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PD-AAV-821  
ISN 50641

DATE SENT

1/18/1978

DISTRIBUTION  
ACTION  
INFO.

FROM - KABUL  
E.O. 11652: N/A  
SUBJECT - WID and the Afghan Context

REFERENCE -

It is not always certain what AID/W programming expectations are relative to WID in individual countries. In this paper a series of issues or topics will be outlined that relate to the socio-cultural context of Afghanistan and to the WID programming possibilities. The focus will be mainly on the rural populations since they represent most of the population of the country and the focus of the USAID program.

Much of the information presented is not new or unknown to the students of Islamic culture but may be periodically ignored in the context of WID rhetoric. The socio-cultural context must never be ignored in the process of realistic programming. No attempt will be made to evaluate present USAID activities that relate to WID. That issue will be addressed in other documents. This is a brief social context overview.

The Nation: Afghanistan is a conservative, Islamic peasant and tribal society, fragmented by a multitude of different ethnic and linguistic groups, isolated by a rugged geography and poorly developed systems of communications, and insulated by traditional xenophobic orientations. National identity is not strong among most of the people. "Afghan" to most of the rural population means a member of the Pashtun ethnic group.

Eighty-five percent of the population lives in rural areas and most are subsistence farmers. Perhaps two million of the estimated 12-14 million population are engaged in transhumance nomadism with herds of sheep and goats.

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DRAFTED BY RBScott:sa	OFFICE DP	PHONE NO. 259	DATE 12/31/77	APPROVED BY: D:CGrader
A. I. O. AND OTHER CLEARANCES DP:Sherzai(draft) HFP:SThomas(draft) EDU:JColman		DP:RRogers DD:OCylike		U, DD, DP(4), EDU, RD, HFP, MGT, ECON, RF, CR

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There is little trust of government civil servants, and much suspicion of their activities. Recent attempts to deliver a variety of services to the rural areas is likely having some impact on the traditional views of government, but perhaps a majority of the rural population are unaware or unaffected by the limited services offered to date.

The Family: The family unit is the basic unit of social, economic and political organization and has been described (not altogether accurately) as being extended, patrilineal, patrilocal in residence, patriarchal, endogamous and occasionally polygynous. Most action and organization at the village level is focused on the household unit of a patrilineage, and households within a community are commonly linked in the same manner. The household is the unit to which the most basic loyalties are attached. It is the most immediate unit to which responsibility is attached for any one member's action, e.g., group responsibility in blood feud. It should not be surprising under such a system that most marriages are arranged by the families. Marriage establishes important social relations and responsibilities between the family units as well as between two individuals. The unit is expected to have priority over individual desires, male and female. Generally, very careful consideration goes into the selection of a husband or wife for ~~member~~ of the household. Unhappy marriages have much broader implications in Afghan society than a simple divorce.

Women's Role: Within this traditional rural context, Afghan women are expected to be mothers, wives and housekeepers. Their domain is expected to be that of the household. Generally the society is segregated by sex with the women socially isolated in the household and insulated from the greater society through a combination of strict values and life style. The set of core values at play tend to be stated in terms of family honor, shame, status, and the strictly defined and interpreted tenets of Islam.

The isolation of women from the broader range of social contacts is commonly expressed in terms of the private or household or extended family sector, in contrast to the broader range of contacts of the male population in the greater society or public sector of life. The role of women is located within the household unit and within this domain women have and exercise considerable influence, power and control. In the extended family situation, there is generally a head of the women's domain (commonly the older wife of the male household head) who runs the household activities.

There are a number of qualifiers to the above statements. (1) The patterns of action relative to these role principles vary considerably over the country by ethnic group and sub-culture. (2) The woman gains status within her household unit over time through: personal qualities e.g., piety, intelligence, industriousness, age, and having produced children, particularly males to continue the patri-lineage.

