



GENDER IN HUMANITARIAN ACTION

Afghanistan



Research on Challenges, Barriers and Opportunities for Women

led CSOs in the Afghanistan's
Humanitarian Crisis

FINAL REPORT – 30 MARCH 2022

GENDER IN HUMANITARIAN ACTION WORKING GROUP

Contents

| | |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|
| Executive Summary | 3 |
| 1. Introduction | 6 |
| 2. Methodology | 7 |
| 3. Women and Girls in Humanitarian Action | 10 |
| 4. Context for Women and Civil Society in Afghanistan | 11 |
| 5. Registration of Civil Society Organisations | 13 |
| 6. Challenges and Barriers for Women CSOs | 14 |
| 7. Opportunities for Partnerships and Donor Funding..... | 19 |
| 8. Opportunities and Innovative approaches to safely engage women led CSOs in the humanitarian response. | 21 |
| 9. Recommendations..... | 22 |
| Annexes | 24 |

Acknowledgements:

The consultancy team would like to thank the members of the Gender in Humanitarian Action (GiHA) Working Group for their support and advice in conducting this study.

The team is very grateful to all NGO colleagues for their support in hosting and supporting the field visits in the provinces. In addition, the team would like to thank all those UN and NGO colleagues who gave their time for interviews and discussions on this important topic.

This research has been made possible with the generosity of the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) of the British Government.

Fiona Gall – 30 March 2022.

Cover page photo: Nai Qala Association pre-school teachers, Daikundi. Design by Kabul Creative Printing Press.

Executive Summary

Afghanistan is one of the worst humanitarian crises in the world with 24.4 million people, 55% of the population in need of humanitarian assistance¹. In addition, the financial sanctions applied to Afghanistan after the takeover have paralyzed the banking system, led to a cash and liquidity crisis, and a 40 percent contraction of the GDP within a few weeks. As a result, Afghanistan is on the brink of a humanitarian catastrophe. Half of the Afghan population is suffering from acute food insecurity, 95 percent of households do not have enough to eat, and in the coming months, and three quarters of the population² will need humanitarian assistance. The number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) reached around 3.5 million in January 2022³ and 97 percent of the Afghan population could fall below the poverty line by mid-2022⁴.

As of August 2021, many CSOs led by women have reportedly stopped working and some heads of organisations and civil society members have left the country. As such, it was necessary to track down representatives to see if their organisations still existed and understand their status – as active or non-active.

Women and women’s organisations can be at the forefront of providing critical protection and assistance bringing their contextual knowledge, skills, resources, and experiences to emergency preparedness, response, and resilience building. Their role in holding governments accountable for the enforcement of equitable laws and policies is invaluable in ensuring effective response to the needs of the most marginalized communities and especially those of women and girls.

This study looks at the challenges, barriers, and opportunities of women-led civil society organisations (CSOs) across Afghanistan working in different sectors, with the aim to inform how partners can boost their power and agency and support them to respond to the needs of the most marginalized communities as well as their participation and leadership within the humanitarian response in Afghanistan. The research was commissioned by the Gender in Humanitarian Action (GiHA) working group for Afghanistan’s humanitarian response.

The study took place in February and March 2022. The methodology comprised of mapping women-led and women focused national organisations using initial lists from the GiHA working group and NGO coordination platforms, before collecting other contacts through referrals. This was followed with field research in 15 provinces, where the research team travelled to and held Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with women CSOs and national women staff. Interviews were also held with provincial level de facto authorities to understand challenges faced and perceptions of different stakeholders in each province. A questionnaire was developed to interview national women’s NGOs and CSOs across all provinces.

At the end of the field research, information was collected from 279 women participants in 23 FGD, and 96 individual organisation interviews conducted in 25 provinces some face to face some remotely. This information was used to update the contact database of women CSOs.

¹ <https://reliefweb.int/report/afghanistan/afghanistan-humanitarian-response-plan-2022-january-2022>

² FAO (2021): “Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) Acute Food Insecurity Analysis: September 2021 – March 2022”, Food Security and Agriculture Cluster (FASC) Afghanistan, IPC Global Support Unit. Available at https://www.ipcinfo.org/fileadmin/user_upload/ipcinfo/docs/IPC_Afghanistan_AcuteFoodInsec_2021Oct2022Mar_report.pdf

³ UNOCHA (2022): “The United Nations Humanitarian Response Plan for Afghanistan 2022”, UNOCHA Afghanistan, January 2022. Available at <https://afghanistan.un.org/en/167820-afghanistan-humanitarian-response-plan-2022>

⁴ UNDP (2021): “Economic instability and uncertainty in Afghanistan after August 15”, UNDP Afghanistan, September 2021. Available at: <https://www.undp.org/publications/economic-instability-and-uncertainty-afghanistan-after-august-15>

Key findings for the field research

Challenges and Barriers for Women CSOs

Limitations in movement - Women working in NGOs and CSOs face different restrictions under the de facto authorities. The most well-known is the requirement for all women to wear the hijab and to be escorted by a *Mahram* or chaperone when moving outside a certain perimeter of their home. This can vary in each province or district. There is frustration about the lack of clear guidance being provided by the de facto authorities, and this affects not only individual women and their families but also the offices and aid organisations that employ them. There is also the added economic cost of the *Mahram* for travel and the difficulty for some women who do not have a member of the family to provide the mandatory escort.

Intimidation and bureaucratic constraints – Women CSOs face a difficult administrative environment under the de facto authorities. One of the key constraints mentioned was the struggle to get official documents renewed or extended by different de facto authorities such as business licences for selling handicrafts in markets and CSO registrations. Some women in FGDs said that they had been too frightened to directly engage with the de facto authorities since August 2021. According to several staff of de facto provincial Directorates of Justice, there has been a directive from Kabul to stop certain types of associations continuing their work – those that worked in human rights, advocacy, and social activities.

Lack of Funding - 77 percent of women CSOs interviewed reported they had no projects in 2022. There were also barriers in withdrawing funds from bank accounts inside Afghanistan and receiving funds from outside the country since August 2021 due to restrictions and compliance requirements imposed by the international regulatory regime in force since the Taliban takeover in August 2021. The national NGOs and CSOs that partnered with UN agencies and international NGOs have managed better with money provided in cash by their partners or through *hawala* in some cases. However, there are important safety, compliance, and insurance related challenges that women CSOs are disproportionately affected by when dealing with large quantities of physical cash. Many smaller CSOs that had income generating projects were also suffering from economic decline since August 2021.

Humanitarian aid distribution– Women participants in the FGDs agreed that humanitarian assistance was extremely important for many people who had nothing, especially remote villages and newly displaced. However, they were critical of the way distributions were happening and the lack of support for economic activities in the longer term. The main concern of women CSOs was the inequitable distribution by aid agencies and the missing out of vulnerable families. This criticism was also voiced by provincial de facto authorities. In all FGDs there were examples given of certain groups being favoured in distribution: either belonging to the authorities, to the elders of the villages, to important people or to the staff of humanitarian agencies.

