 39.3 percent saying they had been hit by their husband in the previous year

⁹⁹ Wali, *How Can Rural Afghan Women Support and Benefit from Agriculture?* p. 2.

Empowerment in Agricultural Index (WEAI).¹⁰⁰ The WEAI measures the roles and extent of women's engagement in the agriculture sector in five domains: (1) decisions about agricultural production, (2) access to and decision making power over productive resources, (3) control over use of income, (4) leadership in the community, and (5) time use. It also measures women's empowerment relative to men within their households. The Index, which is currently being used for performance monitoring and impact evaluations of Feed the Future programs (baseline data has been collected in Bangladesh, Guatemala, and Uganda), relies on household surveys that include interviews men and women from the same household.

USAID is attempting to use the WEAI approach in Afghanistan, despite the security conditions and the general difficulty in directly accessing rural women in this country. However, collecting the data needed to effectively utilize the WEAI to measure the empowerment of rural women in Afghanistan will likely require some customization within the WEAI parameters. Over time, as these constraints become less restrictive, the use of the WEAI to measure changes in the empowerment of women in the agriculture sector could evolve closer to resemble the standard approach. The Index identifies the various "domains" where women are empowered and reveals the connections among areas of disempowerment. Therefore, it enables decision-makers to focus on improving the situation of the most disempowered women. The WEAI also measures how empowered women are, relative to men in the same household, which is critical to understand the gender empowerment gap, and address this in current project implementation and future project design.

Women's Groups and Roles within the Community

In terms of community-level decision-making, the shura is the most important institution in Afghanistan. This is an informal decision-making and dispute resolution body that can encompass a range of economic and political issues that affect the welfare of local populations. As with most traditional Afghan institutions, it has historically been comprised of male elders and landowners. Women have traditionally had no direct representational voice in most shuras, which reflects the cultural perspective that men are responsible for upholding the collective values of the community.¹⁰¹

NGOs and others promoting local-level programs have tried to form separate women's groups, in order to bring women together and offer them some measure of autonomy and control over local-level decision-making. However, such groups are not always easy to form. One problem identified by Wakefield is that such efforts have often been based on geography, rather than on where existing social bonds and networks are strongest. Wakefield identified several key questions that needed to be considered before forming these "coalitions" of women. First, do the women have a strong incentive to participate in the group activity, especially if it is not something they do naturally on a large and formal scale? Second, are the women mobile and able to participate in the group? Third, how much time is involved, and are there childcare and other responsibilities that would pose significant time constraints for them? Wakefield found that men would generally be suspicious of a women's participation in new community institutions, particularly if the activities involved were outside of women's widely accepted household and community responsibilities, or if it was not clear what the outsiders organizing the groups were trying to achieve in their community.¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰ The Women's Empowerment in Agricultural Index was developed by USAID, under the Feed the Future Initiative, in collaboration with the International Food Policy Research Institute and the Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative. Feed the Future, *Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index*, Brochure, 2012

¹⁰¹ Wakefield and Bauer, *A Place at the Table: Afghan Women, Men and Decision-making Authority*, p. 4

¹⁰² Wakefield and Bauer, *A Place at the Table: Afghan Women, Men and Decision-making Authority*, p. 7

A 2005 study by Wakefield on decision making in a village in Panjao District, Bamyan Province, found that women were not accustomed to meeting, either among themselves or with men, to discuss community level issues. The women had never previously participated in the traditional shura because they “did not have knowledge,” particularly about issues that were not directly related to their responsibilities in the household or community (e.g., making preparations for weddings). This was a characterization that the women themselves accepted, and appeared to be an important constraint. When women were included in a village meeting, their participation was largely symbolic. The researchers in this study found that it was considered shameful and inappropriate for women to voice opinions about issues that, in the eyes of the community, did or should not concern them, or were the domain of those with a higher social status. Even issues of importance to women, such as water collection, household hygiene, and the education of the children, were seen as the domain and responsibility of men.¹⁰³

Women’s producer groups or associations are being formed under a number of donor-funded projects. Such groups can provide a key entry point for women-to-women service delivery. This would include extension services, credit, and inputs and market linkages. In each case, the agents of change will have to be women (female extension agents and loan officers or female village-level traders or agents). Women’s producer groups, with some financing, could also be groomed to undertake or invest in collective activities, such as post-harvest processing.

A USAID-funded survey of five provinces in Eastern Afghanistan in 2013 found that women in those districts expressed strong interest in being members of a farmers’ association, although few were actually members of one. The province with the highest reported female association membership was Nangarhar with 5.4 percent of women reporting that they were members of an association. In Parwan it was just 1.3 percent and in the other provinces surveyed (Wardak, Ghazni, and Laghman) less than 1 percent of women were actually members of a farmer’s association.¹⁰⁴

Community Development Councils (CDCs) are one vehicle for mobilizing local community involvement. Established under the National Solidarity Program (NSP) of the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development (MRRD), CDCs are community decision-making bodies that help identify, implement, monitor, and provide financial management of block grants awarded by the NSP for community projects. Since its inception in 2002, the NSP has been implemented in over 29,000 villages across 361 of Afghanistan’s 398 districts. The CDC leadership is elected by the local community. Every resident of the village, whether male or female, aged 18 years or older, is eligible to vote or serve as a council member and, since the NSP requires the participation of at least 60 percent of the adult population in a village, female enfranchisement is required. The NSP block grants are valued at \$200 per household. The projects selected are generally focused on the construction or rehabilitation of infrastructure (e.g., potable water, irrigation rehabilitation or roads and bridges) or human capital development. The program requires that one of the projects in each village targets women. However, the female-oriented projects are generally training courses for women (either literacy or courses in tailoring or embroidery).¹⁰⁵ Anwarzay, in a 2012 survey for the MRRD, found that women in “local self-governance institutions” (CDCs, District Development Assemblies, shuras, etc.) interviewed in Nangarhar and Herat Provinces listed sewing/tailoring courses as the most useful projects, literacy training as second, and animal husbandry/poultry production third.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰³ Wakefield, *Gender and Local Level Decision Making: Findings From A Case Study in Panjao*, pp. 2, 7, 22-23

¹⁰⁴ IDS International Government Services, *Baseline Monitoring Pilot – East Region, Final Report*, p. 22.

¹⁰⁵ Bleath, *Empowering Women: Evidence from a Field Experiment in Afghanistan*, pp. 7-8.

¹⁰⁶ Anwarzay, *Gender in Development: Local Self Governance Institutions and the Participation of Women in Afghanistan*, p. 9.

A 2012 study of a women's CDC in Kalakan District, Kabul Province, concluded that the CDC did provide a venue for women to participate in the development of their community.¹⁰⁷ It also created an opportunity for women to interact with other women, exchange knowledge, and express themselves freely. According to the study, the NSP's requirement that the community set up a *shura* for women, as well as for men "sent a strong signal to male community members that the programme would listen to women's voices and ensure their participation. This led them to be more open to consulting with women and accepting their involvement in the project." The women's exposure to staff members of the NGO facilitating partner during meetings also reportedly helped increase women's awareness about their rights and boost their confidence, and the interaction with other women raised their awareness of issues in general. This, in turn, improved the way the women handled themselves both within and outside their homes, which apparently led to some relaxation of traditional restrictions on women's mobility within the community. The women CDC members also reported that they were able to participate more fully in household decision-making. The study found that the experience had given female CDC members, many of whom were widows, the confidence to undertake new tasks, such as purchasing goods for their households in the bazaar. This was because they had less fear of being ostracized for joining in activities outside the home or of being physically harmed by male family members for doing so. The exposure to the *shura* also led to changes in the women's attitudes toward their daughters, including the value of educating them.

Despite these apparent successes, the above mentioned CDC study identified important challenges. In particular, the lack of literacy and numeracy among female *shura* members made it difficult for them to effectively examine the transactions and plans proposed by the group's leadership. This lack of education facilitated the "capture" of the program by local elites. Even the secretary of the women's *shura* was illiterate, which made it difficult to document the decisions made or the discussions that took place during the *shura*. It also made it difficult for individual *shura* members to lobby for their own ideas and interests, or to oppose the *shura* leadership. In one case, the lack of literacy and numeracy also made it impossible for the women to control their own funds (the treasurer of the men's *shura* handled the financial affairs of the women's *shura*). This led to allegations of corruption and mismanagement of program funds, which had a negative impact on the community's perceptions of the program and on women's participation. In the end, the participants in this case reported that they had gained little from their participation in the NSP sub-projects that were funded through the CDC. Moreover, when the budget for the NSP-funded projects was exhausted, the women's *shura* ceased to function.

A 2008 study of the impact of CDCs also noted the problem of elite capture of benefits, particularly when the benefits are not public (e.g., culverts or gravel roads), but rather are "excludable" (i.e., where only a limited number of members of the community necessarily benefit). "Excludable" benefits might include human capital development efforts or solar panel or livestock distributions, or programs where fees are required to access benefits, such as electricity from diesel generators or solar panels where individual households were required to purchase batteries. Reporting on a women's goat project in Bamyan Province, for example, one community member said, "We have one project in the village for the community. This is a goat project. We only received 17 male goats. The rich people and the landlords got these goats." The study found that projects for women, such as tailoring and literacy courses or animal husbandry, tended to fall into the "excludable" category, and were thus more likely to generate dissension over the equity of benefit distribution, which could "backfire," justly or not, on female CDC leadership. The 2008 impact evaluation also found that, in many communities, male CDC members maintained *de facto* control over CDC resources allocated for women's projects in the village. For example, the report cited one community in which the women's CDC chose to use NSP funds to start an animal husbandry project. The members of the village's male CDC did not want to allocate resources to a

¹⁰⁷ Echavez, *Does Women's Participation in the National Solidary Programme Make a Difference in their Lives: A Case Study of Kabul Province*, p. 1-3.

separate women's project. However, the NGO that served as the NSP's local facilitating partner insisted that a separate project for women be implemented. So the men bought several sheep for the women, and then later sold the sheep at the bazaar, and used the proceeds to purchase more solar panels for the men's CDC project.¹⁰⁸

Despite the problems encountered, the 2008 CDC impact study concluded overall that the participation of women in community-level project planning could serve as an end unto itself.¹⁰⁹ A 2012 study of 13,000 respondents from 500 villages (250 with NSP programs and 250 without) sought to determine how the NSP program affected the attitudes and outcomes with respect to women's roles in family life, village community, and society more broadly. It found that the NSP program increased female participation in village governance, community life, and production activities. It also increased support for female participation in village decision-making. However, the researchers could detect no impact on the intra-family decision-making or on attitudes towards the general role of women in society.¹¹⁰

Azarbaijani-Moghaddam, in her 2010 study of gender equity among the NSP's CDC Programs, concluded that the NSP improved the mobility for some women by giving them somewhere legitimate to go on a regular basis, united them with a singular purpose for the first time, and enabled them to participate more effectively in community life. However, the level of women's participation in decision-making has varied. Men in local communities, and even facilitating partner staff, have often bought into the assumption that women have no skills, where the reality is that women, particularly, in specific age groups, have skills, but cannot use them profitably. As a result, the interests of various socioeconomic groups of women (and men), including younger women, poor women, disabled women, female headed households, and landless households, are not always represented. Consequently, the NSP's impact, in terms of improving the quality of women's lives and skills could be much better.¹¹¹

In another illustration, the USAID-funded Alternative Development Project/Southwest (ADP/SW) worked with two villages in Pusht-e-koh District (Farah Province), Nowbar and Dozbar, to enhance their irrigation capacity. As part of the planning process, the project's agriculture and gender team undertook an assessment under which surveyors collected the names of all farmers—male and female—with land holdings, and recorded land use and types of crops cultivated. Discussions were then held with shuras for each community and local community leaders concerning, inter alia, shared water rights and the necessity of forming male and female cooperatives. The shuras proved extremely cooperative and were actively involved in the creation of three cooperatives (two male and one female), even obtaining government permission and collecting the 15 percent contribution necessary to qualify for in-kind grants. The Nowbar shuras were particularly supportive of gender activities and did not object to benefits being targeted to widows and other women. The shuras even agreed that ADP/SW could supply a farm tractor and equipment to the women's cooperative, which then hired men to maintain and operate it.¹¹²

Producer groups can provide another vehicle for supporting women. Such groups can serve a social, as well as an economic objective. Again, more educated women in the community would most likely have to provide a leadership role. According to the RADP Gender Analysis, women reported that their participation in income-generating activities in a cooperative had become an "acceptable" and

¹⁰⁸ Brick, *Final Report: Investigating the Sustainability of Community Development Councils in Afghanistan*, pp. 22, 31-32.

¹⁰⁹ Brick, *ibid*, p. 30.

¹¹⁰ Bleath, et. al., *Empowering women: Evidence from a Field Experiment in Afghanistan*, pp. 2-3.

¹¹¹ Azarbaijani-Moghaddam, *A Study of Gender Equity through the National Solidarity Programme's Community Development Councils*, p. x.

¹¹² Tetra-Tech ARD, *Alternative Development Program—South/West (ADP/SW), Quarterly Report (October – December 2010) Bi-weekly Report (December 16-31, 2010)*, pp. 15-16

“permitted” activity that allowed them out of the home. However, the analysis concluded that a long-term commitment is needed, including training in planning, management, and business skills, if they are to become viable and to turn women’s groups into commercially-oriented organizations. Such groups also need access to locations (e.g., women-only training and demonstration areas), where they can interact with female extension agents in a culturally acceptable and secure environment.¹¹³

In 2011, the USAID-funded Agricultural Credit Enhancement (ACE) Project conducted a needs assessment, in partnership with the United Nations Development Program’s (UNDP) Gender Program and MAIL’s Home Economics Directorate, of 44 women’s co-operatives in 15 provinces. The objective of the assessment was to identify cooperatives with the highest potential, and to determine the extent of capacity building required for them to expand their businesses with investment through the Agricultural Development Fund (ADF). The assessment revealed extremely low capacity on all fronts: marketing, business management, leadership, and technical skills. To begin to address these weaknesses, seven representatives from women’s cooperatives were sent to India on a ten-day study tour, during which they received training from an organization that specialized in mobilizing women through joint initiatives in the agriculture sector. This training effort was done in collaboration with UNDP. ACE’s senior management acknowledged that the process would likely to take several years, but that a targeted effort was essential to develop women-owned commercial agribusinesses.¹¹⁴

Reaching Women through Agricultural Extension

Rural Afghan women do not typically have access to information that might enhance their productivity and provide income generating opportunities. This is due to multiple constraints. One of the most basic is the cultural prohibition on women interacting with men to whom they are not related. This is, of course, a problem because agricultural extension services are traditionally delivered by men. Moreover, one cannot assume that any technical advice provided to the male members of a household will be effectively shared with the female members, even when the latter are doing the work. Another constraint is the restriction on women’s mobility in rural areas, which not only limits the scope of their participation in some agricultural activities, but makes it difficult for them to proactively seek information about new technologies and practices, or to benefit from extension efforts (such as farmer field days) aimed at groups of beneficiaries in a given community. Rural women cannot generally attend training sessions that are distant from their homes, because they have household responsibilities to fulfill and because their families may not allow them to go. These means that such training must take place in the villages.

The relative difficulty of reaching women with technical assistance was quantified in the RADP Gender Analysis, which estimated that a typical male extension agent with his own motorbike may be able to reach over 150 locations and farmers in one month, while a female extension agent is more likely to reach only 30-50 farmers, and needs to coordinate transportation through family members, taxis, or on foot.¹¹⁵

The fact that women in remote areas often do not possess official identification can also be problematic. The USAID-funded SRAD Project encountered this problem, because it made it difficult to verify the identity of women beneficiaries of subsidized inputs, such as improved seed and fertilizer or low-tunnel greenhouses, through “Conditional Asset Transfer” packages. These transfers required an investment by beneficiaries, including attending training courses or providing a co-pay, in exchange for the receipt of subsidized commodities. While SRAD originally allocated 5-10 percent of the Conditional Asset

¹¹³ Brennan, *Gender Analysis: Regional Agriculture Development Program (RADP) Afghanistan*, p. 17.

¹¹⁴ Savage, *Gender Analysis: Afghanistan Agricultural Credit Enhancement (ACE) Program*, p. 9.; and DAI, ACE Quarterly Report ,Oct. 1 – Dec. 31, 2012 p. 24

¹¹⁵ Brennan, *Gender Analysis: Regional Agriculture Development Program (RADP) Afghanistan*, p. 8.

Transfer packages to female heads of household, actual beneficiaries numbered only one percent, largely due to lack of verifiable identification.¹¹⁶

The restrictions on male-female interactions in Afghan society means that the provision of technical assistance and training to women can, for the most part, only be carried out by female staff, particularly in rural areas. This presents its own set of problems. USAID's implementing partners have had difficulty recruiting qualified Afghan women for technical positions, particularly in the field. This is a problem shared by other donors. The relatively low level of education among Afghan women means that the number of candidates for such positions is very limited. Women from major urban areas, where the main agricultural training opportunities (such as in universities) are found, are unlikely to go to work in rural areas. Similarly, women from rural areas are unlikely to come to major urban areas for training. At the same time, women interested in such employment have difficulty getting permission from their families to accept jobs without significant preparatory work. It is also often the case that the husband or a male relative also needs to be engaged as a 'protector' (*mahram*) for the woman when she is visiting women's groups in the field. Language barriers can also make it more difficult to reach women. For example, Wakefield, in her research in a predominately Uzbek village, found that, while a majority of the men in the village spoke Dari, only a few of the women did. The absence of Uzbek speakers on her team made it difficult to reach women.¹¹⁷

Rasuli noted that most village women would be uncomfortable with male teachers and would not participate in such trainings. They would prefer to be taught by other women. Moreover, the men in their families would more likely allow them to participate in the training, if it were given by women. At the same time, village women often mistrust or misunderstand women who come from cities. They are, however, more likely to respect the opinions of older women, even if they are uneducated, and would identify better with older gender staff, even if they were from cities.¹¹⁸

In conservative rural communities, it may be necessary for male extension staff to first talk to the men of the community or household, to open the doors for subsequent work with the women. This was the case for the ADP/SW Project. That project's gender team included male members who could communicate and work with the local village shuras (all male) to build receptivity to assisting village women. Often, ADP/SW found, offering support for local widows provided the first step into gaining male approval to access the broader female population.¹¹⁹

This quandary is illustrated by the problems encountered in promoting extension to women in the livestock sector. Despite the fact that women play a prominent role in livestock production, there have been difficulties of recruiting female para-veterinarians (paravets). For example, the Livestock Health, Production, and Marketing Improvement Program, implemented by the Dutch Committee for Afghanistan, had trouble retaining female paravets in its training program. This was due to the length of the course (six months) and the reluctance of the women's *mahrams* to spend the six months with the women in the training locations. An evaluation of the program recommended shortening the training sessions to one month (necessarily making the training more rudimentary) and offering the classes closer to the communities, so the issue of travel with a *mahram* would be less of a constraint. It was also suggested that a female paravet be recruited to do the training, in order for the trainees to more easily obtain permission to attend the trainings.¹²⁰

¹¹⁶ International Relief and Development, *Southern Regional Agricultural Development Final Report*, p. 42.

¹¹⁷ Wakefield, *Gender and Local Level Decision Making in Samangan*, p. 4.