Women and the Economy: There seems to be a common assumption that the isolation of women from the activities of the greater society is synonymous with inactivity in the economic sphere. The women in Afghan society are the foundation of the household unit and its economy. Their domain generally includes the household animals, (e.g., chickens and cows) and their products. It includes food storage and processing. They help with various aspects of the agricultural cycle, at harvest and threshing. They make most of the rugs and woven goods produced by the extensive national weaving industry within the household. The women do not generally enter the market scene, however, to sell the rugs or keep the returns as personal gain. The process of weaving is a household activity beginning with sheep raising and shearing (male activity) or purchasing wool from household resources (male activity), perhaps including dyeing, spinning, and weaving (female activity), with the male taking the finished product to the market. In the context of the extended household, individual incomes from whatever source, male and female tend to be pooled.

This does not assume that men or women in rural Afghanistan are fully employed but women likely do have more work than men on a year-around basis.

Economic necessity and household size, in some cases, demands a greater involvement of women in the heavier agricultural activities outside the household. Life style and division of labor among the nomads demands greater female participation. Other marginal ethnic groups, e.g., Nuristan], the Sum of Lagman and Nangrahar, for variety of socio-cultural reasons require more general female participation. Generally, the Pashtun areas in the south of the country tend to stress the more traditional, isolated role and patterns of action for women. In some areas, it may be expected that as economics improve, women would be withdrawn from the fields to resume their traditional housekeeping role full-time, which could result in an improvement in the household quality-of-life. Much depends on the abilities of the woman as housekeeper. In any case, women working in the fields tend to reflect the low status of the households from which they come.

The term "isolation" refers more to social contacts than to the physical isolation of the traditional pardah found in urban or small town sitings. Given the range of activities required to keep the rural household operational, physical, isolation, like the use of the chadri (the total body veiling garb) would be dysfunctional.

Women and Education: The near total illiteracy of women in the rural areas (about one percent literacy) reflects the traditional orientations on women's non-involvement outside the home and acts as a barrier to cultural change. Of the few rural girls that start an education, most drop out by the age of puberty. The age of puberty is generally the age of marriage, and contacts outside the household have the potential to result in situations or rumors that reflect on a girl's morals. This situation would reflect on a family's honor, status, and may require action to protect this honor. It would reduce the girl's marriageability. Girls and women are expected to interact with their female peers, with limited or no contact with males outside their kin's households. Girls are not expected to have non-kin male friends, and a show of interest in such relations is defined as bad. The expectation is that everyone will marry and the unmarried person is suspect. The value of limited social contact combined with early marriage results in low educational attainment among the rural women.

Further, modern education is not considered necessary to fill the traditional expectations of the women's role and may instill contradictory and perhaps immoral values. Modern education, as opposed to traditional religious education, which prepares a person for a moral Muslim life, is defined by some as bad. This last point is also a barrier to the education of males in the society vis-a-vis traditional male role expectations.

Thus, for many rural households, the example of the educated female functioning in the greater society, especially where the job places the women in continuous contact with strange men (men from outside the kin group), would have negative if not immoral connotations. The most common example across the Muslim World would be the job of the female nurse which carries low status among the traditionally oriented.

Analyzed in terms of the maximum utilization of national manpower, the barrier to education for women is dysfunctional. Analyzed in terms of the socio-cultural context, the situation is understandable and remains a formidable barrier.

Women as the Reservoir of Tradition: Anthropologist Helma Granquist observed years ago, in her studies of Arab village women, the reinforcing nature of the role of women in maintaining a traditionally oriented society. To some degree, the analysis applies to Afghanistan today. The women are socially isolated and insulated within the household unit. They lack educational opportunities. Women mostly interact with other equally isolated women. Further, the women, as mothers, are responsible for most of the child training during the early and formative years of life of the children, male and female, when the traditional values are being forwarded and maintained.

The multiple linguistic groups in Afghanistan combine with this situation to make indirect communication via radio difficult. The women maintain the dialects. In recent years, however, the introduction of the cheaper transistor radio is having a social impact, although this is not necessarily via the national radio station. Russia, China, Iran, India and Pakistan all have local language broadcasts.

Women and the Government: In August, 1959, the present President of State, Mr. Mohammad Daoud, who was then Prime Minister, gave an order that sent shock waves through this traditional and conventional picture of the status and role of women. On the eve of the first day of the independence celebrations in 1959, a verbal order was given that all higher government officials appear the next day in public with their wives unveiled. Thus, for Afghan women a public role was identified and legitimized only 18 years ago.