Increased violence and disrespect for women and girls, harmful social practices - Respect for women had declined since the arrival of the de facto authorities. This was not only due to stricter rules put in place for women and girls by the de facto authorities and reinforced conservative behaviour of men advancing discriminatory gender norms, but also due to the reduced advocacy and human rights activities that many women CSOs had been engaged in. The dismantling of institutions where women could go and complain or raise issues such as at the Human Rights Commission and Ministry of Women's Affairs was another factor contributing to the overall decline in ensuring accountability to rights and respect for women and girls.

Sector specific operational restrictions for women CSOs - Women CSOs mentioned that all projects needed to be introduced and discussed with communities and de facto authorities in preparation before activities started as standard best practice. Some sectors of work can be more easily accepted by communities such as health activities, hygiene promotion and livelihoods activities, where the benefits are easily understood. Women participants in FGDs mentioned that advocacy, rights projects, and women's shelters had initially closed in August 2021, some due to insecurity, others closed by the de facto authorities, but since then some of these had quietly re-started again.

Opportunities for Partnership and Funding

Navigating the requirements from donors and ensuring compliance with due diligence and capacity assessments required by UN agencies and INGOs for partnership meant that smaller national and women CSOs struggled to compete. The best practice would be for proposals to be prepared in local languages and applications processes to be made more flexible and simplified. It was also suggested that dedicated support from the international community- donors, INGO, and UN to prepare and design the project would enable women CSO to access funding. This would help strengthen the role of women's organisations and encourage their ideas and creativity without demanding over-rigid processes. This approach is contrary to current donor funding requirements and demands creativity and a greater appetite for risk-taking from partners and donors in order to provide the right support for smaller women's organisations.

Recommendations

For international community, including donors, the UN:

1. Funding grants for women CSOs

Flexible small grants for grassroots CSOs on provincial levels are strongly recommended to donors as there are important complex challenges to making bulk transfers safely and reliably to meet important levels of humanitarian needs unless new mechanisms, with appropriate political backing, are put in place. There is also a need for sustained support to women CSOs at the provincial level to meet the organisational capacity requirements to absorb funds as well as negotiate access with the de facto local authorities.

2. A combination of vocational training, advocacy activities, and education courses can be offered in resource centres for women beneficiaries. Flexible ways of transferring funds should also be encouraged (such as *hawala*) as banking is extremely limited in many provinces. **Women staff across all levels of decision making in humanitarian assistance.**

3. Humanitarian partners need to hire and promote national women staff in senior positions on all levels in main offices and field operations to strengthen the participation of women in the humanitarian response. This will not only support the greater inclusion of women beneficiaries but also enable Afghan women to be at the table when decisions are made. The safety and wellbeing of women humanitarian staff is a responsibility of all humanitarian partners as well as continued advocacy with donors to explain necessary additional costs necessary for employing women, such as the cost of mahram escorts, which must be budgeted for. The members of the Women's Advisory Group (WAG) to the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT) have already taken up advocacy for women humanitarian staff as a priority and can ask HCT and GiHA members to present regular updates on women staff numbers.

4. Engagement with de facto authorities

Women CSOs are looking to the international community to support them and engage with the de facto authorities. Discussions with the de facto Ministry of Justice on a national level need to be held to clarify the position of national civil society associations and whether they can continue to be registered there, as in the past. If not, alternatives must be suggested. There should also be discussions about how to create a channel for women to engage directly with de facto authorities. The idea of a '*Women's Commission*' has been suggested in some discussions with the de facto authorities but the details of how this would work on national and sub-national levels need to be developed so that women can engage with de facto authorities in the provinces more easily. These discussions should start as soon as possible and be supported by the international community, including donors, otherwise, there is a risk of women's organisations being further marginalised.

For humanitarian aid actors:

5. Women CSOs in field monitoring teams

The role of women CSOs in monitoring community distributions for OCHA and the humanitarian community and following up with women beneficiaries on behalf of the Accountability to Affected Populations (AAP) Working Group must be promoted. They should be locally based and assigned to specific areas. This would be much more cost effective than hiring monitors centrally.

6. Advocacy for women CSOs through WAG members

The HCT- Women Advisory Group members must continue high-level advocacy to enhance the operational space and participation of women CSOs in humanitarian assistance. This must be encouraged and supported by OCHA, including through involving women CSOs in engagement with women at the provincial level and reporting back to GiHA and the HCT on challenges and solutions. There needs to be a systematic tracking of the challenges raised in the meetings and advocacy on national and local levels as the situation changes in provinces and due to the high turnover in provincial de facto authorities.

7. Engaging in the clusters at provincial and national levels.

Women CSOs can play an important role as first responders in disasters and field monitors so links need to be built up between them and the clusters on provincial and national levels. At local district levels, there are some networks created by some of the Disaster Risk and Rehabilitation actors with local communities which can include women CSOs. Youth groups can also play an important role in supporting the clusters at the local level. Clusters should systematically invite women CSOs to give their perspectives and experience in relevant meetings, complementing the advisory role of the WAG to the HCT.

For the Gender in Humanitarian Action Working Group

8. Training materials

Trainings have been requested by women FGD participants in proposal writing, organisation development, humanitarian systems, and principles. Also training for de facto authorities on humanitarian principles and the Joint Operating Principles. Much of these materials will be available among different UN and NGO members, but the GiHA working group should ensure the materials and courses are appropriate for the level of women CSOs and in local languages.

9. Centralised database and follow-up with women diaspora groups

As an outcome of this survey, an updated list of women CSOs and national NGOs with a large proportion of women's programming is now available with the GiHA working group. This can be used to provide information on women CSOs for donors and cluster partners (respecting confidentiality) and should be maintained and regularly updated by the GiHA working group. A useful follow-up study should be carried out to identify links with women's diaspora organisations in different countries and see how they can provide support and funding to CSOs and affected populations, in collaboration with NGOs already working with the Afghan diaspora.

1. Introduction

This aim of this study was to look at the challenges, barriers, and opportunities of women-led civil society organisations (CSOs) across Afghanistan working in different sectors, to inform programming and better support their participation and leadership within the humanitarian response in Afghanistan. The research is commissioned by the Gender in Humanitarian Action (GiHA) working group for Afghanistan's humanitarian response. Specific objectives include:

1. Exploring the experiences and perspectives of women led CSOs regarding their participation in humanitarian coordination structures, decision-making processes, and access to funding, understanding specific constraints and barriers.
2. Identifying the type and nature of the partnerships between women led CSOs and responding actors and donors, including access to sufficient financial and technical support.
3. Understanding the political, bureaucratic, and socio-cultural constraints that hamper women led CSOs operational capacity and the differences between different sectors and service provisions.
4. Identifying opportunities and innovative approaches to safely engage women led CSOs in the humanitarian response to the crisis and increase access to funding.
5. Providing recommendations to different stakeholders, including INGOs, UN agencies and donors on how to better support women led CSOs in Afghanistan and diaspora.