¹¹⁸ Rasuli, *Lessons learned from a Recent Survey of Rural Gender programs in Afghanistan*, p. 4.

¹¹⁹ Tetra Tech, *Alternative Development Project/South West, Final Report*, p. 51.

¹²⁰ Nassery, *Gender Status Report*, p. 12.

One cannot assume that approaches that work for male extension officers will work for female extension personnel, or that it is sufficient to treat them equally. For example, MAIL provides its extension officers with per diem to enable them to travel to the field. However, MAIL's failure to provide per diem for the *mahrams* that must accompany female extension agents to the field undercuts their mobility.

The Horticulture and Livestock Project (HLP) employed 18 female horticultural extension workers to work with approximately 4,000 women in 160 women's producer groups in 11 districts. Yet, HLP found the employment and retention of these female extension workers a challenge. The women recruited needed to come from the focus districts, have a high school diploma, and be able to participate in extension training and refresher courses provided by the project. While they found that older women could generally move around the districts with fewer limitations than younger women, they were less likely to have completed high school. As a result, the project hired fresh graduates from high school and provided extension training and refresher courses.¹²¹

Shamim, in her interviews with female farmers and female HLP extension agents in Mir Bacha Kot district in Kabul Province, found that some female farmers were dubious of the qualifications and experience of female HLP extension workers. One farmer said, "The extension workers might have read a few books, but I got my hair gray in this field." Another said that the extension worker went by the book, not what was really happening in the field, and that she was not very sure sometimes about what she was advising them to do and could not answer many of their questions. The Shamim study found that the HLP extension workers did not have enough practical knowledge on their field of expertise, and that this affected their ability to train farmers, leading to training that is more theoretical than practical. For their part, the female extension workers found it difficult to work with women farmers, because they were often busy with household activities and so did not regularly attend extension sessions. They also identified as problems the fact that the poverty of women farmers made it difficult for them to afford inputs, and their lack of education made it difficult for them to understand and follow up on recommendations given. Shamim concluded that the competence of the HLP female extension workers who worked with female farmers was hampered by their own low level of education and their lack of experience.¹²²

The USAID-funded Alternative Development Program-East (ADP/E) project found that projects involving women needed to conform to a variety of prerequisites. For example, activities needed to be located indoors or inside a compound, where the women participants would not be seen by the public, and project sites needed to be near their homes or sufficiently accessible so that a male family member could provide escort services to and from the location. The activities could not require interaction with unrelated men and not run past daylight hours. Finally, some provision for child-care services was needed for women with young children. The ADP/E Project also found that women's programs needed to be seriously vetted in terms of interest, location, marketing potential and overall financial viability. Projects chosen simply because they were "helping women" had a poor success rate. This "relief mentality" was viewed as a stumbling block to sustainable business development and success.¹²³ This argument was echoed by the USAID Agricultural Gender Assessment by Saraya. That report recommended that USAID "provide long-term systematic support for the programs – ad hoc, piecemeal pilot projects can build women's self-esteem, but are often not sustainable."¹²⁴ Similarly, the mid-term evaluation of the CHAMP project, criticized the failure of that project to integrate its gender-focused vegetable gardens and poultry activities with the rest of the project's production and marketing efforts.

¹²¹ World Bank, *Understanding Gender in the Agricultural Value Chain: The Cases of Grape/Raisins, Almonds, and Saffron in Afghanistan*, p. 19.

¹²² Shamim, *Learning Space between Female Farmers and Female Extension Workers*, pp. 21-22, 30-31.

¹²³ DAI, *Alternative Development Program – Eastern Region, Final Report, 2005-2009*, pp. 68-69.

¹²⁴ Saraya Media and Communication, *Gender Assessment of USAID Agriculture Programs*, p. 10.

While the gender activities were successful and popular with the female beneficiaries, none of these women were even spouses or relatives of the beneficiaries in the project's orchard and vineyard programs. The gender program was viewed as an "add-on" to the project, which the evaluation team characterized as taking a "charitable" approach to gender support.¹²⁵

Afghanistan has one of the least developed agricultural extension services in the world, and efforts to increase agricultural extension to women must take into account the gross inadequacy of the agricultural extension system as a whole. According to the 2012 AGRED Gender Analysis, there are only two to four extension employees at each provincial DAIL. These individuals are responsible for covering all provincial districts. This means that the average extension worker is responsible for serving 4,500 farming families (and is reaching a very small proportion of that number). These extension workers generally have little in the way of technical knowledge or proper training, and little in the way of transportation or communications tools, such as internet access. By MAIL's estimate, outside of Kabul province, only five percent of farmers have access to extension services. The 2007/8 NRVA found that only 1.3 percent of farmers, nation-wide, reported any contact with extension workers (from the government or otherwise).¹²⁶ The IWMP Project reported that, of the 336 employees of the Balkh DAIL, only 12 were women (3.28 percent). There were two women working in the Home Economics Department, but no female staff in technical positions in the Extension Department. The remaining female positions were apparently administrative in nature.¹²⁷

Considering the additional barriers that Afghan women face in accessing government services, it can be presumed that few are benefitting from the sparse extension resources that do exist. None of the women interviewed by the AGRED Gender Analysis team reported any contact with a government extension worker, and some respondents were unaware of the purpose or role of extension. The AGRED Gender analysis also reported that "the predominant thinking in MAIL seems to be that, given the inadequate numbers of extension workers in the districts, the priority must be to first try to stock the DAILs with enough male extension workers, and then worry about the women at some future time when resources are available."¹²⁸

Nevertheless, there are places where change is in evidence. In Herat in 2010 there were two female employees out of 400 in the province. There are now 30 women working in the DAIL (including two in director positions), helped by the fact that there are now modest numbers of female students graduating from the Faculty of Agriculture at Herat University. Nevertheless, women extension workers remain limited to working in the Home Economics Department.¹²⁹

Security is, of course, a primary challenge for gender activities. Anwarzay, for example, mentioned that the murder by unknown assailants of a woman who was very active in a shura in Surkhrud district of Nangarhar province deterred women from participating in local self-help governance groups.¹³⁰ Security was also explicitly identified as a problem by the CHAMP Project, affecting all of the targeted provinces in which they worked (Kandahar, Helmand, Paktiya and Nangarhar), with the exception of Bamyan. CHAMP's female extension officers were threatened directly by anti-government elements, which issued

¹²⁵ Checchi and Company, *CHAMP Mid-Term Evaluation*, pp. 21, 26-27, 32

¹²⁶ Oates, *Gender Analysis: Afghan Agricultural Research and Extension Development (AGRED) Project*, pp. 7-8.

¹²⁷ Perini Management Services, *Irrigation and Watershed Management Program: Balkhab Watershed Desktop Assessment*, pp. 2-63.

¹²⁸ Oates, *Gender Analysis: Afghan Agricultural Research and Extension Development (AGRED) Project*, pp. 7-8.

¹²⁹ Oates, *Gender Analysis: Afghan Agricultural Research and Extension Development (AGRED) Project*, p. 14.

¹³⁰ Anwarzay, *Gender in Development: Local Self Governance Institutions and the Participation of Women in Afghanistan*, p. 14.

night letters or spread rumors that no one should work with NGOs, and especially with its female employees.¹³¹ Such conditions made it difficult to reach large numbers of women.

The establishment of secure locations where women can receive training is one approach for reaching women. For example, as a part of the perennial horticulture component of MAIL's Horticulture and Livestock Project, farmers were encouraged to forgo some production of staple crops and instead create an orchard on part of their land on which women could work exclusively.¹³² The USAID-funded Southern Regional Agricultural Development Project (2011-12) constructed perimeter walls at district women's training centers in Nad-e Ali and Sangin Districts in Helmand Province and in Maiwand district in Kandahar Province. The project also undertook building renovations and refurbished the women's training centers in Sangin and Maiwand districts, including providing toilet facilities, interior upgrades, and demonstration facilities.¹³³

An alternative approach that could be explored would be the use of radio as a tool for reaching rural women with agricultural extension and credit information. The 2007/08 NRVA found that nearly 40 percent of farmers regularly followed agricultural information programs on TV or radio, with nearly 60 percent following such programs "occasionally." It is not known to what extent women also follow such programs, but it is clear that TV and radio can be a powerful means of reaching those engaged in agriculture. To ensure women are reached, messaging would have to be targeted specifically at women. At the same time, TV and radio messaging to farmers could also support women by targeting men with messages that convincingly argue for women's increased role in agriculture.

Strengthening local Afghan technical capacity, including on gender-related issues, has been, and should continue to be, a component of USAID programs. IDEA-NEW, for example, provided capacity building assistance to the Provincial Departments of Women's Affairs (DOWAs) in the Eastern Region, as well as to the MAIL Gender Team in Kabul. Training topics included business, computer and English skills, as well as training in agriculture and watershed and natural resource management. This training was given to 21 staff from MAIL gender department and 38 staff from provincial DOWAs.

More recently, the Women in Agriculture (WIA) Program, a component of the USAID-funded Afghan Agricultural Extension Project, has had some success in mobilizing women. The goal of that program is to prepare female extension educators to work with women farmers, focusing on kitchen gardens, small-scale poultry, small ruminant production, postharvest storage and preservation, nutrition, and the marketing of agricultural products. To date, the WIA program has trained 94 students from various vocational schools and public and private universities, increasing their understanding of horticulture and livestock and strengthening their extension skills.¹³⁴ The WIA program has access to a 0.6 hectare plot of land belonging to MAIL at the Darulaman Demonstration Farm in Kabul. The WIA program has established a training center and demonstration farm there that showcases various techniques in organic farming and kitchen gardens. This includes compost production, integrated pest management, apiculture, backyard poultry, small ruminant production, and urban gardening. The WIA team utilizes low or no cost/appropriate technologies that women can implement in their homes.

¹³¹ Roots of Peace, *CHAMP: First Annual Report, Feb 1 2010 – Jan. 30, 2011*, pp. 20-21.

¹³² World Bank, *Afghanistan Gender Mainstreaming Implementation Note Series, No. 2: Gender in Developing the Agriculture and Livestock Sectors*, p. 6.

¹³³ International Relief and Development, *Southern Regional Agricultural Development Program - Final Report*, p. 37.

¹³⁴ AAEP II- *Women in Agriculture: Concept for Women's Empowerment through Internships Program*, January 21, 2016.

The WIA program utilizes the Farmer Field School (FFS) approach. The FFS students (extension staff and cooperative leaders who volunteer their time to serve as trainers and mentors for other women in their community) visit the training center each week and participate in FFS classes taught by AAEP Women in Agriculture staff or other experts. A typical FFS Saturday begins with a farm tour to observe and discuss developments, problems, and solutions. The FFS students also observe agricultural practices appropriate to the stage of production and their effects as the season progresses. The weekly training addresses new techniques and skills and equips the students to teach and model appropriate gardening, husbandry, food handling, preservation, and marketing skills. The lessons follow the crop season, covering every aspect of food production, from seed and soil preparation, to drip irrigation and IPM, to harvesting and marketing of the products that are not consumed at home. An important feature of the FFS approach is the bidirectional flow of teaching and learning. During a typical training cycle, 25-30 women leaders will attend the FFS and learn a new hands-on technique. They practice teaching that technique at the demonstration farm. Then, each FFS woman leader implements what she learned at her own demo garden, thereby teaching another 10-20 women. The FFS women leaders and AAEP staff visit many of the gardens of the women participants to review and troubleshoot.¹³⁵

The RADP-South Project has entered into an agreement with the DOWA in Kandahar to establish a women's demonstration farm and training facility at the DOWA Aino Mina Training Center, located in Kandahar City. The demonstration farm will cover nearly 2 1/3 hectares, almost half of the area of the training facility. With this effort, RADP-South will furnish an agricultural training classroom and an administrative office located in the Aino Mina Training Center, as well as design curricula, facilitate all training programs, develop and supply training materials, lead recruitment of trainees, and cover transportation and per diem costs, as they apply for trainees, facilitators and attending project staff. The DOWA demonstration farm will serve as a safe environment for women to participate in training sessions on crop production and postharvest handling, learn about livestock care, and gain more information on business and leadership development.

Finally, it should be noted that programs should restrict or limit the provision of stipends or other direct payments to beneficiaries aimed at encouraging their participation. Beneficiaries can become accustomed to such payments and, down the road, may begin to refuse to participate without them. At the same time, the reimbursement of transportation costs for female training programs may be warranted, since the costs that they incur in travelling to training sessions could be prohibitive. To the extent possible, training for women should be held in locations that minimize the distance that women must travel to participate.

Gender Issues with Credit and Microfinance

The access of women to financial services is extremely limited. This is not necessarily due to a lack of lenders or loan funds, but rather to the fact that women generally lack of ownership of, or control over, the financial and real assets that would be required for collateral. Since an Afghan family's property is generally in the name of the male family member, the permission and cooperation of the male head of household is generally required for women to take out loans where collateral is required. Women's low levels of literacy and numeracy, together with their limited mobility, only exacerbate this problem. Compounding this problem is a lack of female loan officers. The targeting of microfinance credit to Afghan women, however, has been a mainstay of development efforts to benefit them, and according to

¹³⁵ Afghan Agricultural Extension Project, Women in Agriculture, power point presentation, March 2014; University of Maryland Department of Agricultural and Resource Economics websites. <https://www.arec.umd.edu/extension/ume-arec-programs/farmer-field-schools> and <https://www.arec.umd.edu/extension/ume-arec-programs/demonstration-farms>

the World Bank, women currently (2013) account for 38 percent of the 400,000 microfinance clients in Afghanistan.¹³⁶

A major vehicle for extending credit to women has been the Microfinance Investment Support Facility for Afghanistan (MISFA), established in 2003 by the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development and supported by the World Bank and other donors. MISFA is an apex organization with five Micro-Finance Institutions (MFI) partners. As of 2015, MISFA's partners represented 198,000 active clients, with 129,000 loans worth approximately \$110 million (an average of \$850 per loan). Approximately 60 percent of MISFA's active borrowers are women.¹³⁷ Other donors, including USAID, have implemented their own microfinance programs. The USAID-funded RAMP project (2003-2006), for example, provided \$4 million to microfinance institutions for both group lending and individual loans, with a focus on agricultural borrowing for inputs, trading, and poultry.

In his analysis of microfinance and gender in Afghanistan in 2006, Lyby examined MISFA's record. At the time (August 2006), MISFA had nearly 224,000 active clients in 150 districts in 20 provinces. Some 75 percent of its microfinance savings and credit services were directed to women. Lyby found, however, that only 0.8 percent of these loans went for crop production purposes, and only 14.2 percent went for livestock.¹³⁸ Most of the credit went for retail trade (44.1 percent), tailoring (20.6 percent), and carpet weaving (4 percent). Another 4.5 percent went to provide services (e.g., restaurant or mobile phone sales), 0.4 percent for handicrafts, and 11.3 percent went for consumption.¹³⁹

Lyby also found that the microfinance credit was primarily used for male-generated endeavors. In other words, although the credit was solicited by Afghan women and given to them, they almost inevitably turned the funds over to their husbands to use for enterprises that they controlled and, once the funds were turned over, the women had little or no direct involvement in the use of the funds. An exception to this pattern was credit given for tailoring and carpet weaving, which fell predominantly within the female domain and took place in the home. A 2009 study by MISFA indicated that roughly 80 percent of respondents turned the funds over to male household members.¹⁴⁰ This pattern was largely the result of restrictions on the mobility of women and on their interaction with outsiders, particularly men, which made it very difficult for them to effectively use the loans themselves.

This resulted, according to Lyby, in concerns over whether the women involved were merely serving as fronts or conduits that channeled MISFA microfinance loans to men, and that it might have made little difference, if the loans had just gone directly to the men in the first place. While an argument could have been made that the loans went into a family business and, therefore, benefited all the members of the family, this would have been the case even if the loans had gone to the men of the household directly. On the other hand, the argument could have been made that when a woman was the loan recipient her status and empowerment within the family increased, irrespective of the use of the loan. According to Lyby, some female loan recipients felt that their well-being had increased and that they were more empowered. However, Lyby found that the men he interviewed did not necessarily share that opinion.¹⁴¹

¹³⁶ World Bank, *Women's Role in Afghanistan's Future – Taking Stock*, p. 81

¹³⁷ MISFA, Annual Report for the Year Ended March 2015 and November 2015 Consolidated Report. Note that the 60% estimate is from 2013 data from the World Bank, *Women's Role in Afghanistan's Future – Taking Stock*, p. 81

¹³⁸ The livestock credit was largely for fattening cattle or sheep for the Eid celebrations. Lyby noted that this was a particularly risky type of loan activity, given the absence of veterinary services and the possibility that the animals could be stolen

¹³⁹ Lyby, *Microfinance and Gender Roles in Afghanistan*, p. 24.

¹⁴⁰ Microfinance Investment Support Facility for Afghanistan (MISFA), *Gender Mainstreaming in Microfinance: Making a Positive Impact on the Lives of Afghan Women*, p. 17.

¹⁴¹ Lyby, *Microfinance and Gender Roles in Afghanistan*, p. 43.

On the other hand, another study (2007) involving household interviews was carried out across 1,019 MISFA client, non-client and dropout households in the provinces of Kabul, Nangarhar, Laghman, Herat, Balkh, Baghlan and Kunduz. Over 300 of the MISFA clients interviewed were women. Of these, only 50 said that all decisions pertaining to loan use were taken by their male relatives. Some 44 per cent of female clients reported absolute control over money that they earned. Of the female respondents, 80 per cent reported an 'improved attitude' in their husbands and other relatives, both male and female, since joining the microfinance program.¹⁴²

Zand's study in Kabul Province (2011) found that, for families receiving credit, the credit facilitated improvement in gender relations when other enabling factors were in place, particularly when the wife had been somewhat empowered earlier, due to the particular social dynamics of her family or the personalities of the individuals within the household. Zand also concluded that female clients who enjoyed the support of their family, especially from the male head or the elder members of the household, were able to benefit more from their participation with the microfinance credit.¹⁴³ Zand further reported that loan groups had the potential to act as a platform for women to engage with, learn from, and be inspired by, one another.¹⁴⁴

While a microfinance organization may view its female credit programs as empowering women and facilitating their ability to contribute to the household economy, this may not be the perception of the borrowers. The examination by Zand of a microfinance project in Parwan Province (2010) found that the clients, their family members, and community residents posited other reasons for the MFI's focus on females. Specifically, they felt that MFIs gave loans to women primarily because their greater trustworthiness and lack of mobility made it more likely that they would repay the loan.¹⁴⁵

In 2012, Echavez studied 57 women who had participated in MISFA microfinance programming in Mazar-i-Sharif (Balkh Province), and found that access to microfinance loans had enhanced women's decision-making responsibility in the household.¹⁴⁶

The USAID-funded Agricultural Credit Enhancement Project (ACE), which began in July of 2010, assisted MAIL in setting up an Agricultural Development Fund (ADF) to provide credit to the agricultural sector, including to agribusinesses and financial and non-financial intermediaries. However, the ADF's minimum loan limit of \$100,000, which was set to hold down administrative costs and interest rates, effectively excluded women from applying directly for ACE/ADF loans. In late 2011, in order to address some of the gender inequities inherent in the original ACE program design, ACE/ADF created a Sharia compliant financial product to cater specifically to women. Called "Zahra," after the Prophet Muhammad's daughter, Saidatina Fatima Az Zahra, it caters specifically to female agribusiness entrepreneurs.