Since that time there have been women cabinet ministers, women deputies in the Parliament, and women in all of the professions from dentistry to civil engineering. The process of higher education has been enhanced greatly for provincial girls over the past 7 years with the development of dorm facilities. While there are nearly 400 girls using such facilities now, previously the number was very limited, and university education mostly involved Kabul girls or provincial girls with relatives with whom to room in Kabul. The road to success and the achievement of a better life for the Afghan woman has been and continues to be, the route of education...not only formal classroom education for the literate, but also the informal health, nutrition, housekeeping and handicraft education that is being considered for the towns and villages of Afghanistan. But action is slow.

This is not to imply that the way is clear for WID. Most of the developments have directly affected mainly the urban elite. Most senior government employees, who would be key actors in the implementation of any real reform, likely still cling to the traditional views of what a woman's role should be. Women in public life are generally tolerated.

The present government has made many public statements on the need to educate and involve the women in all the activities of modern Afghan society, and over the past few years many surface changes have become obvious. including a much higher rate of women on the street without the traditional all-covering garb. Aside from the public statements, however, the government shows limited interest in changing the situation to any great extent. But the problems are clearly understood.

In the 1920's, King Amanullah Khan attempted a series of social reforms to emancipate Afghan women both legally and socially, in the context of a more general reform, modernization and westernization movement. There was some interaction between this model and that being implemented

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by Ataturk in Turkey during the same period. This reform movement resulted in Amanullah's fall in 1926 which was followed by what has been described by one scholar as a period of "political anarchy and severe economic dislocation". This failure at reform has been attributed to a lack of general and institutional support for the reforms and an alienation of important socio-political groups, including the religious establishment, vis-a-vis measures like the attempts to secure the right of public education for women. Since that time, reform and institutional change have been forwarded with caution.

Through the years, there have been occasional back-lash reactions to the gradual erosion process of modernization by the more traditionally oriented.

What  
are their  
activities?

Women in Leadership: There is a small body of very active and aggressive <sup>aspirant?</sup> women who are forwarding the ideas of socio-cultural change of the traditional role of women in Afghanistan. They are somewhat organized and are frequently associated with semigovernment activities. But they represent a small fraction of the total society and very much social elitist's views. It should not be assumed that their activities and organizations are specifically aimed at the betterment of conditions of the majority of the women of the country who are rural and have little in common other than their sex. While several are apparently respected or at least tolerated by the dominant male society (they tend to be products of the same extended kin groups that are well represented in the government) this respect takes on the flavor of what one long-term observer of Afghanistan has labeled as the "honorary male." While these women are as informed and impressive as any to be found in the women's movements in the Muslim World, and these are formidable, their orientations, influence, ~~representative~~ potential impact should not be overemphasized.

Conclusions: This paper has attempted to present an overview of the socio-cultural context within which WID must function in Afghanistan. This context is quite different from that which is the basis of the present WID movement. In many cases, the values and orientations of the two contexts are in opposition. And while part of the target group (rural women) would likely have difficulty in accepting some aspects of WID philosophy (if not defining it as somehow immoral), the goal of WID of improving the lot of women in Afghanistan can be realistically addressed, and an impact can be made within the traditional context. But such an impact will require careful and sensitive programming. Mistakes and over-emphasis in programming and implementation can produce major set-backs to past achievements as well as to future potentials. Through

Therefore, this Mission does not plan to develop programs aimed at drastically changing the role of women in the society, although the erosion of the traditional values is already underway through an almost evolutionary process of modernizing change. Considering the potential impact such an undermining of values may have on the most basic of social institutions of the society (i.e., the family), AID, WID and the Mission should be careful not to take the lead to become the uninvited key agents in this process of social erosion. And an Ataturk of the women's movement in Afghanistan is not evident at present.

108 } This brief social context overview is the first in a series of analyses this Mission will prepare over the next year. For example, USAID is in the process of contracting a social scientist to carry out further in-depth analysis of the role of Afghan women. Project (i.e., women's dom) and sector (i.e., legislative reporting requirements) analyses will broaden our perspective and assist in defining an appropriate and specific strategy. They may even change our sense of the context or assessment of the opportunities. This first analysis, however, represents the careful thought of its author who has analyzed social economic issues over a seven-year period while serving in Afghanistan.

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