This report explains the methodology used to conduct the research and provides the findings from the field survey along with recommendations based on interviews and analysis of the field data. The information from study should be considered as a preliminary step in identifying challenges and solutions for women's organisations in Afghanistan as the situation continues to change politically and economically within the country.

2. Methodology

2.1 Research Design

To conduct this research, a qualitative approach was used including: i) Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) to understand the perceptions and views of women working in different provinces in CSOs and NGOs and ii) the use of a questionnaire to identify the activities and challenges faced by individual women's organisations. In order to identify respondents for the FGDs and questionnaires the team first updated existing information on women-led and women-focused NGOs and CSOs in Afghanistan.

For the purpose of this study, "women-led" means an organisation where the head of the organisation is a woman but also due to the departure of many women members of civil society members since August 2021, and problems with de facto authorities, some women led CSOs have appointed men as Director or Deputy Director. These organisations have been included as women led for this research. The term "women-focused" describes organisations that are dedicated to women's activities and support for women's programmes which is the case for most of the smaller CSOs in this study. Some national NGOs have also been included that have large numbers of women staff and a focus on women's programmes.

In this study the term "CSO" covers the wider group of civil society organisations while "NGOs" are a more specific group of organisations registered under Ministry of Economy in Afghanistan (see section 5).

Many CSOs led by women have reportedly stopped working since August 2021, and some heads of organisations and civil society members have left the country, so it was necessary to track down representatives to see if their organisations still existed and understand their status – as active or non-active. The identification of respondents for the mapping and FGDs was based on information from GiHA working group members, UN Women, Agency Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief and Development (ACBAR) and Afghan Women's Network (AWN) coordination bodies and other contacts provided by informal networks to the team. The list of 675 women's organisations on the (de facto) Ministry of Economy's website⁵ was also used as a contact resource. Some of the senior management and Directors of CSOs were working from other countries, so instead the staff members living inside Afghanistan were interviewed. Initially it was requested to include Afghan diaspora organisations in the survey but there was not enough time to permit this. A follow up study to identify the role of diaspora CSOs in providing support and funding to affected populations could be useful.

In the first phase (10 Feb-25 Feb 2022) the consultant reviewed reports and relevant documents for the assignment as well as held online discussions with GiHA working group members, UN agencies, NGO partners and other relevant stakeholders to understand the current context and needs. A work plan was prepared for the field activities in the second phase, and an organisational questionnaire and FGD guide were developed. Three Afghan women assistant consultants were hired to assist in contacting participants, collecting and translating data and carrying out interviews in Pashtu and Dari. Confidentiality and protection of women respondents was considered when collecting information through asking for verbal consent before each interview or FGD, avoiding naming individuals in the reports and careful collection of names and contacts of women participants for updating the GiHA working group database.

Second phase (27 Feb – 17 March 2022) - After discussions with International Rescue Committee (RC), a variety of provinces were selected for the field work which covered the five zones of the country – north, south, east, west and centre. Major provincial cities were targeted as well as smaller provincial cities to provide contrast in experience of women organisations.- for example Mazar-i-Sharif in Balkh province and Aibak city in Samangan province. Most of the women led CSOs had their base in cities according to the data collected in this study, with one or two exceptions in Bamiyan province. In Afghanistan 76% of the population still live in rural areas and 24% in urban areas, although the country is one of the most rapidly urbanising societies in the world, with 49% of returning refugees since 2001 choosing to settle in the cities¹.

⁵Afghanistan's Urban Future, Discussion Paper 1, UN Habitat, 2014, https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/download-manager-files/1424269536wppdm_Afghanistan%20Urban%20Future.pdf

Overall, the team carried out field visits to 15 provinces:

- **North:** Mazar-i-Sharif - Balkh, Aibak- Samangan, Kunduz city - Kunduz, Taloqan - Takhar
- **East:** Jalalabad – Nangarhar, Mehtarlam - Laghman
- **West:** Herat city – Herat, Herat, Qalae Naw - Badghis
- **South:** Kandahar city – Kandahar, Lashkargar – Helmand,
- **Centre:** Pule Alam - Logar, Charikar - Parwan, Maidan Shah – Wardak, Bamiyan city – Bamiyan
- **Kabul city**

The team used different NGO offices as safe locations to invite women to participate in FGDs and as a base for the consultants to organise interviews. FGDs were held for 2.5 hours with between 10-15 participants in each session.

A total of 279 women participated in 23 FGDs, with two meetings held in each of the larger provincial cities and one meeting in smaller provincial cities. A total of 96 heads of CSOs were interviewed with the organisation questionnaire of whom 45 participants were from the FGDs that were head of CSOs or NGOs, were interviewed individually with the organisation questionnaire. Over 100 organisations were contacted in 25 provinces and their details updated in the central database.

Third phase (20-30 March 2022) - The team prepared a zero or preliminary report with findings and recommendations for review and feedback after analysing the information collected. After feedback had been received from key stakeholders, the report was revised and finalized, and the executive report translated into local languages for wider dissemination. Training materials may be developed based on needs identified in the data collection and interviews in future.

2.2 Sampling Methodology

FGDs - Women who were invited to the FGDs were identified through referrals from other women CSOs and NGO women staff in the related provinces as well as the central contact lists from the GiHA working group, ACBAR and AWN through convenience sampling. Participants included members of CSOs, civil society activists, and NGO staff.

Questionnaires - interviews were carried out using a structured questionnaire in person and by telephone with heads of women CSOs. Some of these interviewees were drawn from the provincial FGD participants and others from the central contact lists across a wider range of provinces, (see breakdown of provinces in annexes).

De facto authorities - interviews were held with 9 de facto Justice and 10 de facto Economy Directorates in 15 of the provinces visited to ask questions about the activities and status of CSOs and NGOs in each province as these two entities are responsible for associations (Justice) and NGOs (Economy).

2.3 Limitations in the study

It was considered that women interviewees and focus group participants might be reluctant to answer questions, provide information or attend FGDs due to security concerns. In fact, one of the challenges of the study was locating women CSO representatives as many of them had changed their contact numbers, or did not respond to calls, and some had left the country. Once women CSO representatives were contacted then the research team were able to emphasise the confidentiality of the research. The team also worked with IRC to ensure the data was protected and attendance lists remained confidential.

The field research time was very limited and inevitably there were concerns about delays to provinces for flights and road travel due to weather conditions in February and March. Eventually 15 provinces were physically visited by the consultants working in three separate teams. In addition, to reach a wider number of CSOs and provinces the consultancy team carried out telephone interviews to respondents covering 25 provinces.