The Zahra program offered loan amounts ranging from \$20,000 and \$40,000. Collateral was still required (and was normally provided by male family members), and there was a strict monitoring program to avoid the use of women as "fronts" to access finance. Nevertheless, channeling credit to female entrepreneurs still proved difficult. By mid-2015, the ADF had made only seven direct loans to six female-owned/operated agribusinesses and to one non-financial institution (the Afghan Women Saffron Growers' Association), totaling \$1.37 million. These organizations were involved in saffron production,

¹⁴² Greeley and Chaturvedi, *Microfinance in Afghanistan: A baseline and initial impact study for MISFA*, pp. 42-43.

¹⁴³ Zand, *The Impact of Microfinance Programmes on Women's Lives: A Case Study in Kabul Province*, pp. 1, 33-36

¹⁴⁴ Zand, *The Impact of Microfinance Programmes on Women's Lives: A Case Study in Parwan*, p. 42

¹⁴⁵ Zand, *The Impact of Microfinance Programmes on Women's Lives: A Case Study in Parwan*, p. 14.

¹⁴⁶ Echavez, *The Impact of Microfinance Programs on Women's Lives: A Case Study in Balkh*, p. 4

food processing, beekeeping, baked goods production, livestock, and handicrafts. Another loan was to a Financial Institution, OXUS Afghanistan, that on-lent the funds to 206 female clients. A total of 779 women benefitted from ADF through various forms of intermediaries. In the end, however, women constituted only 2.7 percent of the ADF loan portfolio. Loans going to male-owned and operated agribusinesses also benefitted women, however. The workforce of one borrower, Herat Ice Cream, for example, is 70 percent female.

The draft final performance evaluation for the ACE Project, identified the following key challenges preventing women from accessing ADF loans: (i) women do not own businesses that can absorb loans that meet the \$100,000 minimum threshold under ADF; (ii) Afghan women do not own assets that can be pledged as collateral, and even if they do, they cannot pledge them without permission of male family members; (iii) women are more risk-averse than men; (iv) women lack the skills and confidence to apply for loans; and (v) women have little access to information on opportunities to borrow.¹⁴⁷ The ACE Impact Assessment suggested that the actual number of female beneficiaries is probably higher than can be reported. Due to a lack of access to property, women are often dependent on a man to provide collateral. In such cases the loan is actually provided to the man and he is counted as the beneficiary. The actual proportion of female borrowers in this position is difficult to estimate.¹⁴⁸

According to the ACE 2014 Annual Report, ADF loans created a total of 3,611 jobs, of which 1,245 directly benefited women.¹⁴⁹ ACE also supported its female clients with technical assistance and small grants (which totaled nearly \$200,000 by November 2013). For example, it organized a study tour for the silk garment manufacturer Rabia Maryam Handicraft Company, to Bangalore, India, to identify and procure silk processing machinery. It has also organized a number of training programs on gender for ADF clients, with the purpose of increasing gender awareness and encouraging the incorporation of women as workers and suppliers of raw materials.¹⁵⁰

In order to expand opportunities for women's participation, ACE/ADF sought to hire female loan officers. Hiring women for professional positions proved difficult, given that very few female applicants possess the requisite skills and experience. However, ACE/ADF was nevertheless able to recruit ten women professionals for mid-level and senior level positions. ACE also implemented a professional development program for ACE/ADF female employees, which has supported them in their pursuit of educational opportunities. As a result of this, according to the 2012 ACE Annual Report, one female employee had applied to the Fulbright Scholars' program, three had applied for admission at the American University and three were enrolled in continuing education training.¹⁵¹

Access of Afghan women to credit remains extremely limited and, even when they receive credit, their ability to make productive use of it is limited by the traditional constraints placed on their physical mobility and social interactions, particularly in rural areas. These constraints hamper their ability to build personal networks and to avail themselves of the training opportunities that would help them to expand their businesses.¹⁵² Despite these issues, some progress has been made, including through the USAID-funded ACE/ADF Program, to direct credit to women-owned agribusinesses and to women's producer associations.

¹⁴⁷ Checchi and Company – *Final Performance Evaluation: Agricultural Credit Enhancement Program*, pp. 8, 22-25.

¹⁴⁸ DAI, *Agricultural Credit Enhancement (ACE) Program, Impact Assessment 2010 – February 2015*, pp. 16-17.

¹⁴⁹ DAI, *Agricultural Credit Enhancement (ACE) Program, 2014 Annual Report*, pp. 24, 45-46

¹⁵⁰ DAI, *Agricultural Credit Enhancement (ACE) Program, 2013 Annual Report*, pp. 21-22.

¹⁵¹ DAI, *Agricultural Credit Enhancement - 2012 Annual Report*, p. 20.

¹⁵² International Finance Corporation, *GEM Country Brief: Afghanistan 2007*

Gender Aspects of Water and Irrigation

Access to drinking water, irrigation water, and more efficient irrigation systems are a primary concern for female farmers, according to interviews conducted in Balkh Province by the Irrigation and Watershed Management Project (IWMP) in June of 2013.¹⁵³ In a normal year, the time to travel from rural households to a main water source averages less than ten minutes, although two percent reported in the 2007–2008 NRVA a walking distance of one to three hours. Rural household accessibility to sources of safe water varies considerably by province, and disputes over water can lead to conflicts among neighboring communities. Water access is particularly difficult for nomadic Kuchi households, with Kuchi women spending between 30 and 40 minutes each day collecting water. During periods of drought, of course, the amount of time spent each day collecting water increases.¹⁵⁴

Conflicts over the distribution of irrigation water are second only to land disputes as a source of community conflict. Water conflicts are generally resolved by the elders and *mirab* (an individual selected by the community and charged with regulating the distribution of water) of the village or villages involved. The extremely weak position of women in rural communities increases their vulnerability in such conflicts.

Water allocations come with the land and, as noted above, women do not normally own land. Where women do own land, their irrigation water rights should be protected, at least in theory. However, the inequities associated with a woman's ownership manifest themselves in many ways. Land inherited by a woman would most likely be managed by the immediate family. If she were a widow and did not have children to work the land, she might rent it out under a sharecropping arrangement (most likely to a brother or other relative). If the land is irrigated, the women might pay for some of the needed inputs, as well as for the services of the *mirab*, and make a monetary contribution to the maintenance of canals. The male relative or sharecropper would normally be responsible for ensuring that the land received its fair allocation of irrigation water.

Since, in most rural areas of the country, it is not socially acceptable for women to attend public gatherings, they are not generally involved in the selection of *mirabs* or *wakils* (local community representatives), though they may be represented by a male relative in such meetings.¹⁵⁵ A woman would rarely, if ever, meet with the local *mirab* or *wakil*. A male relation or the sharecropper would normally deal with them on her behalf. Moreover, a woman would likely have limited understanding of the rules governing the allocation of water for her land, or of whether she was getting her fair share of irrigation water. Nor would she be expected to have such an understanding. This ignorance of the water allocation system, combined with the lack of opportunities to participate in the decision making process that surrounds it, leaves women vulnerable to exploitation and unable to protect their water rights.¹⁵⁶

Despite these constraints, rehabilitating and expanding irrigated land would likely benefit female-headed households, since such households are relatively more vulnerable to drought. This is because, given their status and the constraints they face in society, Afghan women have limited coping strategies in the face of increased income insecurity. Access to irrigated land is crucial, not only for the provision of economic income, but also for ensuring their independence, a key factor in their overall empowerment. As a result,

¹⁵³ Perini Management Services, *Irrigation and Watershed Management Program: Balkhab Watershed Desktop Assessment*, p. 2-61

¹⁵⁴ Center for Policy and Human Development, *Afghanistan Human Development Report 2011 - Forgotten Front - Water Security and the Crisis in Sanitation*, pp. 98-102.

¹⁵⁵ Lee, Jonathan, *Water Management, Livestock, and the Opium Economy, The Performance of Community Water Management Systems*, Kabul: Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, p. 37.

¹⁵⁶ Chokkakula, *Interrogating Irrigation Inequities: Canal Irrigation Systems in Injil District, Herat*, pp. 22-23

breakdowns in management systems and uneven distribution of water resources will most likely have a disproportionately negative impact on female-headed households.¹⁵⁷

Within the realm of USAID programming, one option for reaching women might be the introduction of drip irrigation systems for family gardens, since the planting and cultivation of family gardens is traditionally a women's activity. Such a system would increase output, reduce the need for weeding, and save women's labor for more productive activities. An economic analysis of such systems would be needed, especially given the likelihood that much of the output would be either consumed or marketed locally. Further, a significant constraint might be the availability of water in or near the compound.

Women's Roles in Livestock Production

Most rural households in Afghanistan keep livestock, mainly for domestic consumption but occasionally for sale. Women and children are the main keepers of smaller livestock (sheep, goats, and chickens), and women are responsible for most livestock management when the animals are in and around the compound. Larger herds tend to be managed by men and boys. The latter are usually in charge of taking the animals for grazing, while women and girls collect fodder. Women take care of newborn and sick animals, milk the livestock, collect fodder and cow dung, clean the stalls, and feed and water stabled animals. In some of areas in Panjshir and Badakhshan, women play a far wider role in livestock management, including travelling to summer pastures without their families to tend animals.¹⁵⁸



Photo: Female paravet-trainee inspects sheep at a veterinary training clinic in Parwan in 2006.

Table 8 presents a breakdown women's and men's responsibilities with respect to cattle, sheep, and goat production. Women generally have greater work responsibilities (apart from grazing animals and treating them for diseases). With respect to decision-making authority, men have greater say in purchasing and selling animals and in purchasing feed, while women have greater authority on the sales of byproducts.

Despite the role that women play in animal care, women aren't usually considered to own the animals (aside from poultry). Men act as overall 'managers', overseeing the women and children as they perform

¹⁵⁷ Rassul, *Water Scarcity, Livelihood and Conflict: A Thematic Paper*, p. 26

¹⁵⁸ World Bank, *Afghanistan National Reconstruction and Poverty Reduction - the Role of Women in Afghanistan's Future*, March 2005, p. 61.

various chores. When women do own livestock, they normally possess only one or two animals. This likely reflects the fact that the animals are used for household consumption, rather than income generation. The fact that livestock management by women takes place within the compound also limits the amount of livestock that a woman can own, as does the lack of credit to purchase animals.

Table 8: Women's and Men's Responsibilities in Animal Husbandry (%)

	Cattle		Sheep		Goats	
	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men
Work Responsibility						
Feeding	69.14	19.46	59.70	26.60	63.86	23.37
Grazing	11.44	21.89	7.67	32.17	10.74	27.72
Watering	63.32	17.90	51.22	26.36	51.81	23.80
Tending young	81.86	4.86	58.54	16.49	70.68	13.50
Milking	84.13	1.87	57.49	4.88	77.94	4.93
Treating	22.73	74.44	38.21	56.91	33.82	59.22
Decision Making						
Purchasing animals	33.65	65.63	28.69	68.76	33.96	60.23
Purchasing feed	28.95	70.37	24.39	73.05	27.29	66.91
Selling animals	37.60	61.64	35.31	61.56	42.96	51.09
Selling milk	52.31	19.06	35.89	17.65	47.61	18.58
Selling wool			34.03	25.90		
Selling fiber					40.35	21.92
Treating	34.09	64.63	46.23	50.41	38.61	54.57

Source: Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation, and Livestock 2008, and World Bank, *Gender in Developing the Agriculture and Livestock Sectors Afghanistan Gender Mainstreaming Implementation Note Series, No. 3, 2012*

Note: The percentages for men and women do not always total 100 percent because sometimes children are involved (notably in animal grazing), and because some respondents did not answer some questions in the survey associated with collection of this data.

Several efforts have trained women as para-veterinary workers. Female paravets can interact directly with women, who are often responsible for the health of the livestock (especially small ruminants and poultry). Local paravets would likely be able to go alone to treat animals in the houses of others inside their own village. However, they would generally need a *mahram* to go outside the village.¹⁵⁹ In 2010, in collaboration with the Dutch Committee for Afghanistan, ASAP supported the establishment of regional veterinary field units (VFUs) in western Afghanistan. These included six female paravet members, as well as 127 male paravets, and 10 veterinarians. The program worked with VetServ to facilitate drug and vaccine supply for the VFUs and offered credit facilities to members to help them expand their businesses.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁹ Grace, *Who Owns the Farm*, p.14.

¹⁶⁰ Chemonics, *ASAP Annual Report 2010*, p.37

RADP-South is also working with the DCA under its livestock component. For example, in early 2015 DCA Extension Agents provided training to 2,026 women on livestock preventative care and treatment, including on the signs of common diseases and treatment options, the importance of deworming, and the management of pests (ticks and the mites that cause mange and scabies), as well on sheep and goat reproductive cycles.¹⁶¹

In interviews with Catherine Schloeder, during her study of the role of women in pastoral production, Kuchi women indicated that they were integral to production and that their role as partners in this livelihood was similar to that of female pastoral producers elsewhere in the world. They were responsible for overseeing the birthing of lambs and kids, caring of newborns and young, fiber collection and processing, milking, processing of dairy products, weaving, fetching water, and maintaining the family dwelling. In contrast, Kuchi men were responsible for all decisions related to seasonal migration, herding, shearing, slaughtering, veterinary needs, livestock marketing, and forage supplies. Schloeder also found that, due to their transient lifestyles, Kuchi women are vulnerable to risks (as are men). She noted, for example, that if a family has to find an alternative migration route (when they are prohibited from using a traditional transit route), Kuchi women risk abduction and rape unless the family has previously secured safe passage along the new route. Criminals and corrupt commanders or warlords were identified as the most frequent culprits in these situations.¹⁶²

Poultry Production

Small-scale poultry production is a culturally acceptable practice for women, one that could contribute to improved nutrition and food security, as well as income generation, for rural households. In the villages that Grace studied in 2004, some of the women owned chickens and sold the eggs produced to other women inside the village. It was an activity that could be done inside the “acceptable” workspace of the compound. However, it was not a particularly remunerative activity, and Grace concluded that the lack of income generated from the sale of eggs explained why mostly women and not men raised the chickens.¹⁶³

The potential of poultry as a gender activity is constrained by the nature of the poultry industry overall. A value chain assessment of the poultry subsector, conducted in 2004 under RAMP, found that 99 percent of Afghanistan’s chickens were raised using a “backyard scavenger system,” with the chickens generally owned by women. Under this system, a flock of usually less than a dozen birds is left to scavenge for whatever food they can find within the compound. The backyard scavenger system provided an average egg production of about 60 eggs per bird per year. This relatively low level of production permitted the women to sell, on an *ad hoc* basis, a few surplus eggs and the occasional live bird. The system relied on domestic breeds that, while more disease resistant than improved breeds, still had a mortality rate of over 50 percent. RAMP found that the villagers were unfamiliar with improved poultry breeds, did not corral chickens, and did not provide supplementary feed to increase egg production. The production levels obtained, as a result, did not provide an incentive to women to form producer associations, which might have enabled them to market their eggs and buy feed collectively. The RAMP assessment concluded that moving to a semi-scavenger system, where the birds were directly fed about half of their food, as well as given medications and some shelter, would permit flocks to increase to up to 500 birds of mixed breeds,

¹⁶¹ Chemonics, *RADP-South FY 2015 Quarterly Report – Quarter II January-March*, p. 17.

¹⁶² Schloeder, et. al, *Women as Partners in Pastoral Production in Afghanistan*, p. 59.

¹⁶³ Grace, *Gender Roles in Agriculture*, p. 9.

with average egg production of 125-150 eggs per hen per year.¹⁶⁴

In an effort to improve poultry productivity, RAMP subcontracted with FAO to implement a rural poultry production project between early 2004 and June 2006. The project had a budget of about \$3.5 million and trained 28,000 village women in seven provinces (Ghazni, Baghlan, Kunduz, Nangarhar, Parwan, Herat, and Bamyan Provinces) in improved breed poultry production. During implementation, 187 women were trained as trainers, who then trained village women in six-month cycles. More than 20,000 classes were held and 338,000 household visits were made to provide assistance to rural women poultry producers. At the end of this time period, the trainees received a starter kit of 15 crossbred chicks and equipment, and were organized into village producer groups. Feed was also given at no cost to each woman for the first six months of production. The women were asked to contribute 20 percent of the cost of the 15 birds that they received, which went into a revolving fund for the village producer group. The project also created five provincial centers, which included small feed mills and refrigerated storage for vaccines. These centers also served as collection points for the marketing of eggs to traders. This model sought to give producer groups continuous access to the training, inputs and market linkages critical to raising improved poultry breeds successfully, and it initially met with some success.

RAMP found that even within the poultry chain, it was not generally possible to bring the sellers (village women) and buyers (urban wholesalers and retailers) together, because the most rural women rarely left their homes, much less their villages. RAMP considered this weakness in the value chain to be a critical obstacle, since the inability of women to bring their surplus to market on a consistent basis undermined efforts to increase production. To address this weakness, the project sought to create an exceptionally strong network of both horizontal and vertical linkages between the project's provincial supply centers and the trainers, village group leaders, and village producer groups. By the end of the project, 1,020 producer groups had been established. This success was attributed to the willingness of the women, mainly widows and otherwise impoverished women, to associate and cooperate.¹⁶⁵

In the end, however, although FAO tried to obtain official government registration for the village producer groups, it was unable to do so. Nor was it able to bring the provincial-level associations under the umbrella of an Afghanistan Rural Poultry Development Federation. These steps would have allowed the privatization and continued functioning of the provincial supply centers as businesses without further donor funding. The businesses would then have been owned and operated by the technical staff and regional trainers who had been running them as integral members of the value chain under the FAO program. As a contingency plan, FAO worked to get World Bank funding for a bridge project. However, by the end of RAMP in June 2006, neither the privatization nor the bridge funding had been arranged. As a result, the project staff running the provincial centers left, the feed mills fell idle, shipments of replacement chicks were not ordered, and the production-marketing network that had been built up over the previous two years ground to a halt. Fourteen months after RAMP ended, only 45 percent of the 28,000 women were still active poultry producers.¹⁶⁶ The village women who had been successful producers under the FAO program were still practicing the improved methods as best they could with their last few improved breed layers. These women were eager and able to buy the feed and replacement

¹⁶⁴ McMahon, *Case Study of the Poultry and Grape/Raisin Subsectors in Afghanistan*, pp. 8, 34, and Chemonics, *RAMP Final Report*, pp. 70-71. See also Fattori, *Organizing Women to Generate Income from Poultry*. Note that beyond the scavenger system is the semi-commercial system, with 500 to 5,000 birds in total confinement and provided with all their feed. The semi-commercial production that exists in Afghanistan is all male-owned. Semi-commercial production and commercial production are very limited, despite the country's huge reliance on imports.

¹⁶⁵ McMahon, *Case Study of the Poultry and Grape/Raisin Subsectors in Afghanistan*, p. 44.

¹⁶⁶ Checchi and Company, *Impact Evaluation of Rebuilding Agricultural Markets Project (RAMP)*, p. 10.