De facto local authority counterparts were also interviewed from de facto Ministry of Economy and de facto Ministry of Justice to understand the perspective of de facto local authorities in different provinces. In a

few cases, the de facto provincial authorities could not meet the consultants but most of the interviews were conducted thanks to introductions performed by NGO partners with good relations with the de facto local authorities.

This study as in any type of research raised expectations, so the team were careful to explain that this exercise was being carried out so that humanitarian partners and donors could better understand the needs and challenges being faced by women participants to improve linkages to donors and funds. However, there was considerable frustration from women participants about the lack of funding opportunities to date.

The study could not reach out to as diaspora contacts as originally intended so this is recommended to be followed by in future research conducted by the GiHA working group. Recently the Danish Refugee Council (DRC) held a diaspora conference in Europe so there may be some useful connections that can be shared by them for future research exercises.

3. Women and Girls in Humanitarian Action

Gender Equality is Goal 5 in the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) where it is called not only a fundamental human right, but a necessary foundation for a peaceful, prosperous, and sustainable world. At the first World Humanitarian Summit in 2016, in preparation for the SDG commitment to Leave No One Behind, the UN Secretary General briefed that: *"disasters kill more women than men and hit women's livelihoods hardest. 60 per cent of all maternal deaths take place in humanitarian settings and all forms of gender-based violence against women and girls spike during disasters and conflict."* In addition: *"the capacity, knowledge, and impact that women and local women's groups consistently display in a crisis is also rarely supported due to these structural inequalities"*⁶.

Policies and systems have been put in place to improve practice in the humanitarian sector, through data disaggregation of beneficiaries for men and women, girls and boys to ensure that there is greater inclusion of women and girls; through accountability mechanisms on all levels to ensure promotion and inclusion of women; and policies on whistleblowing and protection from sexual abuse and harassment. The IASC's 2017 policy on gender equality states in its principles that gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls (GEEWG) is *"a critical component of achieving effective and life-saving humanitarian action and is a responsibility to be owned by all actors. It is not optional or additional."*⁷

Implementation of these policies requires support at all levels of the humanitarian system: at headquarters, at country level and on local levels. A 2020 evaluation commissioned by the Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation Standing Group found however that resources were not consistently allocated to ensure there was sufficient expertise available to promote GEEWG in humanitarian response teams, especially at the beginning of interventions. The report also found that *"gender equality projects targeting women and girls were disproportionately underfunded compared to other humanitarian projects. Only 39 per cent of funds requested for projects targeting women and girls were received, significantly lower than for other types of projects (69 per cent)"*⁸.

*One outcome at the World Humanitarian Summit (2016) was the commitment to "localisation" by humanitarian donors and partners to promote principled and effective action by local and national responders. From a gender perspective, UN Women notes that. localisation includes focusing on the work of women led organisations and women's rights organizations and supporting their roles and capacities in humanitarian settings as local responders and in the humanitarian architecture*⁹. Under localisation funding is recommended to be at least 25% for local and national responders. In the 2019 annual report of the Grand Bargain, seven signatories had met or exceeded their 25% commitment to localized funding but women led organisations and women's rights organisations accounted for only 1.9 per cent of total funding allocations¹⁰.

As is noted in the current strategic plan for the UN Trust Fund in support of Actions to Eliminate Violence Against Women (UN Trust Fund), the role of women led organisations and women's rights organisations is essential in the fight for the rights of women and girls and to eliminate violence against women and girls. The Trust Fund was set up in 1996 to further this goal and provide *grants specifically for preventing and ending all forms of violence against women and girls. "In the 24 years of its existence the Fund has supported 572 initiatives to a total value of almost USD 183 million in 140 countries and territories. Since 2017 it has provided grants solely to civil society organizations (CSOs)"*¹¹. The approach of the UN Trust Fund through provision of long-term grants and organisational support and capacity development for the partner is an important example of good partnership practice.

⁶Preparation for core commitments for Girls and Woman at WHS 2016: https://agendaforhumanity.org/sites/default/files/resources/2017/Jul/WOMEN_AND%20GIRLS-CATALYSING_ACTION_TO_ACHIEVE_GENDER_EQUALITY_0.pdf

⁷Policy on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and Girls in Humanitarian Action, IASC Reference Group on Gender and Humanitarian Action, November 2017, p.4.

⁸Inter-Agency Humanitarian Evaluation on Gender equality and the Empowerment of Women and Girls, Inter-Agency Humanitarian Standing Group Report, 2020, <https://www.unocha.org/sites/unocha/files/2768%20UNOCHA%20Report%20121120.pdf>

⁹Technical Guidance Note: Gender and Localisation Agenda, UN Women, 2019, <https://gblocalisation.ifrc.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/13082019-FV-UN-Women-Guidance-Note-Summary-Localisation.pdf>

¹⁰Ibid, UN Women, 2019

¹¹UN Trust Fund to End Violence against Women 2021- 2025, Strategic Plan, UN Women, p.8, <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Field%20Office%20UNTF/Images/2021/Strategic%20Plan%202021/2021strategic%20planfinal%20002compressed.pdf>

4. Context for Women and Civil Society in Afghanistan

4.1 Development between 2001-2020

The 2004 Constitution of Afghanistan enshrined women's equality before the law, the right to an education, and the right to work. On a policy level, the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan made formal commitments to gender equality through ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 2003 followed by the Elimination of Violence against Women (EVAW) Law, adopted by Presidential Decree in 2009. Women were considered as key actors in peace and security with the 2015 National Action Plan (NAP) based on UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325, as part of the global women, peace, and security (WPS) agenda. The role of women in the economy was supported in the Women's Economic Empowerment National Priority Program (WEE-NPP) in 2017 and in the 2017-2021 Afghanistan National Peace and Development Framework (ANPDF):

"Investment over the long term in women's education, health and skills will increase women's economic activity, thereby growing the economy and reducing household poverty¹²

In 2017, the Afghanistan government laid out objectives and benchmarks to advance rights of women and girls in the Afghanistan Sustainable Development Goals (ASDGs) under health, education, livelihoods, and gender equality. Under gender equality the 2017 report noted that in the country 24% of civil servants were women, 28 % of parliamentarians were women, 30% teachers were women and 74% of health clinics and hospitals across the country employed at least one female healthcare worker¹³.

While policies and laws were brought in to support women in Afghanistan, health and education indicators remained precarious. Maternal mortality ratio (MMR) has declined consistently since 2014 but the MMR in Afghanistan in 2018 was still at 638 per 100,000 live births, substantially higher than the SDG target of 70 deaths per 100,000 live births, while 60 out of 1000 children die before 5 years, from preventable diseases, pneumonia and diarrhoea (UNICEF). Malnutrition, for both mothers and children, is a contributory factor and has increased since 2018 particularly with droughts in 2018 and 2019 and now the current economic collapse. UNICEF notes that in education, the rapid increase in children attending school from 2001 until 2012 started to slow in 2013 with 4.2 million children out of school by 2016. These included a large number of girls, children living in rural areas, and children in Kuchi communities¹⁴.

Development in Afghanistan over the past two decades has seen an expanding civil society. NGOs established themselves in Pakistan very soon after the Russian invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, to provide assistance to the large Afghan refugee population there and to work cross border with rural communities inside Afghanistan. After the fall of the Taliban regime in October 2001, most NGOs transferred their main offices to Kabul in 2002 and 2003 with the installation of a new interim government under Hamid Karzai and continued to play an important role in service delivery, humanitarian assistance and emerging development programmes. Over the next twenty years, donors played a pivotal role in encouraging civil society and women CSOs to develop through funding grants for a wide variety of interests – women's programmes, literacy courses, election monitoring, transparency and anti-corruption advocacy, human rights defenders, rights of people with disabilities, professional associations, youth groups and other social organisations.

In August 2021, the role of women in government and parliament abruptly ended with the take-over of Afghanistan by the Taliban (referred to as de facto authorities). The country was already facing large scale displacement of civilians across the country due to drought and conflict and economic decline aggravated by Covid19. After the chaotic departure of international military forces, diplomats and members of the Republic government and the Parliament there has been freezing of foreign aid and implementing of sanctions against members of the interim administration, contributing to an economic crisis and widespread unemployment.

12 Afghanistan National Peace and Development Framework, 2017-2021, p.8, <https://www.afghanembassy.us/contents/2017/12/documents/ANPDFEnglishWebsite.pdf>

13 Afghanistan Sustainable Development Goals, Goals, Targets and National indicators, Ministry of Economy 2017.

14 Situation Analysis of Children and Women in Afghanistan, UNICEF, August 2021, p.x, <https://www.unicef.org/afghanistan/media/6301/file/Summary-Situation%20Analysis.pdf>

a. Humanitarian Response and Structures

The UN estimates that 24.4 million Afghans need humanitarian assistance, more than half the population, in its Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) for 2022, with all 34 provinces in the country in severe (5) or extreme (29) need and almost all population groups of concern present in every province¹⁵.

In late 2021 the Humanitarian Country Team approved a strategy which emphasised the centrality of women and girls' rights and the participation of women and women's CSOs. *"The strategy will be integrated throughout the 2022 humanitarian response as a key cross-cutting priority to ensure women's and women's CSOs' meaningful, equitable and safe participation in, access to and benefit from humanitarian assistance, services, communication, information and assessments". The second strategic objective of the HRP supports protection and human rights, and consists of three aims: i) safe, equitable and inclusive access to essential services, ii) protection of all beneficiaries as befits their human rights, safety and dignity, and iii) protection and empowerment of women and girls, "and a do no harm approach by ensuring effective, inclusive and gender responsive mechanisms for complaint, feedback and communicating with communities, GBV response, prevention and mitigation, PSEA and child safeguarding, and women's equitable and meaningful participation across the humanitarian response"*¹⁶.

While gender and inclusion of women is mainstreamed in objectives of all clusters, including disaggregation of data and attention to employment of women staff, three clusters / working groups have a specific role in protection and gender inclusion: the Protection Cluster chaired by UNHCR with NRC as deputy Chair, the GBV sub-cluster, led by UNFPA and IRC as co-lead, the GiHA working group, UN Women permanent lead and IRC as co-lead. These groups all have international and national NGO partners, but this study was not able to identify the precise number of women led CSO and NGO members in the three coordination mechanisms. Under all three coordination mechanisms groups there are women CSOs that provide specialist services such as GBV services in the GBV sub-cluster and in the disability-inclusion working group under Protection Cluster, although there is currently a lack of inclusion of men and women's organisations for persons with disability. In addition, individual UN agencies and humanitarian NGOs have national implementing partners which include national NGOs, some of whom are women led and women focused CSOs.

In terms of developing women's leadership, the past twenty years have seen many donor programmes promoting women-led businesses, women entrepreneurs and women-focused CSOs. Some of the most well-known women members of civil society and government have left the country since August 2021, but others have remained and face lack of traditional donor funds for their work. The question now is whether those women's organisations that remain should be encouraged to pivot their activities and attention to support the humanitarian sector and what support is required.

From the UN side a start was made in 2020 to include women more systematically in the humanitarian system with the creation of the Gender in Humanitarian Action (GiHA) working group, currently co-led by UN Women and IRC. Membership of the WG includes UN agencies, international and national NGOs and individual Afghan civil society activists; all with an interest in promoting a gender responsive humanitarian response. UN Women has a seat on the Humanitarian Country Team which was not available before co-chairing the GiHA working group. Also at the end of 2021, at the request of the Humanitarian Coordinator, an Afghan Women's Advisory Group (WAG) was set up to provide guidance and advice to the Humanitarian Country Team (HCT). The group is drawn from around 9 women leaders around the country and has outlined the following initial priorities: i) support for national women staff in leadership level to ensure safety and security; ii) advocacy to support "equal assistance" for women and protection of women, and iii) to support women led CSOs and networks to promote their activities in the humanitarian sector and links with donors.

With the de facto authorities in Kabul and their interpretation of Sharia law as well as the economic collapse of the country, any work that will now be done with Afghan women's organisations must consider the position of women in a more conservative Islamic society where ideas about the prominence and role of women can vary from family to family and one province to another. Any activities by and for women, whether humanitarian or longer term, will need to have strong community acceptance if they are to succeed and if women are to work safely.

15 OCHA Humanitarian Response Plan 2018-2022, <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/afghanistan-humanitarian-response-plan-2022.pdf>

16 OCHA Humanitarian Response Plan 2018-2022, <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/afghanistan-humanitarian-response-plan-2022.pdf>

5. Registration of Civil Society Organisations

Civil society organisations in Afghanistan are registered under two Ministries, Economy and Justice. According to the website of the de facto Ministry of Economy (MoEc), there were 2,069 NGOs registered (Feb 2022) in Afghanistan - 1,820 national and 249 international NGOs. Of the 1,820 national NGOs, 675 of these have the name “women” in their title but this does not necessarily mean they are women led or women focused. Since 2005, NGOs are required to register and report to the Ministry of Economy and are governed by the 2005 NGO Law⁶ which describes NGOs as non-governmental, non-political, and not-for-profit. Reporting to MoEc is six-monthly and all NGO projects must be approved before implementation by MoEc and the related sectoral line-Ministries on national and provincial levels leading to delays and cumbersome processes, particularly under the previous administration of President Ghani. The NGO Law has been under review since 2015. In 2020 a revised version was prepared by the Ministry of Justice with the MoEc. This was not submitted to Parliament for review and a regulatory framework that was also drawn up to accompany the Law was also not submitted. There had been considerable advocacy from NGOs, NGO coordination bodies like ACBAR and AWN, and donors on concerns that the revised Law and regulation framework meant increased interference in NGO activities beyond reasonable monitoring and evaluation. At the present time, the de facto MoEc is reviewing the regulation framework but has indicated that the 2005 NGO Law is still applicable.