Photo: RAMP village poultry production program, which was implemented by female trainers who provided training, improved chickens, vaccines and marketing assistance to over 28,000 village women.¹⁶⁷

chicks to continue production, because they had experienced first-hand the success of the new methods. However, the inputs were not available to them.¹⁶⁸ The RAMP impact evaluation concluded, however, that the project had, indeed, made a lasting impact by building social connections, trust and cooperation among rural women themselves. The women in the producer groups had developed a support system that had not existed before, and through it could discuss issues other than poultry. This was reinforced by the increased empowerment gained from being trained in new skills and earning more income. The RAMP evaluators felt that, since the incentives to stay connected remained compelling, and because the women had substantially increased their ability to raise poultry. As a result, they concluded, the groups could provide a potential base for efforts to revive the poultry producer-marketing chain should the input supply problem be solved.

This RAMP experience clearly demonstrated the importance of longer-term planning and investment, as well as the need to strengthen the enabling policy environment, if poultry investments to reach women are to succeed. At the same time, it demonstrated the difficulties encountered in scaling up from a backyard scavenger production system to a semi-commercial egg production system, particularly from the point of view of gender. In the end, poultry is a culturally acceptable means for women to earn income.

Since the RAMP experience, other USAID programs have included poultry production components that were targeted to women beneficiaries, with varying levels of success. In 2009, for example, ADP/SW, in collaboration with two local NGOs, established a grant program to distribute 50 chicks to each of 2,000 women in Farah Province (along with an initial quantity of chicken feed and some small equipment). In spite of the great popularity and warm reception of the poultry distribution, subsequent analysis by ADP/SW identified several material problems with its initial strategy. First, the project found that 50 chickens generally constituted too small a flock to form the basis for a sustainable poultry business and,

¹⁶⁷ Photo credit: Chemonics, *RAMP Final Report*, p. 69.

¹⁶⁸ McMahon, *Case Study of the Poultry and Grape/Raisin Subsectors in Afghanistan*, pp. 34, 44.

as a result, the birds were frequently simply consumed. Second, the very young chicks distributed were too delicate for novice poultry producers and, in the extreme conditions of the hot and arid Farah desert, the mortality rate was quite high. The project also concluded that it had not allocated sufficient resources to technical training for the beneficiaries.

As a result of this analysis, the ADP/SW women's poultry production program was redesigned in 2010 to increase the focus on helping women entrepreneurs enter into the poultry business and to move away from an emphasis on very small scale household production. Plans were made to distribute older birds to groups of women, rather than to individuals. Specifically, the women were formed into groups of five and each group was given 250 two-to-three month old pullets, rather than chicks, along with initial feed and the same types of small equipment. In addition, a more extensive training program was designed to provide both deeper technical training and some preliminary exposure to running a commercial operation.

In addition, recognizing that the absence of a commercial feed industry in Farah province was a severe constraint, the ADP/SW project distributed nine hammer mills to local entrepreneurs, two of whom were women. When ADP/SW began operations in Farah Province, there was no commercial feed industry in the province, despite the existence of a relatively large poultry industry and a significant small ruminant population. The manufactured feed used at the time was imported from Pakistan and was of questionable quality. The nine feed mills provided by ADP/SW, which were largely of Pakistani or Indian origin, had a combined potential production capacity equivalent to roughly 6-7 percent of the estimated Farah provincial demand.¹⁶⁹

Other USAID-funded programs have had poultry components. A Home-Based Poultry Program was implemented by ADP/N, beginning in 2008, and involved 100 women in three districts, who earned about \$70 a year selling eggs.¹⁷⁰ IDEA-NEW implemented a women's backyard poultry farming program involving 400 women in Baghlan, Badakhshan, Kunduz and Takhar provinces. The project provided pullets to women and trained them in chicken breeds, coop construction, pullet management, balanced feeds, vaccination, and hygiene and disease control. They were linked to local private sector providers, including veterinary field units (VFUs) and local poultry feed suppliers. In early 2012, a decision was made to stop providing feed and material for building coops, in an effort to ensure the project's sustainability by increasing beneficiaries' investment. In order to encourage beneficiaries to save some of their earnings from daily egg sales, IDEA-NEW helped establish community-based savings groups that would allow women to pool their extra income, so that they could purchase inputs in bulk to take advantage of economies of scale.¹⁷¹ The Commercial Horticulture & Agricultural Marketing Program (CHAMP) also helped women establish 125 poultry units in Nangarhar, Helmand, Kandahar, Bamyan, and Paktiya provinces, including the construction of CHAMP-designed chicken coops.¹⁷² The female beneficiaries in these and other USAID projects were numbered in the hundreds, however. Reaching larger numbers of women would likely require significantly larger-scale, focused, integrated and sustained poultry production efforts.

FAO implemented a poultry sub-component of the World Bank-funded Horticulture and Livestock Project (HLP) in the provinces of Balkh, Parwan, Kabul, Kunduz, and Panjshir between November 2008 and December 2011. The project's performance was evaluated by FAO in January 2012. This effort built upon FAO's earlier collaboration with RAMP. The project assisted 25,000 farming families to build up and improve their poultry production. The FAO project identified the lack of technical knowledge in feeding and disease control, the unreliability of the supply of quality inputs, and marketing as key issues

¹⁶⁹ Tetra Tech ARD, *Alternative Development Program-South West Final Report*, pp. 18-20

¹⁷⁰ AECOM International Development, *Alternative Development Program-North Completion Report*, p. 16

¹⁷¹ Development Alternatives, Inc. (DAI), *IDEA-NEW Annual Report – Year 4 [2012]*, pp. 23-24.

¹⁷² Roots of Peace, *CHAMP: First Annual Report, 2011*, pp. 5-6.

hampering the transformation of traditional poultry husbandry systems into more semi-commercial poultry production systems. FAO invested in the training and capacity building of village women and improvement of the input supply. FAO made an effort to include poor women, especially widows and disabled women, in the project. The project assumed that the private sector service providers would fully take over the service provision over the course of the project and, to an extent, links were made between farmers and service providers (generally men, which meant that female producers had to interface with them through male intermediaries). However, many of the households consumed between 30 and 40 percent of the eggs produced, and thus found it difficult to pay for the recommended levels of balanced feed or ensure that their birds were fully vaccinated. At the same time, the input providers were understandably more interested in retaining links to institutional clients (such as FAO), which promised higher volume business, rather than in investing a great deal of time and effort in building up networks of rural service providers for many small-scale producers.¹⁷³

It should be recognized, however, that, while small-scale poultry production may be a valuable approach from a gender point of view, meeting Afghanistan's demand for poultry products will require investments in large scale, commercial poultry production, which can take advantage of advanced production methods, and achieve the economies of scale needed to compete with imports in satisfying the rapidly growing demand in Afghanistan for meat and eggs. For this reason, the World Bank Agriculture Sector Strategy advocates focusing on intensive poultry production in peri-urban areas.¹⁷⁴ It has been argued, however, that expanding semi-commercial and subsistence poultry operations could actually be counterproductive to this goal, since the flocks of these smaller operations are more susceptible to poultry diseases. These smaller operations lack the training and resources (such as access to vaccines or veterinary services) needed to prevent disease outbreaks. Disease outbreaks in smaller operations can pose a threat to larger-scale, commercial operations.

Dairy Production

Most of the dairy production in Afghanistan is carried out by women who own one or two cows. They are responsible for collecting fodder and feeding the livestock, cleaning the stalls, caring for newborn and sick animals, and the milking. Women are also responsible for processing the milk into butter, buttermilk (*dogh*), cheese, yogurt, and other products, which are usually consumed at home or traded with neighbors. If the household owns more than a couple of cows, the milk may be sold locally to generate some income.

Over the years, USAID has supported several efforts to improve dairy production by women. A major effort took place under the Dairy Industry Revitalization Project for Afghanistan (DIRPA), which ran from 2004 to 2007 and was implemented by Land O'Lakes. Land O' Lakes began in early 2005 in Parwan province, where nine female extension agents and four veterinarians provided assistance to over 900 farm families. The Land O'Lakes' extension efforts expanded to Kunduz in March of 2006, where the program assisted women farmers with a range of technical assistance and training services, similar to those provided in Parwan, aimed at improving the health, nutrition and productivity of their cows. Land O'Lakes recruited nine educated women in the target villages to be trained as trainers. Land O'Lakes sought the approval of their families and of the local shuras to ensure that these women would be allowed to work with other women farmers and to receive training from Land O'Lakes consultants. The five-week training-of-trainers course included both classroom instruction and practical field work, covering a broad range of subjects, including milking hygiene, milk handling and storage, animal health, parasites and feeding practices. Upon graduation, the women began providing technical assistance to women farmers in local villages. These female trainers needed to get the approval of village shuras to meet with

¹⁷³ FAO, *Evaluation of Consultancy Services for Poultry sub-component of HLP (Emergency Horticulture and Livestock Project)*, pp. 12-13, 18, 25, 30, 34-35

¹⁷⁴ World Bank, *Agriculture Sector Assessment*, p. vii.

other women farmers. Even though most of the agents lived and worked in their clients' villages and their families were well known, the husbands of many farm women resisted the extension agents' efforts to meet with their wives. Ultimately, the female agents identified about 100 women each to train, and typically visited four clients' households every day for six days each week.

The female DIRPA extension agents kept records of their activities and measured their impact. They recorded the milk yields, the incidences of disease, and the use of feeds and improved forages. Veterinary services were also provided, including disease testing, vaccinations, and sprays to control parasites. Women farmers also participated in weekly group meetings to discuss the possibility of establishing cooperatives. As client farmers saw improvements in their animals' health and productivity, their suspicions disappeared and the extension agents were welcomed wherever they went. Families that had initially rejected their services began requesting their assistance. The agents also reported that many of their clients passed on what they learned from DIRPA agents to their neighbors.¹⁷⁵

Similarly, under the Alternative Development Program/North (ADP/N), Land O'Lakes trained women in Kishem District in Badakhshan Province in basic animal husbandry practices, including livestock management, milking techniques and dairy processing. Under that project, female extension agents demonstrated improved livestock management methods to more than 3,500 women farmers.¹⁷⁶

IDEA-NEW and ACDI/VOCA provided livestock management training to 500 female dairy farmers in five provinces in northern Afghanistan (Balkh, Faryab, Jawzjan, Samangan and Sari Pul provinces). The women that participated received six months of training in animal husbandry best practices, and technical support and advice in remodeling their cowsheds, including the mud plastering of walls to prevent ectoparasites.¹⁷⁷ Since 2010, IDEA-NEW has worked with the Balkh Livestock Development Union (BLDU), a cooperative union running a modern dairy plant in Balkh province, to set up village milk collection and processing centers where local dairy farmers could sell their excess milk.¹⁷⁸ The ten villages selected designated a building for the center to house a gas batch pasteurizer and hand operated equipment for yogurt and cheese production. Each center employs a manager, who is responsible for the operation of the center and its financial transactions, and a worker. Milk deliveries are recorded in a collection book, and the producers receive a weekly payment based on the quantity delivered minus charges for inputs. Each center has 50 women members, who own dairy cows, and one female lead trainer to work with them. The BLDU recruited these women trainers through the local community development council. Under the supervision of BLDU's master trainer, the lead trainers teach the members about cattle management, hygiene, vaccinations, shed management and other livestock matters. This enabled the 500 women participants to increase their cows' productivity.¹⁷⁹

The importance of understanding internal household dynamics – who controls the resources and benefits from development initiatives, as opposed to who shoulders the additional workload – was illustrated by Azarbaijani-Moghaddam, using the case of a dairy project in Afghanistan that actually had a perverse impact on the status of women. Improved dairy cattle were given to local families, with the objective of improving the health and economic welfare of the local community. It was expected that milk from the

¹⁷⁵ Land O' Lakes, *Dairy Industry Revitalization Program - Final Report*, pp. 17-18

¹⁷⁶ AECOM International Development, *Alternative Development Program-North Completion Report*, p. 33.

¹⁷⁷ DAI, *IDEA-NEW, Annual Report – Year 4 [2012]*, p. 24; and DAI, *IDEA-NEW, Annual Report – Year 5 [2013]*, p. 41.

¹⁷⁸ FAO began providing support to the BLDU in 2005, but stopped in 2010, when it that integrated dairy scheme became autonomous. The experience is discussed in FAO, *Empowering Women in Afghanistan: Reducing Gender Gaps through Integrated Dairy Schemes*, passim.

¹⁷⁹ DAI, *IDEA-NEW, Annual Report – Year 2 [2011]*, p. 20 and <http://www.acdivoca.org/site/Print/IDEA-NEW-strengthens-dairy-value-chain-supporting-rural-Afghan-women-success-story>

animals provided would ultimately improve the nutritional status of children in the community, and that the additional income from selling the milk would enable more children to go to school. After the project had been in place for a year, an assessment revealed that the nutritional status of the children had actually declined and that fewer girls were attending school. The assessment found that the additional dairy cows provided by the project had significantly increased the workload on women, since they were responsible for the care of the animals. The men, however, were responsible for selling the milk. They came to appreciate the extra income, and so took a greater share of the milk to sell. This reduced the amount available for home consumption, which led to deterioration in the children's nutrition. The men used the extra income to buy inputs for cash crops and to send their sons to more expensive schools. The daughters were kept home to help their mothers with the increased work in caring for the livestock.¹⁸⁰

IDEA-NEW had success working with women-run cooperatives that produced cheese for both the local and Kabul markets. IDEA-NEW assisted with marketing and packaging. In addition, IDEA-NEW assisted women to receive loans to purchase dairy cows. Eight cheese processing centers were supported and two centers were located within IDEA-NEW facilities, employing 57 women. Another six centers had been established under Alternative Development Program for the Eastern Region (ADP/E). IDEA NEW worked to link these centers with the ACE loan program, so that the women could obtain small loans to each to buy better quality cows.¹⁸¹

ICARDA implemented a dairy goat improvement program between 2006 and 2009 that worked with 546 women from 14 villages in Baghlan and Nangarhar provinces. The project focused on introducing practical low-cost technologies to improve dairy goat production, including re-stocking, vaccination and de-worming, improved milking and dairy processing, and the cultivation of fodder plants. Project-trained basic veterinary officers provided advice and treatment and female facilitators, based in the target villages, disseminated information and linked the communities with other project partners. An evaluation done in 2010 indicated that the project had significant impacts in terms of improved animal health and productivity, higher milk yields, improved dairy products, better market access for women, higher incomes and better nutrition. Vaccinations and other preventive veterinary care interventions had slashed mortality rates and abortions from 20-25 percent to 4 percent. The incidence of sub-clinical mastitis has been reduced from 27 percent to 4 percent among technology adopters. Communities reported that milk yields had increased by 10-15 percent, and that loss of milk production due to disease had fallen substantially. Improved hygiene, more efficient processing methods and the introduction of simple processing equipment had boosted the quality and quantity of dairy products, largely eliminating milk spoilage. Nearly 300 women had received animals of the hardy native Gujry breed, through a 'pass on the gift' scheme, in which beneficiaries gave the offspring from animals received to other women in the village. This allowed poor households to rebuild their herds with genetically improved animals.¹⁸² This ICARDA dairy goat program in Baghlan and Nangarhar Provinces was continued between 2009 and 2013 with IFAD funding.

¹⁸⁰ Azarbaijani-Moghaddam, *Gender Awareness and Development Manual, Resource Material for Gender Trainers*, p. 79. Azarbaijani-Moghaddam presented this example as a training exercise at a gender workshop. Although it was based on a project in Afghanistan, she did not actually identify the name of the project, its location, or the donor that provided the funding.

¹⁸¹ IDEA-NEW presentation to USAID: "Gender Programming in the Eastern Region," April 5, 2012.

¹⁸² Tibbo, *The Case of Women Livelihoods and Dairy Goat Programme in Afghanistan and Pakistan*, International Center for Agricultural Research in the Dry Areas, and ICARDA, *Empowering Women – Dairy Goat Technologies in Afghanistan*, p. 10.

Wool Production

Cashmere and karakul wool production is another area of potential for gender programming. At present, only around 30 percent of the Afghan cashmere-producing goats are being shorn or combed, which clearly leaves significant potential for increased production. Dehairing cashmere also is one role that women can play in the cashmere value chain, given that the price of dehaired cashmere can be five times greater than that of cashmere that has not been dehaired. While the dehairing could be done on-farm, farmers don't generally know about this price difference. Therefore, it is often the trader who captures this price differential (by hiring women to hand-dehair the cashmere).¹⁸³ ASAP attempted to strengthen the cashmere value chain, including the training of over 193,000 goat herders (of which 22 percent were women) in cashmere production. The project was designed to raise awareness of the value of cashmere and introduce better cashmere harvesting methods to goat herders in an effort to expand Afghanistan's cashmere industry. Thirty-four cashmere value chain master trainers (of whom 17 were women) were trained. They then trained 886 trainers (including 437 women) who in turn trained 87,889 farmers (43,094 women) in 17 provinces. The program was coordinated with a network of VFUs. Nineteen women participated in the VFUs as trainers and paravets.¹⁸⁴ I



Photo: Female herders and a cashmere goat.¹⁸⁵

IDEA-NEW worked on increasing the income of karakul wool producers in northern Afghanistan. Karakul pelts are a major and valuable export commodity, and IDEA-NEW worked to raise the fertility of

¹⁸³ De Weijer, *Cashmere Value Chain Analysis Afghanistan*, p. 16-17.

¹⁸⁴ Chemonics, *ASAP Annual Report 2010*, p. 36.

¹⁸⁵ Picture Credit: USAID/ASAP, *Success Story: Afghanistan Prepares to Fill Cashmere Demand*.

their flocks and the quality of the pelts produced. This can be achieved through improvements in animal husbandry, health and nutrition through improved paravet services and extension. In 2012, IDEA-NEW staff trained four extension teams in livestock extension, each consisting of a man and a woman, in Balkh and Jawzjan Provinces. These teams then replicated the trainings to karakul farmers in their respective districts, training 1,571 karakul farmers, including 600 males and 971 females. The extension workers then visited their trainees at least once a month to assess how effectively they had adopted the improved herd management techniques.¹⁸⁶

Carpet weaving is one of the most important home industries in Northern Afghanistan, especially in the provinces of Balkh, Samangan, Jawzjan, Sari Pul and Faryab. A number of donor projects have provided assistance in this area, including IDEA/NEW, which has promoted spinning wheels. (Most Afghan women spin wool using the traditional drop spindle, which is time consuming and difficult. However, with a spinning wheel, women obtain a more uniform quality and a faster work rate.) IDEA NEW contracted with the women-owned, Rabia Maryam Handicrafts Company, to provide training in the use of spinning wheels to 500 women in the provinces in which the project works.

Silkworm Production

Household silk production, a traditional activity in the northern and northeastern Afghanistan, also has potential for employing women and for increasing the incomes of poor households. Production costs for silk are low and a family may, with six weeks' work, earn enough to ensure their food security for a year. The silk is processed and used to manufacture carpets and textiles, thus also creating work for spinners, dyers, weavers, carpet makers, and garment makers. IDEA-NEW began a silkworm rearing project in February 2012 that involved training 1,000 women in five target provinces. Twenty five training venues offered an intensive, five-day course on how to rear silkworm eggs to the cocoon stage. The Project contracted with Rabia Maryam Handicrafts to provide ongoing extension support to beneficiaries throughout the production period. Participating households earned an average of \$86.64 per household from the sale of the dried silk cocoons in 2012.¹⁸⁷ In 2013, IDEA-NEW provided, again in collaboration with the Rabia Maryam Handicrafts Company, more than 11,500 mulberry saplings to the women who had been trained in silkworm rearing in 2012. Each tree had the potential to produce enough leaves to allow each silkworm colony to produce 15-20 kg of silk, worth approximately 10,000 AFN (\$184).¹⁸⁸

Women's Roles in Grain Production

Wheat is the staple food in Afghanistan, and wheat flour accounts for 57 percent of the caloric intake of relatively poor Afghan households.¹⁸⁹ As a result, roughly 70 percent of all cropland and 64 percent of irrigated cropland is planted in the crop. Wheat is primarily grown for subsistence, and in a normal year no more than an estimated 25 percent of the crop is sold, with the balance consumed by the producing households. At the same time, only about one in four rural households in Afghanistan are self-sufficient in wheat. Most Afghans must purchase their staple food supply for much of the year.