In 2020, under the Ministry of Justice in the previous government, 3,935 civil society associations were registered. The 2013 Association Law states that “associations referred to communities, unions, councils, assemblies and organizations which are voluntarily established by a group of real persons and corporates as non-profit, non-political and in accordance with this law”¹⁷. Reporting under Ministry of Justice for CSOs was comparatively simple compared to MoEc with an annual report, renewal of registration every three years and virtually no monitoring on provincial levels. Many women CSOs registered under Ministry of Justice as the requirements were less stringent than MoEc. Women interviewees said that creating “associations” or “anjuman” had allowed them to seek funds and start activities at very little cost, under the previous government. Registration as an association under Ministry of Justice is less costly than registration under MoEc. The Association Law was revised in 2013 to allow associations to receive donor funding, as previously this has not been permitted. Women CSOs representatives in the FGDs in the provinces also said one of the reasons of setting up associations in the previous few years was that they did not have to pay tax on their activities. In comparison, NGOs are required to withhold tax on behalf of their staff as well as on rent of buildings and any contracts they make with suppliers, businesses or external services. NGOs have been closely monitored by Ministry of Finance in the last 10 years and many had to pay considerable fines for late tax payments at the beginning of President Ghani’s administration. The cost of registering is also more expensive as an NGO and a clear governance structure with a board of advisors is required. Many donors including humanitarian donors preferred to fund national NGOs as there is greater evidence of documentation and systems in place under the requirements of MoEc: such as the Constitution of the organisation, existence of an advisory board, organogram of staff and a mission statement. Some associations have re-registered as national NGOs under MoEc as they became more structured and experienced, but others have remained associations due to the nature of their activities and have still attracted donor support, such as professional associations for teachers and midwives. Interestingly the survey of women’s CSOs found 48% of respondents were registered under MoEc and 49% registered under Ministry of Justice, very evenly balanced.

Since August 2021 however, the situation is much more challenging for women CSOs under the de facto authorities. Many CSOs associations do not know if they are permitted to continue their work as some provincial de facto directorates of Justice are refusing renew registration licences.

17 https://www.icnl.org/wp-content/uploads/Afghanistan_assoclaw.pdf

6. Challenges and Barriers for Women CSOs

“Ever since the beginning of the Taliban regime, we have been shouting and saying that we will never go back to twenty years ago and we will protect our achievements, but now we are shouting and advocating for our basic rights, which is water, food, education, and health.”¹⁸

Overall constraints raised by women participants in the FGDs across 15 provinces are grouped into seven categories (see table below). Restrictions in freedom and rights were the major concern followed by economic difficulties and concerns about humanitarian aid.

| | | % |
|----|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|
| 1. | Restrictions in freedom and rights under the de facto authorities | 27 |
| 2. | Economic difficulties | 21 |
| 2. | Concerns about humanitarian aid | 21 |
| 4. | Violence against and disrespect for women and girls, harmful social practices | 14 |
| 5. | Lack of access to education | 7 |
| 6. | Insecurity | 5 |
| 7. | Health concerns | 5 |

6.1 Restrictions of movement of women

Women working in NGOs and CSOs face different restrictions under the de facto authorities. The most well-known is the requirement for all women to wear the hijab and to be escorted by a mahram or chaperone when moving outside a certain perimeter from their home. This can vary in each province or district with different interpretations provided by provincial authorities and the foot-soldiers on the street. Representatives from de facto Justice and Economy said different things in interviews; some said women could move within the province without a chaperone, others said that a woman had to have a chaperone upon leaving the house and for visiting any official place. Culturally many women in Afghanistan are used to these requirements, especially in rural areas and when the situation is insecure, but in the last 20 years women have also become more independent especially in urban settings. There is frustration about the lack of clear guidance being provided by the de facto authorities, and this affects not only individual women and their families but also the offices and aid organisations that employ them. There is also the added economic cost of the *Mahram* for travel and the difficulty for some women who do not have a member of the family who can provide escort in this way. Some international NGO interviewees felt that the current ambiguity in the rules could be an advantage when dealing with different provincial authorities, as it allowed flexibility to negotiate on both sides and to take verbal permission for activities. However, for many women CSOs and women staff of NGOs the fear and uncertainty of what might happen to them when they are outside their homes for work or for other reasons is psychologically very draining.

6.2 Lack of space for women to engage with de facto authorities

One of the first steps of the de facto authorities was to abolish the Ministry of Women’s Affairs (MoWA) and replace it with the de facto Ministry of Prevention of Vice and Promotion of Virtue. Despite limitations, MoWA played an important role on provincial levels as focal point for women and as a facilitator for funding and training for women. Until now there has been no replacement of this “channel” for women, either by the interim administration or the humanitarian sector. In all FGDs, women participants noted that they could no longer engage with the de facto authorities to discuss their needs and register complaints or seek advocacy and legal rights as they had before. Women staff in government offices have been told to stay at home so there are usually no woman counterparts in national and sub-national offices to interact with and provide support to women seeking administrative support. Some FGD participants mentioned that women seeking assistance and even women government staff were turned away at the entrance to official buildings and were treated with disrespect by the de facto authorities.

18 FGD participant, 28 February 2022.

“The Department of Justice and Economy do not allow women to participate in meetings. “Last week, two women NGO Directors attended the Department of Economy meeting, and not only the Director did not see them, but they were expelled from the meeting”¹⁹.

Women also mentioned that the de facto authorities were abusing their positions. De facto authorities were taking advantage of organizations, pressuring them to hire staff or distribute aid to relatives. One FGD participant noted that in a local district the de facto authorities had requested 25,000 Afs from each council as usher, based on the value of the agricultural land and livestock and *“even from the trees”*. This imposition of local taxes, a normal practice in areas controlled by the Taliban when they were in opposition, has not necessarily stopped now that they have taken over as the de facto authorities.

6.3 Administrative challenges

Women led CSOs and women CSOs face a difficult administrative environment under the de facto authorities as they do not want to encourage women’s organisations to have activities even if they say that women have the right to work in society. Women CSOs mentioned that they struggled to get official documents renewed or extended in different de facto authorities such as business licences for selling handicrafts in markets (municipality) and CSO registration (Justice). Some women in FGDs said that they had been too frightened to directly engage with the de facto authorities since August 2021. One successful example of a persistent woman CSO in Jalalabad was given in the FGD:

“One women-led organization was closed, and the authorities didn’t allow the organisation to continue. The Director prepared a meeting with the authorities, but they didn’t accept her arguments. Then she collected the elders of the community, all of them came together and convinced the authority that it was beneficial for them, they needed her projects to provide benefits for them. This convinced the authorities, and they gave permission for her to continue her activities”²⁰.