Despite its importance to the household's food security, women in Afghanistan are not generally involved in wheat production or in cereal production in general. This is due to the fact that wheat cultivation

¹⁸⁶ DAI, *IDEA-NEW, Annual Report – Year 4 [2013]*, p. 33-34.

¹⁸⁷ DAI, *IDEA-NEW, Annual Report – Year 4 [2012]*, pp. 16-17.

¹⁸⁸ DAI, *IDEA-NEW, Annual Report – Year 5 [2013]*, p. 30.

¹⁸⁹ D'Souza and Jolliffe, *Food Security in Afghanistan: Household-level Evidence from the 2007-08 Food Price Crisis*, p. 3. Specifically, wheat flour contributes 57 percent to the total caloric content of the average bundle of food items of the relatively poor (i.e., the 20th to 50th percentile of the total consumption distribution, which is the basis for the official Government of Afghanistan poverty line).

requires significant outdoor work in planting and harvesting. Also, threshing is typically considered men's labor.¹⁹⁰ A broad review of the literature on wheat production in Afghanistan did not surface any discussion of a female role in its production. In addition, a review of the literature on gender in Afghanistan generated little discussion of cereal production as a crop. Grace, remarking on the apparent gender differentiation in crops, noted very few women working in wheat fields in the villages that she studied, most likely because such crops were cultivated away from the compound.¹⁹¹ A United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) report stated that grain production typically necessitated the least female involvement in agriculture (as opposed to horticulture and livestock).¹⁹²

Women may be responsible for preparing food for hired workers during the cereal harvest and for grain cleaning and storage. Men are responsible for taking the grain to mills so that it can be processed into flour. Men are also responsible for collecting and transporting the straw. Women are responsible for sifting the flour.¹⁹³

Under the RADP projects, 15 percent of the project beneficiaries must be women. Since a large focus of the RADP Programs is on increasing the productivity of wheat (with the bulk of planned beneficiaries being wheat producers), the relatively low participation of women in this subsector has been problematic. RADP-South has, however, been exploring the potential for training women in the use of the Purdue Improved Crop Storage (PICs) bags for domestic wheat storage. The three nested layers of PICS bags provide airtight storage for grains, preventing infiltration by pests, and creating a dry environment that reduces mold. This allows wheat and other crops to remain in storage for months without significant quality deterioration, which can have significant implications for household food security.

Women's Roles in Horticultural Production

Afghanistan has had a long tradition of horticultural production, both perennial crops (such as fruits, nuts, grapes, and raisins) and annual crops (i.e., vegetables). In order to increase incomes for rural households and promote the overall economic development of rural areas, Afghan farmers need to become more commercially-focused, as well as to increase the production of high-value horticultural crops.

Women's direct involvement in horticulture production is largely focused on small gardens and orchards that are in or near the compounds. There are, however, exceptions. Grace, for example, reported that working in the melon fields for three months prior to the annual watermelon and melon harvest was an important activity of women in the villages that she studied in Saripul and Faryab provinces. There the women stayed on the land with male members of the household, weeded the melon fields and watched over them to protect them from birds, animals and thieves. Some elderly women, particularly elderly widows from landless households, worked in the fields as farm labor in return for one-seventh of the crop, as well as in the orchards of others, guarding and picking the fruits.¹⁹⁴

In Deh Hamza in Ghazni Province, a type of plum (*aloo bukhari*) is the main cash crop. Due to its high profitability, 94 percent of the farmers grow the crop and some 30 percent of the cultivated irrigated land is in plum orchards. For those families with no land, all of the women and older girls work during the

¹⁹⁰ World Bank, *Agriculture Sector Review Cross-cutting Theme: Women in Agriculture*, p. 5.

¹⁹¹ Grace, *Gender Roles in Agriculture*, p. 7.

¹⁹² UNEP, *Women and Natural Resources in Afghanistan*, p. 6.

¹⁹³ Duchet and Duchier, *Rethinking Women's and Farmers' Programmes*, p. 81.

¹⁹⁴ Grace, *Gender Roles in Agriculture*, pp. 7 and 10.

season to peel plums, in addition to doing their other household work. Although it is a painstaking task, it was one activity for which women received payment.¹⁹⁵

Despite these exceptions, women are more likely to undertake their vegetable production efforts in kitchen gardens located within or near their family compounds. As a result, in order to meet gender targets, a number of donor projects, including USAID projects, have focused on reaching women through “kitchen garden” projects.

The Mennonite Economic Development Associates (MEDA), in collaboration with the Afghan Women’s Business Council (AWBC) worked with female farmers in nine villages in Parwan province, from 2007 to 2011 in a project called Through the Garden Gate. The project, which relied on funding from the Canadian International Development Agency, focused on the target crops of carrots, onions, tomatoes, grapes, potatoes, and cucumbers. It aimed to increase household food security, generate income for women, and involve them in more aspects of horticultural value chains. MEDA mobilized a team of female Village Facilitators, each of which supported ten lead farmers. These lead farmers were responsible for reaching out to 25 other women farmers. The Village Facilitators trained the lead farmers in farming operations and business skills, and they, in turn, trained the other farmers in their group. In total, MEDA trained and worked with 90 lead farmers who reached a total of nearly 2,550 women farmers. The training included land preparation, crop rotation, drip irrigation, mulching, greenhouse techniques, pest/disease management, weed control, grape trellising, solar drying, storage practices, record-keeping, costing/pricing, marketing, packaging and food processing. The program negotiated with families to set aside a portion of family land on which to demonstrate improved techniques. Families were given an incentive of \$50 per month to compensate for the risk of production loss. The average income from horticultural activities from the female farmers under the MEDA Project increased from an average of \$38/year to \$323/year by the end of the project. The income of lead farmers, which managed larger demonstration plots, reached income levels that averaged \$866/year.¹⁹⁶

A number of gender programs have focused on the introduction of greenhouses. The ADP/SW Project, for example, assisted 318 men and 182 women farmers in Farah Province to obtain 500 greenhouses. The project provided training to all of the recipients using demonstration greenhouses at the Farah DAIL, the Farah Agricultural Institute, and at four girl’s schools in the region. ADP/SW staff trained DAIL, Farah Agricultural Institute, and staff from the girls’ schools on greenhouse production to serve as Master Trainers. The project also trained three local businesses to fabricate, install, and repair the greenhouses (and sourced the greenhouses distributed from these companies). Actual results in Farah Province showed that a single 8 meter by 20 meter greenhouse with drip irrigation growing vegetables could produce an average annual gross income of \$3,250, or \$20.31 per square meter. By contrast, wheat production in Farah produced an average annual gross income of only about \$0.118 per square meter of land.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁵ World Bank, *Afghanistan National Reconstruction and Poverty Reduction - the Role of Women in Afghanistan's Future*, p. 59.

¹⁹⁶ World Bank, *Women's Role in Afghanistan's Future – Taking Stock*, p. 73, and Savage, *Gender Analysis: Afghanistan Agricultural Credit Enhancement (ACE) Program*, p. 7-8. See also *Economic Empowerment Through the Garden Gate*.

¹⁹⁷ Tetra Tech ARD, *Alternative Development Program- Southwest (ADP/SW), Final Report*, pp. 7, 11-12.



Photo: Teachers from local schools being trained on greenhouse production at the Farah DAIL demonstration plot center in Farah Province (ADP/SW).¹⁹⁸

Similarly, IDEA-NEW implemented a home-based greenhouse farming project targeting women. In 2013, IDEA-NEW provided 85 women in four northeastern provinces (Badakhshan, Baghlan, Kunduz, and Takhar) with off-season vegetable cultivation training (planting, weeding, irrigation, fertilization, harvesting and post-harvest handling) and improved input materials (seeds and plastic sheeting). All of the greenhouses were built by the end of December 2012 and beneficiaries were trained in land preparation and seed cultivation. The crops cultivated in the greenhouses included lettuce, radish, coriander and cress, tomatoes, cabbage, cucumber, spinach, eggplant and pepper. IDEA-NEW's technical staff monitored the women's progress and provided them with technical assistance on greenhouse construction and layout, proper fertilizer application, pest and disease control, weeding, irrigation and soil management. The beneficiaries also received thermometers and training in how to regulate the temperature in their greenhouses. In April 2013, IDEA-NEW organized field days for female farmers from other districts to enable the participants to share their experiences in greenhouse management. Building off of this successful effort, IDEA-NEW launched a follow-up home-based greenhouse establishment project in June 2013 that targeted another 140 beneficiaries.¹⁹⁹

Another technology being promoted for women is the use of translucent plastic tunnels, which benefit vegetable production by lengthening the growing season. A Vegetable Tunnel Program supported by the Alternative Development Program/North (ADP/N), for example, enabled 130 women to employ plastic tunnels in the late autumn and early spring production of vegetables, and led to average income increases of \$120 a year.²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁸ Photo Credit: Tetra Tech ARD, *Alternative Development Program-South West, Final Report*, p. 25.

¹⁹⁹ Development Alternatives, Inc., *IDEA-NEW Annual Report – Year 5 (2013)*, pp. 18-19

²⁰⁰ AECOM International Development, *Alternative Development Program for Northeast Afghanistan (ADP/N) Completion Report*, p. 2.

IDEA-NEW ran a low tunnel vegetable cultivation pilot project in Takhar Province between November 2012 and March 2013. This project was designed to test a low cost greenhouse design for offseason vegetable cultivation, and targeted 20 female farmers in Taluqan District who were members of Community-Based Savings Groups that had previously been established with IDEA-NEW's support. Farmers built the low tunnels and contributed 50 percent of the cost using funds they had saved through the savings groups.²⁰¹

The World Bank-supported National Horticulture and Livestock Project (NHLP), which works in 21 provinces, provided free seed and other inputs to help 39,432 women establish kitchen gardens during 2013-14. These garden plots averaged 250 sq. meters in area (an eighth of a jerib). In addition, the project supported the installation of 988 plastic tunnels for women farmers and 1,983 micro-greenhouses to produce fresh vegetables during the winter. These micro-greenhouses were 10 by 3 meters (30 m²) NHLP provided the materials to construct the tunnels and greenhouses, as well as some tools and seeds (e.g. polyethylene plastic, metal sticks, handy irrigation pot, harrow, small shovel). These women also received training (twice a month during the crop season) in crop production, irrigation, integrated pest management, and post-harvest management. Some 32 female extension workers were employed under this program to provide extension services, distribute inputs, and provide the training using the Farmer Field School approach.

ASAP established the Badam Bagh Demonstration Farm in Kabul as a venue for introducing new agriculture technologies and improved crop varieties, with approximately 14 hectares of the farm used in horticultural demonstration plots. ASAP established a partnership with the Afghan Women's Business Council (AWBC) in 2010 as part of the Badam Bagh Gender and Development Activities Package. Under this program, women, many of whom were widowed or abandoned, or had husbands that were incapacitated, were hired locally to work in the farm's horticultural plots. About 30 percent of these women were the sole breadwinners for their families, and they took turns working at the farm so that the income would be spread among the group. Under the program at Badam Bagh, AWBC earned more than \$80,000 and provided incomes to 892 female workers.²⁰² Unfortunately, this arrangement did not long survive the close of the project. Similarly, ASAP supported the construction of women's greenhouses in Parwan (in conjunction with AWBC), which ceased operational, despite also having received additional support soon thereafter under AFSA.

The 2016 Agribusiness Sustainability Assessment found that most of the female-managed greenhouses set up by ADP/E stopped operating at the end of project funding. A project final evaluation concluded that the greenhouses required a much stronger commitment from both from the female beneficiaries and from the project. Running a commercial greenhouse requires a strong level of technical knowledge, as well as basic business knowledge and the ability to link to markets. The ADP/E evaluation found that the women operating the greenhouses did not have the right capacity and that the greenhouses had stopped soon after the end of the project. They were only operating nominally as businesses during the project duration, by selling their products to the project. The Agribusiness Sustainability Assessment concluded, "In many cases, the impression from these failed businesses is that they were set up to meet short-term project objectives in terms of deliverables, and thus long-term sustainability was not seriously addressed."²⁰³

The USAID-funded Afghan Agricultural Extension Project (AAEP) II has recently provided training to women in kitchen gardening, including on the organic control of horticultural pests and diseases, how to intensify production while reducing costs and labor related to kitchen gardens, and how to plan a garden,

²⁰¹ DAI, *IDEA-NEW Annual Report – Year 5 [2013]*, pp. 18-19.

²⁰² Chemonics, *Accelerating Sustainable Agriculture (ASAP) Final Report*, pp. 71-73.

²⁰³ Parkinson, et. al, *Agribusiness Sustainability Assessment*, p. 47.

based upon the needs of the family, environmental requirements of plants, and seasonality. Training was also provided in composting and permaculture. Some 110 female farmers also received vegetable nursery establishment training at Farmer Field Schools in four districts in Badakhshan province. Female extension staff members were also trained in needs assessment, appraisal and monitoring of horticultural activities. AAEP II also carried out an internship program, where female students from the National Agriculture Education College (NAEC) were trained in micro-greenhouse construction, including the use of cold frames made from plastic water bottles that could conserve heat and protect plants from adverse winter weather. They also learned techniques for transferring this technology to rural women. To date, nearly 1,100 women have been trained by AAEP and AAEP-trained trainers.²⁰⁴

While, as illustrated above, a number of USAID and other donor projects have supported small-scale horticulture production by women, the reach of these projects, in terms of number of beneficiaries, has been limited – generally measured in the hundreds of beneficiaries. Further, the sustainability of these efforts has been problematic and their impacts limited. The Alternative Development Program/Southwest (ADP/SW), for example, found that, while the women participating in its horticulture activities were better able to feed their families, those activities were less successful at generating substantive supplemental incomes. This was because the women continued to raise the same crops as everyone else. Therefore, while they could feed their families better, the additional production sometimes glutted the market and lowered local sales prices. For this reason, the ADP/SW team recommended promoting vegetables that were typically imported into the market.²⁰⁵ Further, a number of projects concluded that, to be successful, gender-based vegetable production activities needed to be integrated into broader agriculture and private sector development efforts. In other words, they must be integrated into the larger value chain, if they are to be sustainable and have a significant impact on incomes. To that end, IDEA-NEW launched a commercial production farm program for 266 women in Parwan, Panjshir, and Kapisa provinces in May 2013. The women, who grew spinach, turnip, carrot and cauliflower, received training in fertilizer application, irrigation management, and weed control.²⁰⁶

Efforts at reaching women through vegetable production have not always been successful. For example, home gardens introduced for women under a project implemented by ZOA International were ultimately taken over by the men. As a result of cultural and power dynamics in the village, it was observed that women were not able to work in their gardens and the men were doing the gardening instead. Consequently, the project changed its target audience and made the men the primary beneficiaries for the home garden program.²⁰⁷

Women and Grape/Raisin Production

The 2011 Dalberg report suggested that USAID place greater focus on supporting raisin production, due to the size and growth rate of the international market for raisins, Afghanistan's current market share and comparative advantage, and the potential of the country to increase that share.²⁰⁸

However, due to the socio-cultural reasons discussed earlier, the role of women in the grape/raisin value chain is limited. On small farms, they may provide unpaid family labor for the watering, weeding,

²⁰⁴ U.C. Davis, *Afghanistan Agricultural Extension Project, Quarterly Report (Jan. 1 – March 31, 2015)*, pp. 6-8, 12, 30-31.

²⁰⁵ Tetra Tech ARD, *ADP/SW, 2008-2009 Annual Report*, p. 13

²⁰⁶ DAI, *IDEA-NEW Annual Report – Year 5 [2013]*, pp. 21.

²⁰⁷ Food Security and Agriculture Cluster, *Closing the Gaps—Gender Equality: Policies and Practices in Afghanistan*, p. 24.

²⁰⁸ Dalberg Development Advisors, *Afghanistan Agricultural Assessment and Framework Development*, Summary Presentation, p. 4.

pruning, and harvesting of grapes from family orchards. They may also provide post-harvest processing (basic sorting and the removal of debris or bad grapes and the drying of raisins). In this process, the women are largely unpaid household labor, rather than decision-makers. Negotiations with buyers are undertaken by men, with women playing little or no role in marketing decisions.

Post-harvest processing may take place in grape drying houses at local bazaars, or in more commercial raisin cleaning operations. Women can undertake such work, because it does not involve lifting and requires minimal interaction with other (male) actors in the supply chain. Most commercial raisin processing operations (cleaning, sorting, grading and/or packaging) rely on women from urban or peri-urban areas to do the work. These women might earn \$80 to \$140 per month, which is considered too low for men (who generally have better employment options). When the cleaning and sorting is carried out at home, or in the local bazaar, the women doing it are likely relatives of the farmer or wholesaler and so, for the most part, are unpaid. Commercial grape producers do not hire women to harvest fresh grapes, in part because of the heavy lifting entailed, but also because of the cultural prohibitions against interactions with unrelated men.²⁰⁹

According to the World Bank, drawing upon the HLP's experience, when extension services were provided for the fresh grape and raisin value chains (including to women), they largely concerned increasing yields, rather than quality control in harvesting and post-harvest handling. Although the World Bank analysis found that women had a basic knowledge of cleanliness and quality standards, most were complacent about achieving them. It found that women had little incentive, time, or resources to perform more sophisticated processing.²¹⁰

The World Bank also reported that technical assistance provided to grape farmers, including trellising and extension services, by HLP and other projects largely focused on men. This was because of the limited number of extension workers, especially women extension workers. It was assumed that the information conveyed to men would be shared with women within the household. However, such knowledge transfer does not always occur. During focus group interviews, women said that they wanted direct access to extension services. The World Bank reported that, although HLP provides direct extension support to women's producer groups, it has been difficult to retain women extension workers.²¹¹

There have been only a few interventions in the raisin sector that have had a strong women's component. One of these was the Mercy Corps' *Global Development Alliance* (GDA), which operated in Kandahar and Parwan provinces and supported the grape, raisin, and pomegranate value chains. The GDA program organized women to weave mats for drying grapes and distributed these locally woven mats for that purpose. The traditional practice is to place the grapes directly on the ground. As a result, the raisins can get dirty, lowering their quality. The production of the mats, which can last for three seasons, thus offers some potential for commercial production and income-generating opportunities for women. Another intervention was the Mennonite Economic Development Association's support for the Afghan Pride Association (APA), a fruit and nut processor. APA employed 200 women, and the produce they sold was purchased directly from female farmers, although they sometimes sourced additional product from the wholesale market.²¹²

²⁰⁹ APPRO, *Gender and the Agricultural Innovation System in Rural Afghanistan*, p. 5, 12-13; and World Bank, *Understanding Gender in the Agricultural Value Chain: The Cases of Grape/Raisins, Almonds, and Saffron in Afghanistan*, pp. 52-53.

²¹⁰ World Bank, *Understanding Gender in the Agricultural Value Chain*, p. 26.

²¹¹ World Bank, *Understanding Gender in the Agricultural Value Chain*, p. 43.

²¹² APPRO, *Gender and the Agricultural Innovation System in Rural Afghanistan*, p. 20-21

As of June 2013, CHAMP's Gender team had trained 306 women from four target provinces (Kabul, Parwan, Kapisa, and Paktiya) in trellis management and pre-harvest vineyard management. CHAMP's female extension agents provided technical assistance to women farmer producer groups using a Farmer Field School approach. This included the introduction of new techniques and best practices, and the sharing of experiences and monitoring of progress. Raisin drying was another area that CHAMP identified as an opportunity to involve women. The CHAMP gender team distributed straw mats to four hundred women in Kabul and Parwan provinces for raisin drying.²¹³ CHAMP also provided training to 44 women (as well as 920 men) from several provinces in T-trellising systems to improve the output of their vineyards, and pre-harvest vineyard management. Most of the women were widows and female heads of household for whom vineyards provided their chief source of income.²¹⁴ In 2014, CHAMP provided training to 775 women in grape production (from Kabul, Kapisa, and Parwan districts), including 37 women who received trellis training. The relatively low number participating women was due to their unfamiliarity with trellis technology and to the requirement that each beneficiary make a copayment of \$420. This amount was beyond the means of many women.²¹⁵

Women and Orchard Production

The Dalberg analysis also recommended a major focus on almond production, since almond exports show great promise in terms of export potential. Here again, however, the role of women in the value chain is limited. The role women play in orchard production varies. In a survey undertaken in Kunduz, (Qala-I Zal District), women stated categorically that it was not in their tradition to work in the orchards. Nor were they permitted to pick the fruit from the trees. At the same time, Pashtun women surveyed in Herat (Pashtun Zarghan District) said that they were allowed to pick the fruit, but were not allowed to irrigate the orchards. Women from a neighboring village, however, were permitted to help with both picking the fruit and irrigating the fruit trees that were within the walled orchards.²¹⁶

Women may be involved in the early stages of the almond value chain, including watering and weeding the orchards, and harvesting, cleaning and sun-drying the almonds.²¹⁷ After that stage, however, female involvement is effectively limited to providing manual labor in the shelling of almonds by hand for large traders. Men in the almond value chain, as is the case with the raisin value chain, act as the link between the household and market. They purchase any needed inputs and either sell the almonds to middlemen and village-level traders, or travel to local markets to do so. Women's roles higher up in the almond value chain are limited by social norms that restrict their access to services, information, transportation, and financing.²¹⁸

RAMP provided technical assistance and extension services to both male and female farmers in pest control, pruning, and drying nuts. In Samangan and Parwan provinces, for example, more than 4,300 farmers, about 1,400 of them women, were trained in winter pest-control spraying, pruning, and the use of bees for pollination. RAMP also promoted modern methods of almond harvesting, which enabled farmers to reduce spoilage and improve the quality of their harvested nuts. RAMP also implemented a women-only nut production extension program, which provided for an expanded role of women in nut

²¹³ Roots of Peace, *CHAMP Quarterly Report – April-June 2013*, pp. 3, 19; and Roots of Peace, *CHAMP Annual Report Feb 2012 –Jan 2013*, p. 56.

²¹⁴ Roots of Peace, CHAMP 2013 Annual Report, pp. 12, 26.

²¹⁵ Roots of Peace, CHAMP 2013 Annual Report, pp. 30.

²¹⁶ Lee, Jonathan, *The Performance of Community Water Management Systems*, p. 39.

²¹⁷ World Bank, *Understanding Gender in the Agricultural Value Chain: The Cases of Grape/Raisins, Almonds, and Saffron in Afghanistan*, p. 19, 26.

²¹⁸ APPRO, *Gender and the Agricultural Innovation System in Rural Afghanistan: Barriers and Bridges*, pp. 7, 13-14.

production, including field days on almond tree pruning techniques that were attended by over 150 women.²¹⁹

Several USAID programs have also sought to work with women in other orchard crops, at least on a pilot basis. In 2014, for example, CHAMP provided training at Farmer Field Schools to a total of 1,139 women from five provinces, including 228 apple orchard owners, 136 apricot producers, and 775 grape producers.²²⁰ ADP/E started a large fruit nursery in Nangarhar Province that was operated by 63 refugee women. They grew and sold more than one million saplings to farmers and NGOs between 2007 and 2009. ADP/E also started 38 women's fruit and forestry nurseries, which sold varieties of fruit and forestry on the local market.²²¹

In another successful example, the international NGO Concern established a plant nursery in Fayzabad, Badakhshan, which employed 35 women from nearby villages. The nursery, on seven hectares of land, produced 20,000 – 30,000 fruit and vegetable saplings annually. In interviews with the female employees of the nursery, many of whom were widowed or divorced, they indicated that they felt safe and comfortable working in the nursery. They had come to know about the project from the CDC and so had the approval of the wider community to participate. The women worked five days a week, from 8 a.m. – 5 p.m., and were given complete privacy in the nursery. Male guards provided them with physical protection and ensured that no male visitors were allowed in where the women were working. The women further stated that, even though they had to walk for 30-40 minutes each way from their villages, they felt safe since they walked in groups. Widows and divorced women worked as permanent staff, while women from male-headed households were employed on a rotational basis to provide employment opportunities to more women in the community.²²²

Women and Saffron Production

In 2011, Afghan farmers cultivated saffron on around 560 hectares, involving approximately 1,800 farmers, with nearly all the production in Herat province. Average yields were just 3.21 kg/ha. The saffron produced had a value of approximately \$2.43 million (at a price of \$1,350/kg).²²³

Saffron is a labor intensive crop in terms of soil preparation, planting, weeding, harvesting, and processing, and as a result, the area planted by any single farmer is usually low (e.g., one jerib). Women are involved in the land preparation and planting of saffron corms, the harvesting the flowers, extracting the stigmas from the flowers, and the drying and packaging of the output.

Saffron is derived from the thread-like stigmas of the *Crocus sativus* flower. This flower, which blooms in October and November, lasts for only 48 hours and must be picked during that time. More than 150,000 flowers are needed to produce one kilogram of saffron. The flowers must be picked carefully by hand to avoid damaging the stigmas, which are then painstakingly removed from the flowers, dried and packaged. This is a technically complex process, which, if not done properly, can significantly reduce the saffron's quality and value. As a result, the crop's harvesting and processing requires substantial low-cost, specialized, and largely female labor. By one estimate, the harvesting and processing of the current

²¹⁹ Chemonics, *RAMP Final Report*, p. 75

²²⁰ Roots of Peace, *CHAMP 2014 Annual Report, Feb. 2015*, p. 31.

²²¹ DAI, *Alternative Development Program – Eastern Region, Final Report, 2005-2009*, p. 12.

²²² Food Security and Agriculture Cluster, *Closing the Gaps—Gender Equality: Policies and Practices in Afghanistan*, p. 24.

²²³ ASMED, *Afghanistan Saffron Value Chain Assessment*, p. 7.

Afghan saffron crop (on 560 hectares) requires the labor of over 106,000 women during a period of approximately one month, beginning in October.²²⁴

Recognizing this, numerous donor-funded projects have sought to create an enabling environment to permit these women to receive adequate compensation for their labor. Of particular importance has been the Saffron Program of ICARDA, which has been funded by DfID, and implemented in collaboration with MAIL, the Research for Alternative Livelihood Fund Programme of the Danish Committee for Aid to Afghan Refugees (DACAAR), Washington State University, and Catholic Relief Services (CRS).

CRS has supported saffron production since 2004, focusing on four districts in Herat Province, and providing farmers with inputs (saffron bulbs, fertilizer, extension support) and training on saffron production (including proper land preparation, sowing, irrigation, and weed control, as well as in post-harvest handling and local methods of sorting, cleaning, and packaging). In November 2008, CRS helped 120 saffron farmers form an association, in order to improve their ability to coordinate outside support, share knowledge and best practices among themselves, and gain greater control over prices. Another USAID-funded project, ADP/SW worked with a private company based in Herat, Afghan Saffron, to assist 150 farmers in starting saffron production. The Kentucky National Guard Agribusiness Development Team (ADT) and the Kansas ADT tried to introduce saffron on a small-scale in Parwan and Laghman Provinces, respectively.

Two women's producer associations from Herat have been supported by donors, particularly DACAAR. The first of these is the *Association of Women Saffron Producers of Pashtun Zarghoon*, with 274 registered female members. The other is the *Association of Women Saffron Producers of Ghoryan*, with 478 female members.²²⁵ The USAID-funded Agricultural Credit Enhancement Program provided an Agricultural Modernization Grant to the Ghoryan Women's Saffron Association in FY 2012. This organization subsequently received an ADF loan, subsequently repaid, which benefitted 117 saffron producers. In 2013, ADF also approved a loan to the Afghan Women Saffron Growers Association, which benefitted 71 producers.²²⁶

Saffron is a secondary, not a primary crop. The start-up costs are very high (upwards of \$6,000 per hectare for the planting material alone), and saffron takes at least two full crop years to reach economically viable production levels. As noted above, processing is technically complex and, if not done properly, can significantly reduce the quality and farm-gate price of the output. The harvest window is very short, which increases the risk to farmers, since factors, such as bad weather and a lack of available skilled labor, could leave the crop un-harvested.

Low quantity and varying quality make it difficult for individual farmers to sell their saffron in wholesale markets. Saffron is not consumed domestically, but must be exported, and the global saffron market has well-defined quality requirements that are difficult for Afghan small farmers to meet (e.g., the product must be shipped in air-tight, light-protected containers). There are relatively few worldwide buyers – none of whom are present in Afghanistan. Total world production of saffron is only 230 metric tons and Iran, which produces some 90 percent of the world's saffron, largely controls the market.

Women's roles in the saffron value chain decline as one moves up the chain and as the work performed requires more investment capital, business relations, and freedom of movement. All three major saffron businesses in Herat are owned and managed by men. Women are barred by the powerful saffron

²²⁴ Bastin (ASMED), *Afghanistan Saffron Value Chain Assessment*, Feb. 2012, p. 11-13.

²²⁵ World Bank, *Understanding Gender in the Agricultural Value Chain: The Cases of Grape/Raisins, Almonds, and Saffron in Afghanistan*, p. 21.

²²⁶ Agricultural Credit Enhancement Program, 2013 Annual Report, p. 24.

oligopoly from entering the market and competing fairly. At the same time, there are few possibilities at the lower stages of the value chain for gender mainstreaming, except, perhaps, labor market reform to ensure that women are paid a fair wage for equal work with men. While women do most of the difficult work throughout the value chain, they get paid less than men for the same work (while doing an even better job than men in processing saffron flowers).²²⁷ Such wage reforms would, however, require socio-economic and political reforms that are beyond the scope of any USAID-funded agriculture project.

Saffron production has the potential to create jobs for women at home and away from home, even when they do not own land. Those who own farmland can earn good profits from growing the crop. Nevertheless, the rigor of the quality control and processing requirements and constraints on the marketing system will keep saffron a minor crop in Afghanistan for the foreseeable future. While efforts may be made to increase its production and processing, the employment impact and spread effects will remain rather limited.

Women's Roles in Forestry and Watershed Management

Fuel wood is the main source of heating in many Afghan homes. In mountainous villages, cutting and selling wood is an important seasonal activity for both men and women, providing income for some households during the winter.²²⁸ As Maletta reported, 466 of the wealth groups identified (9.1 percent) indicated that their women members collected wood (3.1 percent of better off households, 10.1 percent of poor households, and 14.5 percent of very poor households).²²⁹ Women and girls are also often charged with collecting manure and crop residues, particularly in the summer and autumn.

In a study of the fuel economy of selected communities in two districts, Ishkamish, in Takhar Province, and Burka, in Baghlan Province, Yaresh found that the average household used an average of 7.8 metric tons of trees, another 7.8 tons of bushes and crop residues, and 7.1 tons of manure per year. This combined average amount of biomass used, 22.8 tons/year, amounted to about seven donkey loads per week. Yaresh reported that, because of over-exploitation, the distance that people in these districts have had to go to collect fuel has quadrupled over the last 30 years, and that collecting fuel was generally a full time job for one household member. Due to the extensive degradation, the need to walk 5-10 hours each way to collect fuel is becoming quite common. The peak season for wood collection is in the autumn. In the summer, most of the men of working age are busy with crop production, or travelling to more urban areas to serve as laborers. During spring and summer, fuel collection may be limited to women and boys collecting bushes in the mountains close to their settlements.²³⁰

A study by Kerr-Wilson and Pain of three villages in Laghman Province described the issues surrounding wood collection in that region. Of the three villages, the poorest one (higher up the valley) was three hours from the nearest dry pine forest. The other two villages were seven and nine hours away from the forest, respectively. In the latter cases, villagers would leave their houses in the middle of the night to reach the forests by morning. In the poorest village, it was predominantly young and middle aged women who collected the wood (men from this village had often gone to Pakistan to find work). Older women sent their daughters and daughters-in-law. During the spring, whole households would go to the forests to collect wood and stockpile it for later retrieval. For the wealthier villages, it was primarily the men that collected wood, mainly those with little land, or male adolescents. Some of the households had donkeys,

²²⁷ APPRO, *Value Chain Governance and Gender: Saffron Production in Afghanistan*, p. 2.

²²⁸ World Bank, *Afghanistan National Reconstruction and Poverty Reduction - the Role of Women in Afghanistan's Future*, p. 60.

²²⁹ Maletta, *Women at Work: Gender, Wealth, Wages and Employment in Rural Afghanistan*, p. 6.

²³⁰ Nasratullah, Smith, and Mielke, *The Fuel Economy of Mountain Villages in Ishkamish and Burka (Northeast Afghanistan): Rural Subsistence and Urban Marketing Patterns*, pp. 22-26, 31.

but often the donkeys could not negotiate the steep terrain and so were kept at the bottom of the hills while the wood was carried down by the villagers.²³¹ The heavy expenditure of labor required to collect fuel wood would argue for the promotion of agro-forestry and village woodlots.

Burning of fuel wood in rural homes not only requires an extensive investment in labor and damages rangelands, but the indoor pollution it causes also leads to respiratory ailments and other health problems, particularly for women and children. To address this problem, the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) has introduced new fuel efficient stoves in the Wakhan Corridor. The traditional tandoor oven is extremely inefficient and lacks a chimney system, causing the house to fill up with smoke. The stove that WCS introduced is more fuel-efficient and, unlike the tandoor stove, has a chimney that channels smoke out of the house. WCS's approach involved issuing a stove to one family, training them in its use, and helping that family train women from neighboring villages on the use of the stove. The fuel-efficient stove proved to be immensely popular with local women, leading WCS to establish a training center in Ishkashim, in Badakhshan Province, to train local tinsmiths to produce fuel-efficient stoves.²³² Stove making metal and tools were subsequently provided to tinsmiths, who produced and distributed 903 stoves in the Wakhan Corridor.²³³

The recruitment of women to manage tree nurseries is another area where USAID programs, especially those that deal with the expansion of tree crop production and watershed management, could have a direct and explicit gender impact. The USAID-funded Afghanistan Water, Agriculture and Technology Transfer (AWATT) Project, for example, provided employment opportunities for more than 200 women in Nuristan, Balkh, and Nangarhar Provinces through its "Foster Mum" program. Under this program, women were trained in tree nursery management practices that were adapted to a single household production level. The Foster Mum program was targeted at, but not exclusively limited to, households where widows or other women were the only income earners in the household. Seeds or young seedlings were provided to the women, and the saplings were then sold back to AWATT in the spring when they were ready for transplanting under watershed reclamation programs. AWATT, in-turn, donated the seedlings to the provincial forestry departments for planting on the reclaimed watersheds.

The potential for this type of program is significant, given the need for a significant increase in the production of fast growing tree species, as well as pistachio. Watershed rehabilitation efforts, in particular, will require the large-scale planting of trees, in order to reduce erosion and soil degradation in Afghanistan's mountainous areas. The nursery management of pistachio and other forest trees is neither difficult nor very time consuming, so widows can make it a part of their daily routine right in their houses and patios. Nursery production of fruit trees is also possible. Under the AWATT program, each Foster Mum was expected to raise and nurse 500 tree seedlings for 10 months. They were each provided with baby tree seedlings in polyethylene bags, shade materials for seedling beds, and water sprayers and small hand weeding sickle. They were also encouraged to visit each other's nurseries to compare growth and share information on production practices. At 30 Afghanis per plant, the 500 saplings produced could generate a potential income of 15,000 afghanis (\$345). In most cases, this effectively doubled the women's income from other sources. Each Foster Mum contributed the equivalent of 46 person days of

²³¹ Kerr-Wilson and Pain, *Three Villages in Angilar, Laghman: A Case Study of Rural Livelihoods*, p. 23.

²³² Wildlife Conservation Society, *Improving Livelihoods through Natural Resources Management through Natural Resources Management in Afghanistan: Budgets for Women's and Girls' Activities*, 2011. WCS also cooperated with the USAID-funded Afghanistan Clean Energy Program, to install solar power in two schools. WCS also conducted Public Hygiene and Sanitation Awareness training sessions in 10 villages within Band-e-Amir National Park, with 574 attendees, of which 343 were women. See also Wildlife Conservation Society, *Improving Governance through Improved Natural Resources Management Annual Report covering April 10, 2010 to April 9, 2011*.

²³³ WCS, ILGNRM, *Fourth Quarterly Annual Report 10 April 2012 to 9 April 2013*, p. 7.

work toward the tree growing program, which added up to an equivalent of 23,000 person days of employment.²³⁴

To the degree that Afghan policy supports the restoration of upper watersheds, this home nursery program could provide continuous employment and income for Afghan women throughout the country. However, it must be remembered that women-managed nursery production, such as that promoted by AWATT, must be a component of a larger endeavor. Moreover, while the scale of donor-supported watershed management activities may be significant, the numbers of women nursery managers that could feed into that effort would likely be limited to a few thousand. While the skills conveyed to the women in terms of nursery production could enable them to do it as a business (e.g., providing fruit trees to neighboring farmers), this would also likely remain on a small scale. AWATT's Foster Mums were dependent on that project to provide key inputs and to serve as a reliable market for their output. These nurseries were not set up as sustainable income generating operations.

The Alternative Development Program/North (ADP/N) Home-Based Nursery Program also targeted widows and poor women. This program included 350 women from 37 villages in seven districts in Badakhshan Province. Each woman received seeds for their home gardens as well as pine saplings that could be sold for a dollar after they grew to sufficient size. Initially, the women also received a stipend of \$50 per month to help them focus on tending their nurseries. According to the ADP/N final report, the women in this program realized an average annual income of \$500, excluding the subsidy.²³⁵ A subsequent evaluation of this activity, however, indicated that the effort had had mixed results, partly because some of the varieties distributed were not suitable and the women did not get enough technical assistance. The evaluation found that, while a few women had continued to make a business of it, many had dropped the enterprise.²³⁶



Photo: Women working on gabion production as part of a cash-for-work project, ADP/SW.²³⁷

²³⁴ New Mexico State University, *Afghanistan Water, Agriculture and Technology Transfer Final Report March 2008 – June, 2011*, p. 23-24.