There have been frequent changes in local de facto authorities across the country, this was also noticed in interviews with provincial de facto Directors of Justice, some of whom did not know have any information about associations registered in their department. Some of them were not aware of any problems being faced by women’s organisations. Fortunately, there were staff retained in the directorates from the previous government that could provide more precise information. According to several de facto provincial staff, there has been a directive from Kabul to stop certain types of associations continuing their work – those that worked in human rights, advocacy and social activities (*“Ishtemayi”*). One suggestion was made that women CSOs change their names to Unions (*“Ittehad”*) or Charities (*“Bunyard e Khairia”*), to avoid this problem, but this would of course mean going to the de facto Ministry in Kabul to re-register and pay a registration fee. The other suggestion made regularly by de facto heads of Justice was that women’s organisations appoint a man to come and engage with the de facto authorities more easily.

The de facto Directorates of Economy visited across the provinces were better informed about the number of NGOs registered in their province and did not prohibit women NGOs working and having activities, although they mentioned that many national NGOs were no longer active due to lack of funds. The de facto Directors of Economy generally requested NGOs to increase activities and coordinate with them and requested donors to provide longer-term reconstruction projects rather than humanitarian assistance.

As donor funding usually requires that the national NGO or CSOs partners be registered with their respective de facto Ministries, this issue of access to Ministries for women CSOs and NGOs and renewal of registration in de facto Justice Ministry will need to be pursued by the UN and donors. The issue of replacing women with men as heads of organisations is troubling.

“The Taliban says that there should be a man at the head of the organization, while we worked hard for years to get here and now a man should represent from us”²¹

19 FGD participant, 13 March 2022.

20 FGD participant, 28 February 2022.

21 FGD participant, 22 February 2022.

6.4 Lack of funding for CSOs and economic difficulties

| Reasons for stopping operations (multiple answer) | % |
|---------------------------------------------------|----|
| Lack of funds | 87 |
| Fear or threats from new authorities | 67 |
| Banking problems | 20 |
| Office was looted | 7 |
| Staff have left the country, left the job | 3 |

As can be seen from the table above, the major reason for stopping activities for respondents of the questionnaire was lack of funds since August 2021 due to freezing of development funds and grants because of sanctions. 77% of women led CSOs interviewed reported they had no current projects in 2022. There is also the added complication of existing funds being difficult to withdraw from bank accounts inside Afghanistan and banks refusing to send money into the country since August 2021. Those national NGOs and CSOs that are partnered by UN agencies and international NGOs have managed better with money provided in cash by their partners or through hawalasin some cases. Some NGOs and CSOs have survived by taking out the 5 per cent amount of existing funds from their bank accounts weekly as permitted to pay running costs but this is not enough to implement projects. A few FGD participants admitted that due to lack of funds they had had to close their offices and sell their office equipment to pay remaining staff salaries or rent and electricity costs.

“This week, the World Bank released 14 million of dollars, but it doesn’t make any different to me because I don’t have dollars nor I don’t have money at all, it would be better if they gave at least 10 percent of this money to women’s organizations to get projects and provide jobs or to earn a living”²².

Women in two regions, Bamiyan and the peripheral provinces around Kabul (Wardak, Logar, Parwan) mentioned the economic situation as even more important than their concerns with de facto authorities. In Bamiyan the drop in the markets and tourism was impacted first by Covid19 and then with the sharp economic downturn since August 2020. Many women had previously made steady incomes from handicrafts, carpet weaving and agricultural products. The take-over of Afghanistan by the de facto authorities has also meant a loss of jobs for men in local government and the national army. In Wardak, Logar, and Parwan there were similar explanations:

Before in each family, at least one person had job and a source of income but now we are all jobless, women heads of households became extremely poor. Most retired elders received money from government, families whose family members were soldiers in the government and were killed in the wars, they received some money from government, but now there is nothing, they have no job and government does not support them”²³.

6.5 Engagement in humanitarian assistance and criticism of aid distribution

Some national women CSOs/NGOs are directly engaged in emergency assistance through the clusters or as partners of UN and NGOs. In the organisation questionnaires, the top three sectors for women CSOs activities were: i) education, ii) vocational training and iii) GBV services. These were followed by activities in health, child protection and agriculture. 49 per cent of questionnaire respondents said that their organisation attended cluster meetings.

FGD participants agreed that humanitarian assistance was extremely important for many people who had nothing, especially remote villages and newly displaced, but were critical about the way distributions were happening and about the lack of support for economic activities in the longer term. Their main concern was inequitable distribution by aid agencies and the missing out of vulnerable families. This criticism was also voiced by provincial de facto authorities. In all FGDs there were examples given of certain groups being favoured in distribution: either belonging to the authorities, to the elders of the villages, to important people or to staff of humanitarian agencies.

FGD participants suggested that instead funds should be directed into economic activities for men and

22 FGD participant 13 March 2022

23 FGD participant, 13 March 2022.

women – such as vocational training, food/cash for work, loans for people with disabilities and income generating projects. The criticism from de facto provincial authorities was also that aid agencies are not distributing to the most vulnerable and do not share information to reduce duplication. One factor is that there is pressure on humanitarian actors to deliver assistance rapidly and not spend enough time in community mobilisation and preparatory surveys. Women FGD participants suggested that more women be hired during distributions and that agencies do better research before distributions to avoid discrimination among ethnic groups and languages.

“Women should be hired during the distribution of humanitarian aid, neither the Taliban nor people should prevent them. The presence of women in society is a model for other women to eliminate their fear of the current situation and on the other hand, families allow their wives and daughters to work and learn.”

Criticism of aid distribution was more marked in the larger provincial cities of Kunduz, Mazar-i-Sharif, Jalalabad and Herat where FGD participants suggested that vocational training and economic activities should replace food and cash handouts to stimulate employment and entrepreneurship:

“This aid is not effective, and it accustoms people to begging. Provide people jobs to manage their own lives. Don’t fish, teach fishing!”²⁴

6.6 Increased violence and disrespect for women and girls and harmful social practices

Women participants said that respect for women had declined since the arrival of the de facto authorities. This was not only due to stricter rules put in place for women by the authorities and increased conservative behaviour of men, but also due to the stopping of advocacy and human rights activities that many CSOs had been engaged in, and places where women could go and complain, or raise issues such as at the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) and MoWA. Women participants gave many examples of successful mediation and advocacy in the community in the past when dealing with bad practices like exchange of women to solve tribal and family disputes (*‘badal’*), marriage of underage girls, using of young boys (*“bacha bazi”*), and violence in the family. Economic factors and lack of income were contributing to tensions in households and forcing families to sell their children or send them to the street to work. Women FGD participants in Kandahar, Herat, Kunduz, Laghman, Helmand and Nangarhar suggested that religious scholars play a stronger role in condemning bad practices and raising awareness about women’s rights in Islam.