²³⁵ AECOM International Development, *Alternative Development Program–North Completion Report*, p. 15.

²³⁶ Checchi and Company Consulting, *Final Evaluation of the Alternative Development Program-North*, p. 12.

²³⁷ Photo Source: Tetra Tech ARD, *Alternative Development Program/SW, 2008-2009 Annual Report*, p. 24.

Another women-friendly activity related to watershed management is the weaving of gabion wire baskets, which are stacked together and filled with rocks to create walls or filling to stabilize riverbanks and reduce erosion along roadbeds. Gabion weaving can be lucrative. With training and experience, output can reach two gabions per day, earning \$8 per gabion. Though rates vary (by size, quality and region) this ranks among the better incomes for women, and it can be done within the household or at village compounds, where the women can work together to weave the gabions.²³⁸ Under ADP/N, for example, nearly 2,000 women wove gabion wire baskets, earning \$5 per day. They worked on average 20 days and took home \$100.²³⁹ IDEA-NEW also provided training in gabion-weaving to 100 women in Badakhshan and Baghlan Provinces. These women subsequently received contracts from various companies to weave gabions for construction projects.²⁴⁰ Similarly, as part of IDEA/NEW's watershed management program in two districts in Nangarhar, 202 women wove 4,885 gabions that were used for flood control. Other USAID-funded stabilization projects, such as ADP/SW (2008-11) and the Alternative Income Project (AIP) in Helmand Province (2005-06) also included gabion production activities for women.

Incremental progress is also being made in the broader field of natural resources management. Under the ILG-NRM Project, wcs has been working with MAIL to manage Band-e-Amir National Park, a World Heritage site. In July 2013, MAIL hired four women to serve as park rangers in Band-e-Amir, the first women ever hired as park rangers in this country. The decision to recruit these women was made with the endorsement of representatives from the 14 villages in the park, as well as provincial and district governments, and reflected the fact that a significant number of the 4,000 tourists each month were women.²⁴¹

Women's Roles in Opium Production

Women play a more significant role in the cultivation of opium poppy than with other field crops. They may be involved in planting, weeding, and thinning, and may be involved in harvesting (lancing the capsules and collecting the gum) in the household's or close neighbor's fields, assuming that there are no outside males available as laborers. Also, they participate by preparing food for hire laborers, for whom the daily compensation may be two or three meals per day. Women may also play important roles in breaking the capsules and removing and cleaning the poppy seeds and processing by-products, such as oil and soap. Women play a more significant role in the cultivation of opium poppy in both the northern and eastern regions of Afghanistan. In the more conservative southern region, where land ownership is more concentrated, female participation in opium poppy cultivation is restricted to the task of preparing food and drink for itinerant poppy harvesters. There, the participation of women in the opium poppy harvest tends to be restricted to those households with a limited supply of male or child labor, or with insufficient financial resources to employ itinerant laborers. The fact that poppy tends to be cultivated on irrigated land located nearer to the household, facilitates women's participation. Moreover, the low opportunity cost attributed to women's labor tends to make labor-intensive crops, such as opium poppy, more economically attractive to households.²⁴²

The poppy harvest is a labor-intensive endeavor, requiring a sizeable hired workforce and involving the widespread use of reciprocal labor. Participation in poppy cultivation represents a significant increase in women's workloads. It is also arduous work and must be performed in addition to their normal domestic

²³⁸ Banzet, *Research on Chronically Poor Women in Afghanistan*, p. 18.

²³⁹ AECOM International Development, *Alternative Development Program-North Completion Report*, p. 15.

²⁴⁰ DAI, *IDEA-NEW, Annual Report No. 2 [2010]*, p. 9.

²⁴¹ Wildlife Conservation Society, *Women Park Rangers Now Patrolling Afghanistan National Park*.

²⁴² Mansfield, *The Economic Superiority of Illicit Drug Production: Myth or Reality*, pp. 10, 14. See also Fishstein, *Despair or Hope: Rural livelihoods and Poppy Dynamics in Afghanistan*, p. 21; and World Bank, *Afghanistan National Reconstruction and Poverty Reduction - the Role of Women in Afghanistan's Future*, pp. 59-60.

and agricultural duties (e.g., managing livestock). Also, there is increasing evidence that opium use in rural Afghan households is widespread, increasing, and a significant health concern, including for children.

The authors of the USAID Agriculture Gender Analysis pointed out one implication of women's participation in opium cultivation: "While hardly exemplary, the role women play in the cultivation of opium in both the North and East shows that they have the potential to take more active roles in agriculture and work alongside men -- but it requires an economic incentive for men to welcome their involvement."²⁴³

Women's Participation in Cash for Work Activities

Women do not normally participate directly in cash-for-work (CfW) activities, such as the rehabilitation of canals, terracing of hillsides, or planting of trees and shrubs, since this is generally considered men's work. The experience of the ADP/E Program, which ran from 2005 to 2009, is illustrative of the difficulties in reaching women through CfW programs. During its implementation, ADP/E employed nearly 174,000 people in CfW programs, paying out salaries totaling \$22 million. However, only around 1,650 of these were women (less than one percent of the total). These women did, nevertheless, receive an average salary of \$4 per day for 69 work days each (for a total payout of \$456,000). While women couldn't work as laborers, they could be employed in ancillary services, such as cooking food and providing water to the workers.²⁴⁴ Similarly, the IDEA-NEW Project employed 26,000 community members for its Community Constructed Infrastructure programs, of which only 1,133 were women (four percent). Women received \$100,000 of the \$3.8 million paid out in salaries.²⁴⁵ The ADP/N Project employed over 480,000 person days of labor for cash for work activities, of which women accounted for less than 13,000 person days (2.7 percent), mainly through the weaving of gabion baskets. This work was concentrated in the off-season for agriculture, particularly during the late fall and early winter season. It served to provide many Afghans with cash income just before winter and during the poppy planting season.²⁴⁶

Under the ADP/N program, women were also hired under a CfW program to collect beetles in Kishem and Baharak districts of Badakhshan Province. The Colorado beetle is a serious pest for potatoes, but the hand-removal of the beetles is tedious. To avoid the use of insecticides, the project distributed bottles containing a pheromone that attracted the beetles. Under a "cash for beetles" activity, women and children were paid \$5 dollars for each bottle of beetles collected (with approximately 1,000 beetles per bottle). Some 3,000 bottles were collected in the Baharak district alone.²⁴⁷

Women's Roles in Postharvest Processing

Women undertake post-harvest crop processing activities, such as cleaning, sorting and drying vegetables, fruits, and nuts, and packaging them for both domestic use and for the market. Grace, for example, reported that women may dry tomatoes inside the house, some dry melon and some make jam from watermelon for the winter.²⁴⁸

²⁴³ Saraya Media and Communication, *Gender Assessment of USAID Agriculture Programs*, p. 15.

²⁴⁴ DAI, *Alternative Development Program – Eastern Region Final Report 2005 – 2009, Annex VIII*, p. 70.

²⁴⁵ DAI, *IDEA-NEW, Annual Report No. 2, [2010]*, p. 38.

²⁴⁶ AECOM International Development, *Alternative Development Program–North Completion Report*, p. 15.

²⁴⁷ Checchi and Company, *Final Evaluation of Alternative Development Program–North (ADP/N)*, p. 12.

²⁴⁸ Grace, *Gender Roles in Agriculture*, p. 6

Often this post-harvest processing takes place at the wholesaler's level. Traders and wholesales often outsource these activities to women living in urban and peri-urban areas, who work in their homes or in women-only facilities, at salaries of around 100-200 Afghanis per day, wages that are less than half of what male laborers receive for processing fresh grapes, for example.

In Kabul there is one woman-owned and operate processing center for dried fruits and nuts, run by the Afghan Pride Association (APA). Female APA staff visit villages to purchase produce directly from women producers.²⁴⁹

The post-harvest processing of crops (drying/cleaning/preserving) is a predominately female domain. This is particularly the case with horticulture, and a number of USAID-funded programs have worked with women to improve post-harvest processing. The number of women benefiting from such activities and the level of sophistication possible, however, has been modest, largely because of the social constraints placed on women's mobility. Under the AWATT Project, 68 women in Balkh province were trained in fruit preservation techniques, including the drying and canning of perishables. Many of the women who attended these trainings were reportedly able to capitalize on their learning and create enterprises that generated secondary sources of income for their families. These skills provided the women with a means for extending the shelf life of locally grown crops for both home consumption and



Photo: Afghan women learn how to make sundried tomatoes at the Badam Bagh Demonstration Farm.²⁵⁰

potential sale in local markets. This contributed not only to improving household incomes, but also increased the diversification of family nutrition.²⁵¹

²⁴⁹ World Bank, *Understanding Gender in Agricultural Value Chains*, pp. 22-23

²⁵⁰ Picture Credit: *Afghanistan Sustaining Agricultural Development Program, Final Report*, p. 40.

²⁵¹ New Mexico State University, *Afghanistan Water, Agriculture and Technology Transfer Final Report 2008-2011*, p. 37

The use of solar dryers can preserve fruits and vegetables and extend the market window for many fruit and vegetable products. AWATT promoted solar driers, including the training of Afghan carpenters on how to build different types of dryers. AWATT found that the commercialization of the solar dryers was rapid, as indicated by the receipt of nearly 3-dozen orders during the first growing season. Through NGOs the dryer technology promoted by AWATT diffused to several other Provinces. The drying units are more sanitary and result in higher yields and a higher nutritional content for the dried fruit. In Parwan, women's groups agreed to cost share 50 percent for each dryer (US\$250 per dryer including labor and materials).²⁵² Similarly, ADP/N implemented a Solar Dryer Program that enabled women to collect, dry and sell fruit with small imperfections that might otherwise go unsold in produce markets. Several training sessions were held at the Women's Center in Fayzabad, which acquired one of the four solar dryers imported by ADP/N. Seventy women showed continuing interest in fruit and vegetable drying and were instructed on how to use sulfur to preserve the color and consistency of dried fruit.²⁵³

In 2013, CHAMP taught apricot sulfur drying techniques to 2,426 farmers, including 680 women (over 27.6 percent of the total) from ten provinces. The female beneficiaries were from Bamyan (103 women), Parwan (277 women) and Wardak (300 women).²⁵⁴ The sulfur drying, which can more than double the value of the output, helped the participating women increase their income by 8 percent. A survey of 80 women trained by CHAMP in apricot sulfur drying in Wardak and Parwan provinces in 2012 indicated that 71 percent of this income was shared with the entire family, while 23 percent of women received the money directly.²⁵⁵ In 2014, CHAMP provided training to another 763 women in apricot drying techniques.²⁵⁶

The USAID-funded ADP/E project established a certified packing facility in Sorkhrud district of Nangarhar Provinces. ADP/E trained 16 women from Naranj Bagh village of Sorkhrud to manage and operate the facility. By the end of the project, the facility was providing high quality, fresh produce from regional farms under the brand Pride of the Eastern Region, as well as providing packing services to traders supplying fruit and vegetables for high-end supermarkets and logistics companies in Kabul. On a weekly basis, the facility was processing 3,500 to 4,000 kgs of fresh fruit and vegetables.²⁵⁷

Between 2004 and 2006, under RAMP, an effort was undertaken to construct and operate a vegetable dehydration and processing factory in Parwan Province. While the factory was partially financed by a for-profit Canadian development organization, the intent was to create a Parwan Growers Association that would ultimately share in the profits from the sales of dehydrated vegetables to the European market. The program tried to establish production contracts with over 1200 Afghan farmers from 25 villages for vegetables that the factory could process and export. The program involved some 315 women, who were contracted to supply the factory with sun-dried tomatoes. In addition, nearly 50 women are employed in the processing line during the day shift. Widows without land were hired to sun dry tomatoes at the factory. The contracted farmers were supplied seeds, fertilizer, tools and extension advice. However, the program ran into problems when farmers (including women), who had received inputs and technical assistance from the factory, defaulted on their contracts and sold their output at slightly higher prices on the wholesale market. This, in turn, forced the factory to buy more expensive produce from the wholesale fresh market to satisfy capacity, scheduling and buyer demand. A review concluded that the farmers did not appreciate the fact that the factory's guaranteed product price and staggered crop cycles would

²⁵² New Mexico State University, *Afghanistan Water, Agriculture and Technology Transfer Final Report 2008-2011*, p. 38.

²⁵³ AECOM International Development, *Alternative Development Program–North Completion Report*, p. 15.

²⁵⁴ Roots of Peace, *CHAMP 2013 Annual Report*, pp. 22, 36.

²⁵⁵ Roots of Peace, *CHAMP Annual Report Feb 2012-Jan 2013*, p. 55

²⁵⁶ Roots of Peace, *CHAMP 2013 Annual Report*, pp. 30-31.

²⁵⁷ DAI, *Alternative Development Program – Eastern Region, Final Report, 2005 – 2009*, p. 13.

provide them with a much higher and more dependable income in the long-run.²⁵⁸ An impact evaluation completed in December of 2007 found that supply problems had continued to keep the factory from being profitable and, although at the time of the evaluation it was still operating in the red, there was optimism that it would begin operating profitably.²⁵⁹ The facility subsequently closed. Contract farming efforts do exist elsewhere in Afghanistan and one problem with this effort might have been that it was viewed by farmers as a donor project, rather than as a commercial operation.

The Role of Women in Marketing and Agribusiness

As one moves further up the value chain, the participation of women diminishes. The key value chain actors, such as input suppliers, middlemen, and traders, are predominantly men, and the inability of women to freely interact with them limits their ability to procure needed inputs or commercialize and market their output. At the same time, the cultural norms that preclude women from travelling freely limits their access to local, regional or national markets.

The unstable security situation makes access to markets even more difficult for women than for men. Even when women's domestic production, such as carpet weaving, is the main income of the household, they rarely control its marketing. Rather, the marketing is most often managed by male relatives. Nor are women well-equipped with the skills needed to access markets effectively. Their real or perceived illiteracy or innumeracy limits their ability to participate in the sales and marketing of products.²⁶⁰ Women generally have little access to market information on current prices, product demand, or quality requirements, unless it is provided by male family members. These constraints constitute a major stumbling block for women entrepreneurs in rural Afghanistan in general. As a result, the women's agricultural businesses that exist are, for the most part, small and unregistered. To the extent that women have been successful in agribusiness, it is often due to the personality and dynamism of the individuals involved, which is something that is difficult to teach.²⁶¹ USAID programs have worked with several such female entrepreneurs.

The Rabia Maryam Handicraft Company produces silk garments, such as scarves and shawls. The owner, Rabia Maryam, was a schoolteacher who lost her job when the Taliban assumed control. She turned to fabric and handicraft production to support herself. With a group of eight women, she created the Rabia Maryam Handicrafts Company 12 years ago. Initially, the business was limited by the number of women able to produce raw silk by rearing silkworms. Through IDEA-NEW, the Rabia Maryam Handicraft Co. was contracted by ACDI/VOCA to train 400 women in silk production in 2010. The training program was expanded to 1,000 participants in 2011 and was repeated in 2012. This training has greatly increased the supply of silk cocoons and allowed the company to expand its production from an annual sales level of \$10,000, to over \$120,000 per year in 2012.²⁶² Rabia Maryam Handicraft also benefitted from a loan from the USAID-funded Agricultural Development Fund and a grant from IDEA-NEW.

Another example of a success women's business organization is the Afghan Pride Association (APA), which produces high quality dried fruits and nuts, including pistachios, almonds, raisins and walnuts, relying on a network of 350 farm women across three provinces. APA is owned and operated by Mariam Sadat, who got the idea for the business while employed as a trainer with the Afghan Women's Business Council. APA sells the packaged products to shops and hotels, through exporter unions and through its

²⁵⁸ Neils, *Case Study: Vegetable Dehydration and Processing Factory in Afghanistan*, passim.

²⁵⁹ Checchi and Company, *Impact Evaluation of Rebuilding Agricultural Markets Project (RAMP)*, p. 15

²⁶⁰ International Finance Corporation, *Gender Entrepreneurship Markets Country Brief: Afghanistan*, 2007, p. 4

²⁶¹ Saraya Media and Communication, *Gender Assessment of USAID Agriculture Programs* p. 48.

²⁶² ACDI/VOCA, *Success Story: Revitalizing the Silk Sector in Afghanistan and Developing the Rural Economy*, 2012 [http://www.acdivoca.org/site/Lookup/Afghanistan-IDEANEW-Silk/\\$file/Afghanistan-IDEA-NEW-Silk.pdf](http://www.acdivoca.org/site/Lookup/Afghanistan-IDEANEW-Silk/$file/Afghanistan-IDEA-NEW-Silk.pdf)

own two retail shops, and has set up local collection and drying centers.²⁶³ APA received support from the USAID-supported Accelerating Sustainable Agriculture Program.

Two other female owned agribusinesses that USAID has supported were in the saffron sector, specifically the Association of Pashtun Zarghun Women Saffron Association and the Association of Women Saffron Producers of Ghoryan. Both have received support from the ADF.

Under the USAID-funded Afghanistan Farm Service Center Alliance (AFSA) program (March 2008 to June 2012), the Citizen's Network for Foreign Affairs (CNFA) established 18 Farm Service Centers (FSCs) in 17 provinces. The purpose of these FSCs was to ensure that Afghan farmers would have access to affordable, timely and reliable access to quality inputs and services, such as seeds, fertilizer, crop protection products and agriculture extension. In its first phase of the project, AFSA established seven FSCs, one of which, the Kabul FSC, was owned and operated by women. In its second phase, CNFA created another ten FSCs, two of which were women-owned, one in Parwan and one in Balkh Province. These female-owned FSCs had all female staff, so that they could deal directly with female clients. They stocked products and created market outlets that targeted women's traditional productive activities. According to the AFSA Final Report (2012), sales of the Kabul FSC increased to nearly \$1.1 million, six full time equivalent jobs had been created, 812 individuals had been trained, and the FSC was serving



Photo: Women in the Kabul Farm Services Center²⁶⁴

2,853 households. The status of the remaining two women-run FSCs was considered at the time more tenuous, since these had been established in the final year of the AFSA Project.²⁶⁵

²⁶³ World Bank *Understanding Gender in Agricultural Value Chains: The Cases of Grapes/Raisins, Almonds and Saffron in Afghanistan*, p.23.

²⁶⁴ Picture Credit: USAID, *Success Story, Women's Farm Service Centers Offer Opportunity* (AFSA/Kabul FSC)

²⁶⁵ CNFA, *Afghanistan Farm Service Alliance (AFSA), Final Report*, Sept. 15, 2012, pp. 18, 25, 28, 31-32.

Unfortunately, a 2015 assessment of past USAID agribusiness efforts found that, while the 15 male-oriented FSCs were still in operation, the three female-oriented FSCs had failed once the AFSA project ended. In retrospect, the women-owned FSCs may never have been financially viable, given the difficulties they faced in establishing and maintaining connections to markets. In addition, it is likely that women farmers left the purchasing agricultural inputs to their male relatives, who would not have gone to a women-owned FSCs. That being the case, there were probably not enough active female clients within a reasonable distance of the individual women-owned FSCs to sustain them. The Agribusiness Sustainability Assessment concluded from this that women-owned businesses needed to be subject to the same feasibility assessments as other businesses, and should not be supported, if sustainability looks unlikely.²⁶⁶

There have been a number of other efforts by USAID projects to support agribusinesses that have had gender implications. The CHAMP Project supported the Omaid Bahar Fruit Processing Company, Afghanistan's first-ever juice concentrate processing and fresh fruit packaging facility. This resulted in the creation of over 200 jobs for women, who constituted approximately 35 percent of the factory's employees. IDEA-NEW supported the Spinghar Dairy Processing Centers, cheese-making processing centers owned by women, as well as the women-owned Surkhrod Packing Facility, which packed fruits and vegetables under the brand *Pride of the Eastern Region*. The Mercy Corps Global Development Alliance provided support to the Bagram Juice Company, of which 75 percent of the employees in 2009 were women.²⁶⁷

ASAP provided support to the Afghan Women's Business Council (AWBC), which was established in 2003 to provide local women with access to training, capital, and other resources needed to create businesses. In 2010, with support from the ASAP Project, the AWBC women were given the opportunity to harvest, package, and sell produce grown on the Badam Bagh Demonstration Farm, a farm and training facility established by USAID and MAIL. ASAP provided support to train the women in how to harvest, clean, and pack the fruit and vegetables grown, which was sold to local supermarkets. In 2011, ASAP also provided funding to construct a modern food processing center for AWBC, one that would be compliant with international food safety standards. The AWBC used the profits to pay salaries, buy packaging materials, and fund business and training opportunities for women.²⁶⁸ The 2015 Agribusiness Sustainability Study found that the AWBC processing center had closed and the AWBC no longer existed.

While the efforts to date in supporting female-owned and managed agribusinesses has been beneficial and had some notable successes, the number of such agribusinesses, and their scale and scope, have been limited and, to a significant extent, dependent on exceptional individual women entrepreneurs. The expansion of female agribusinesses will take time, but will clearly be a necessary component in the expansion of women's roles in Afghan agriculture.

In May-June 2014, CHAMP conducted a survey of Afghan agricultural exporters. A total of 93 exporters participated in the survey, ten of which were women. The women surveyed exported significantly less tonnage than their male counterparts. However, they were better educated, holding, on average, a Bachelor's degree. They tended to ship twice as often to the UAE as the men, who tended to ship more often to Pakistan. These women had received some assistance from outside sources, but very little in the

²⁶⁶ Parkinson, Sarah, et. al., *Agribusiness Sustainability Assessment*, p. 53.

²⁶⁷ Mercy Corps, *Global Development Alliance for Strengthening Market Chains for Afghan Grapes and Pomegranates*, 2010 Annual Report, 2011, p. 8.

²⁶⁸ Chemonics, *ASAP Final Report*, pp. 72-73.

way of funding. Although the women were, on average, twice as successful as men at obtaining bank loans, they cited lack of available financing as their greatest trade obstacle.²⁶⁹

Women and Nutrition

The ability to reach local women with agriculture interventions can be increased by incorporating nutrition and hygiene into more integrated agricultural programs. These issues, which clearly fall within the realm of female responsibility in the household, can serve as an entry point and platform upon which agricultural interventions could be built.

Afghanistan faces a serious food security challenge, with 28 percent of Afghan households having inadequate caloric intake and at least a third of households consuming diets with inadequate food diversity. As a result, 59 percent of Afghan children under the age of five are stunted (low height for weight), 33 percent are underweight (low weight for age), and 9 percent are wasted (low weight for height).²⁷⁰ Undernutrition contributes to over one-third of child deaths in Afghanistan, as undernourished children who fall sick are much more likely to die from illness than well-nourished children. Moreover, children who are undernourished between conception and two years of age are at high risk for impaired cognitive development.²⁷¹ Maternal, infant, and child mortality rates in Afghanistan are among the highest in the world, and improving the nutritional status of these groups is critical for their overall health and future economic productivity.²⁷²

Dietary diversity is essential for food security, and strengthening the linkages between agriculture and improved nutrition outcomes is one of the objectives of USAID's Feed the Future Program.²⁷³ As noted earlier, wheat flour contributes to 57 percent of the total caloric content of the relatively poor.²⁷⁴ Between 70 to 80 percent of the average Afghan household budget is dedicated to food purchases.²⁷⁵ Poor Afghan families respond to income shocks, such as reduced harvests or increased prices, by shifting the composition of their diets to cheaper, lower quality (less nutrient-rich) foods. This strategy allows them to maintain their caloric intake in the face of large declines in purchasing power. In their analysis of the impacts of the food price crisis of 2007-08, D'Souza and Jolliffe observed declines in expenditure shares of all food groups except grains. The largest decline was seen in fruit.²⁷⁶

Nutrition education in Afghanistan is still relatively weak and basic nutrition concepts and guidelines are not well understood within rural communities. Duchet and Pascal found that poor quality food was even more important than lack of food among people living in the Baharak Valley in Badakhshan Province. Even when vegetables were available, women are not accustomed to cooking them in large quantities. Likewise, if they grew vegetables, households often chose to sell them and purchase imported goods, such as soft drinks, biscuits and sweets, rather than eating their home produce. The imported goods were seen as high value goods and an indication of a higher standard of living. Duchet and Pascal argued that food programs needed to focus more on food quality, rather than quantity, and on promoting food hygiene and a well-balanced diet.²⁷⁷

²⁶⁹ Roots of Peace, CHAMP Quarterly Report – April-June 2014

²⁷⁰ Levitt, Emily, *Malnutrition in Afghanistan: Scale, Scope, Causes, and Potential Response*, p. 4.

²⁷¹ World Bank, *Nutrition at a Glance: Afghanistan*, n.d.

²⁷² Levitt, *Malnutrition in Afghanistan: Scale, Scope, Causes, and Potential Response*, p. 2.

²⁷³ USAID, *Feed the Future Guide*, May 2010, p. 13-14.

²⁷⁴ D'Souza and Jolliffe, *Food Security in Afghanistan: Household-level Evidence from the 2007-08 Food Price Crisis*, p. 3.

²⁷⁵ Haroun, *Food Crisis and Its Impact on Afghanistan's National Security*, p. 146.

²⁷⁶ D'Souza and Jolliffe, *Food Security in Afghanistan*, p. 18.

²⁷⁷ Duchet and Pascal, *Linking Relief, Rehabilitation and Development Programme (LRRD) in Afghanistan*, p. 5

Programs that promote integrated vegetable and fruit production, as well as increased livestock production, even if for subsistence consumption, can be effective at promoting dietary diversity, particularly when accompanied by training in nutrition and hygiene. This training could involve not only the production and consumption of nutrient-rich vegetables and the benefits of dietary diversification, but instruction in food preparation, women's nutrition, improved infant and young child feeding practices, and encouraging hand washing with soap and water before food preparation.

Nutrition promotion activities should be combined with a package of activities to improve household food security in food insecure areas, because evidence shows that there is a greater likelihood of success when combined interventions are used in such areas. At the same time, incorporating nutrition education into agriculture interventions can be beneficial. Such efforts would require the training of extension agents in nutrition issues. Kitchen gardens and livestock can play an important role in dietary diversity and in increasing the consumption of micronutrient-rich foods.

In October of 2014, USAID launched a multi-sectoral Improving Nutrition Outcomes Program. This program will encompass an initiative to improve nutrition, hygiene, and sanitation, micronutrient supplementation, and food fortification. Nutrition initiatives are also being undertaken by RADPs South, North, and West to complement this initiative. RADP-North's gender outreach team, for example, is providing training on the importance of good nutrition, sanitary food preparation, safe food storage, storage technologies, cooking techniques, maternal and child health, hygiene, and family planning. This training is being provided in close collaboration with staff from MoWA's Department of Home Economics. This campaign will include discussion forums in each RADP-North province, radio messages, and billboards.²⁷⁸

The AAEP II Project's Women in Agriculture Program is also providing training in nutrition to women. Most recently they provided nutrition and health workshops at the DAILs in Mazar-e-Sharif, Kabul, Jalalabad and Herat, and at the Paktiya Provincial DAIL. The attendees, who were primarily women, included DAIL extension workers from the district offices, the Rural Microfinance and Livestock support Program (RMLSP) extension workers, National Horticulture and Livestock Project (NHLP) lead farmers, RADP-North staff (in Balkh) and others. The workshops focused on nutrition for women and children, the effect of nutrition on health, and methods of nutrition extension.²⁷⁹

²⁷⁸ RADP-North, *RADP-N Strategy/Work Plan Nutrition and Gender-Related Activities*. 2015, p. 1

²⁷⁹ AAEP II Quarterly Report. P. 6

Conclusions and Recommendations ²⁸⁰

USAID's Office of Agriculture (OAG) has in the past been criticized for not putting enough effort into ensuring that women benefitted from its agriculture projects. Historically, female beneficiaries have amounted to, at best, five or six percent of the total number of beneficiaries in our projects. Even in large USAID projects with tens of thousands of beneficiaries, the numbers of direct female beneficiaries have numbered in the hundreds or low thousands. USAID's current targets for its agriculture portfolio now require that women constitute 15 percent of project beneficiaries.²⁸¹

Reaching this target will be difficult, given the nature of women's participation in agricultural production and the current social constraints faced in reaching and mobilizing them. These obstacles include the fact that rural Afghan women:

- rarely own land and have limited access to capital;
- have little decision making authority on land use or access to water resources;
- are largely uneducated;
- face cultural norms that limit their mobility outside of their residential compounds and restrict contact with non-familial males; and
- are generally involved in small-scale activities that take place within their residential compounds, which are largely for subsistence, rather than commercial purposes.

These constraints will make the achievement of economies-of-scale with respect to female-oriented interventions in the agriculture sector more difficult, will severely limit the indirect "spread" effects of those programs that are implemented, and will undermine their sustainability.

OAG needs to assess the gender implications of its activities, and gender concerns and experiences should be integral to the design, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation of the policies and programs undertaken.²⁸² Any agricultural sector assistance strategy, however, must recognize the tradeoff between growth and equity. A focus on the growth end of the growth-to-equity spectrum, i.e., on commercially-focused farmers and value chains in peri-urban and irrigated areas, may come at the expense of other USAID priorities, including poverty alleviation, and gender inequities. It is important that this tradeoff be recognized, fully articulated, and reflected in the choice of strategic approach adopted. The failure to do so can lead to sub-optimal design and implementation, and produce unintended consequences. Clearly, maximizing production and incomes for the country or sector as a whole will be easier if one focuses on commercial agriculture and on stakeholders that have the resources to adopt technologies and integrate into the broader market. However, this type of focus isn't necessarily compatible with increasing the participation of rural women in the sector. For example, OAG's past strategic focus has been on wheat and high value export crops that have significant near-term income-generating potential and relatively strong international markets. However, the value chains that show the highest economic potential in Afghanistan (e.g., grapes and almonds), are precisely those that are dominated by men and where women have limited decision-making roles.

²⁸⁰ These recommendations draw upon observations from Nassery, *Gender Status Report, Rebuilding Agricultural Market Systems (RAMP)*, p. 6-10; Wakefield, *Gender and Local Level Decision Making: Findings from a Case Study in Panjao*, p. 33-34; and Wakefield, *Gender and Local Level Decision Making in Samangan*, p. 25-26.

²⁸¹ In this context, 'direct female beneficiaries' refers to women for who, as a result of outside interventions, such as training or technical assistance, make decisions or alter their behavior in a manner that leads to their improved welfare in terms of increased incomes and economic security, food security, health, etc.). This does not include women who may be indirect beneficiaries when, for example, interventions aimed at male members of the household (or the community as a whole) increase their family welfare without significant action on their part.

²⁸² Larson, *A Mandate to Mainstream: Promoting Gender Equality in Afghanistan*, p. vi.

If USAID wants to reach women, it must recognize that this tradeoff exists. Given the nature of women's participation in Afghan agriculture and the current social constraints that hamper efforts to reach and mobilize them in significant numbers, one cannot simply assume that women will automatically benefit from activities in value chains that fall almost exclusively within the domain of men. Nor can one assume that women will automatically benefit from activities that are offered broadly to the agricultural community, such as farmer field days. Rather, to reach women, USAID programs will have to include discrete components that are targeted specifically to them and to the production systems in which they are involved. In taking this latter approach, it must be accepted that the cost per female beneficiary will be greater, the time to reach sustainability longer, and the economic returns, from a macroeconomic perspective and investment standpoint, likely lower.

In other words, the macroeconomic optimization approach will have to be tempered by the need to undertake activities which, while promoting gender equity, will be less optimal in terms of promoting overall agricultural production and agricultural exports. Reaching a large number of women will require an array of interventions, each of which may reach a relatively modest number of female beneficiaries. Strict adherence to the Agency's mandate to focus and concentrate its resources on a limited number of interventions or value chains will, therefore, hamper the achievement of its gender goals, at least with respect to its agriculture program in Afghanistan.

It should be acknowledge that donors have, in the past, supported vegetable gardens, small-scale livestock, poultry production, and the post-harvest processing as gender initiatives. Such efforts have often been disparaged, because they were piecemeal, localized, limited in scale and scope, more subsistence-focused, less easily commercialized and integrated into the market, and not particularly sustainable. Moreover, many of these efforts have been considered of secondary importance within larger programs – concessions to gender concerns, rather than priority efforts.

Given the nature of the challenges women face in the sector, donors and GIRA must focus on the types of activities and the agricultural production systems in which women are actually involved and in which they can play a decision-making role. Unlike in the past, these activities need to be carried out on a larger scale, with greater resource investments, and over longer time frames, in order to set the stage for market integration and ensure sustainability. It is also important to recognize that this near-term focus on traditional women's activities and agricultural production systems is not necessarily the desired end-state. Over time, perspectives will change and opportunities will arise to expand the scope of women's activities into productive areas currently dominated by men, and such changes will need to be nurtured and exploited.

USAID must also recognize that women's roles and responsibilities in agriculture vary across the country, with women in some regions participating more fully in agriculture than elsewhere. There is also diversity in women's roles in agriculture, due to differences in household wealth, with poorer women generally more active in agriculture than women from wealthier households. Therefore, reaching targets for women's participation under USAID's agricultural portfolio could also require spending a disproportionate share of development resources (or at least gender resources) in those provinces where women are more active in the sector and have relatively greater freedom of movement and access. Reaching women may also require a greater focus on food security and nutrition and the use of family-based approaches in all programs designed to target female beneficiaries. OAG's implementing partners will also need the freedom to work with local communities in the planning process and the flexibility to be responsive to needs that the communities themselves identify, as opposed to being required to fit all activities into a pre-defined menu of options.

It should also be recognized that the ability of USAID-funded agricultural projects to affect the internal interpersonal dynamics of rural households and rural communities will be limited. That said, efforts will need to be made to understand those power dynamics, and the findings factored into project planning. Project implementers should also carry out research to identify key differences in status among villagers according to gender (as well as according to age and land assets). The social and decision-making structure of village-level organizations needs to be understood and taken into account in project planning and implementation, in order to ensure that said projects are effective and do not inadvertently harm or exclude marginalized and vulnerable groups. Transparency in the selection of the leadership of local organizations should be required.

Project interventions to strengthen value chains can benefit small producers by increasing their productivity and incomes. However, such interventions can also affect roles and relations. Change in gender relations can result from: (1) the introduction of new technologies that change labor patterns, time allocation, and control over income; (2) shifts to high-value crops that alter patterns of control over resources and benefits; and (3) shifts that change or formalize ownership and household financial management practices.²⁸³ One cannot assume that efforts to benefit agricultural producers and landowners (including through farmers' associations, trading groups, and water user associations) will automatically reach disadvantaged and vulnerable groups. In particular, projects should be cognizant of the potential adverse impacts of technology transfer on women. For example, labor saving technologies could have a devastating impact on the livelihoods of woman and the landless. To the extent that such technologies are promoted, training and alternative income opportunities need to be found for those displaced.

Explicit efforts should be made by USAID projects to identify female headed households and poorer households where women, by necessity, are playing a greater role in agriculture, and to design culturally-appropriate programs to explicitly address their needs. One approach to facilitating women's participation would be to work with villagers to create women-only spaces where new technologies could be demonstrated to women. Project implementers should also provide opportunities for women to gain practical knowledge, even when it is not directly-related to the agricultural objectives of the project overall. Providing such opportunities will help them gain legitimacy in the local level development process. At the same time, special income-generating project activities directed at women (e.g., gabion weaving, carpet weaving, and embroidery) should be developed recognizing the workload that women, especially younger women, currently bear.

In cases where women own land, they often enter into sharecropping arrangements, particularly with members of their extended family. This does not necessarily mean that the female owners have much of a say in the actual use of the land. Nevertheless, efforts to identify such female owners to promote greater investment in the land (e.g., introduction of fruit trees) may be useful. Sharecroppers may or may not be interested in making such longer-term land improvements. Expectations of beneficiary contributions by women (at least in terms of financial contributions) may need to be modest, given that women have fewer resources and are much less commercially-oriented.

It should be recognized that, when credit and subsidized inputs are provided to women, these resources may be used by the male members of their household, with the women having little or no input into the actual allocation of those resources. Nevertheless, channeling the access to such resources through women could help to increase their self-esteem in the near-term, increase their importance in the eyes of the male members of the family, and even increase their influence over the longer-term.

²⁸³ USAID, *A Guide to Integrating Gender into Agriculture Value Chains*, p. 2.

All USAID-funded agriculture projects should employ a full-time gender coordinator to ensure that gender is fully taken into account in the design, implementation, and evaluation of project activities, and that there is comprehensive reporting on gender-related activities and accomplishments. More importantly, the number of female staff should reflect the number of female beneficiaries targeted and the difficulties entailed in reaching them. One cannot assume that two or three "gender staff members" will be sufficient to reach thousands of women as direct beneficiaries. Nor can one assume that the implementing partner's male extension staff will be able to interact directly with rural women. Therefore, implementing partners must make a concerted effort to recruit, train, and mobilize female staff members that have the technical skills, particularly agricultural skills, needed to effectively extend new agricultural technologies to women.

Implementing partners also need to ensure that their staff, both male and female, understand the gender objectives of their projects and are familiar with the issues surrounding gender. Implementing partner staff should be trained in strategies for promoting gender, and how to identify whether or not progress is being made. The gender awareness training provided, often through workshops taught by national and international facilitators, often deals with gender in abstract terms. More practical and substantive goal-oriented training is needed, training rooted in the experiences that implementing staff will encounter in the field. Project implementing partners must also develop the human and technical capacity necessary to anticipate and understand the conflicts that will naturally arise from social change, and be able to take steps to increase the ability of local communities to manage such conflicts.

Women have a key role to play in the Afghanistan's economic development. Given the clear links between agriculture, economic growth, and social stability, formalizing their participation in the agriculture sector and providing them with opportunities to make economically meaningful contributions to their families and society, are critical to reducing poverty and promoting the country's overall economic development. Improvements in the status and economic empowerment of women will largely be driven by social changes that fall outside of the agriculture sector, given the conservative nature of rural Afghanistan. Nevertheless, measures can be taken within the framework of development assistance to the agriculture sector to further these social changes. Doing so, however, will require a better understanding of the current roles of women in the agriculture sector and the obstacles they face in increasing their contributions and improving their economic and social status.

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