6.7 Access to Education and Health

Students across the country have returned to school in the last few months, or private courses during the winter holidays. Permission for older girls to attend high school and university has only been permitted in some provinces while in others permission has still not been given. Women FGD participants in some provinces said they did not permit their daughters to go to university out of fear for them and due to a lack of female teachers. In other provinces the concern was more about lack of schools, the quality of the teaching and suggestions for additional subjects like “entrepreneurship” from 7th grade and focus on teaching good social behaviour to children as soon as they arrived in primary class including respect for their parents and each other. In one province, participants complained that their daughters could not attend university because ***“Taliban does not allow girls to live in the girl’s dormitory or in shared rented rooms, because gathering more than one girl in a group causes immorality”²⁵***.

Access to health services for women is still a concern in many provinces because of family permission, distance to clinics and lack of money to pay for transport and private health services. A woman doctor in Kabul noted that there were much higher numbers of mothers coming to the public hospital where she worked rather than giving birth in private hospitals. In Wardak the participants raised concerns about the lack of clean water, which was causing sicknesses. In one district of Bamiyan the women noted that lack of health services contributed to, ***“women dying during and after childbirth due to excessive bleeding, pregnant and lactating women and children are malnourished, we do not have safe drinking water either, the water is salty”²⁶***. Women FGD

24 FGD participant, 28 February 2022.

25 FGD participant, 14 March 2022.

26 FGD participant, 14 March 2022.

participants also mentioned that drug addicts were treated harshly and sent to prison, but then came back and treated their families in the same way as before, without any consideration, so that re-education programmes were badly needed. (Additional suggestions from FGD participants of the needs of different groups of the population are available in the annexes).

6.8 Fear and Insecurity

UNAMA Human Rights recently reported that there has been a 70 per cent reduction in civilian casualties since August 2021 compared to the first half of 2021²³. This is a considerable improvement but worry about security is still deep-rooted for most Afghans even if explosions and suicide bombs have decreased. Lack of security was flagged up in most provinces:

“We see in the media and hear from people every day that women are mysteriously killed. These issues have made us afraid of the Taliban and we do not even dare to leave the house. “The abduction rate is very high. The Taliban abducted 25 people from our neighbourhood alone. They kidnap children and young men for money”²⁷.

Women also recounted the dangers that women’s organisations and women activists had faced initially and continued to face in FGDs in Kabul and the north. The recent killing of polio workers in Kunduz and Takhar were mentioned in the FGDs there. There were also comments about how certain elements of society benefited from the current situation to take revenge on others, even different parts of the family. One participant said that she feared “killing by the authorities or unknown persons”. Trust needs to be built up again between different ethnic communities and with the de facto authorities.

6.9 Sector specific constraints for women led CSOs

Women led CSOs mentioned that all projects needed to be introduced and discussed with communities and de facto authorities in preparation before activities started as standard best practice. Some sectors of work can be more easily accepted by communities such as health activities, hygiene promotion and livelihoods activities, where the benefits are easily understood. Women participants in FGDs mentioned that advocacy, rights projects, and women’s shelters had initially closed in August 2021, some due to insecurity, others closed by the de facto authorities, but since then, some of these had quietly re-started again. For example, tailoring training with sessions on women’s health and rights. Women CSOs have more experience in providing trainings which can be done locally in the homes (handicrafts, animal husbandry, poultry farming) of groups of women beneficiaries. These are better for the beneficiaries as they do not take them away from home and their families for too long. Travel is the main constraint and cost for vocational trainers and trainees if travel require a mahram.

In health there are specialist CSOs like women led disability organisations and midwifery associations, which also do not face constraints in terms of permission for their activities as they come under health and look after women. Funding is a key issue, especially in the disability sector, which has been underfunded by government and donors during the last two decades.

Women led CSOs working in the protection sector for child protection and GBV are more specialised and work in close collaboration with UN and international NGO partners. GBV work and the provision of shelters for women is regarded as particularly sensitive in the current climate and is being repackaged as family support in safe spaces for girls and women. In the FGD discussions, women were concerned about the lack of referral pathways and focal points for cases of violence as well as legal protection. This remains a difficult and complex area for practitioners.

In education where many women work as teachers and educators, national NGOs and CSOs have played a strong role in providing support for teacher trainings, community-based education and pre-school classes. Education is also a sensitive subject, both because of permission for girls to attend high school and because the de facto authorities want to revise the curriculum and increase the time of religious subjects, so education CSOs will probably be under increasing scrutiny.

“Start again the vocational trainings so women could be self-sufficient and could support their families and rescue their children and themselves from hunger”²⁸

27 FGD participant, 13 March 2022.

28 FGD Participant, 02 March 2022.

7. Opportunities for Partnerships and Donor Funding

7.1 Partnerships

In the past women's organisations, both NGOs and CSOs, either received funding from donors directly (ie. embassy grants, government projects), through USAID contractors or UN and INGO partnerships. There was a huge variety of types of grants from small one-off grants to large multi-year, multi-partner consortia for the big government programmes like Citizens Charter. UN Woman has also provided small funding grants to national women CSOs in the last 2-3 years through the Women Peace and Humanitarian Fund - including partnership with Spotlight Initiative. Most provincial women CSOs seem to have received grants from other national or international NGOs or through MoWA, while Kabul based CSOs/NGOs had more opportunity to apply directly to Embassies and donors. Of those CSOs interviewed with projects funds in 2022, their sources of funding were:

47% - funded through INGOs

24% - funded by international donors

12% - through UN,

12% - private funds

5% - diaspora.

Navigating the requirements from donors and passing due diligence and capacity assessments required by UN agencies and INGOs for partnership means that many national and women led CSOs struggle to compete. The only area where women CSOs were more fortunate was that some donors expressly targeted women and women's programmes in the past decade (ie. USAID's Promote programme²⁹). Women FGD participants in Badghis and Herat mentioned that they had paid professional intermediaries to write their proposals in English for donors in the past. This was costly as the fee had to be paid out of the future project administration costs. Best practice would be if proposals could be prepared in local languages and applications processes were more flexible with support from the donor and partner to prepare and design the project. This would help strengthen the role women's organisations and encourage their ideas and creativity without demanding over-rigid processes. This approach is contrary to current donor funding requirements and demands creativity and a greater appetite for risk-taking from partners and donors to provide the right support for smaller women's organisations. This is probably why humanitarian funding and time frames are not well adapted to small, local CSOs.

UN and International NGOs do have partnership agreements with national NGOs that carry on for several years and allow trust to build up and learning and capacity development to be shared. However often partnership agreements are project related and the national partner is considered as a sub-contractor required to execute some of the activities rather than a partner engaged in design and preparation of activities. Best practice would be to have UN and INGOs partnering with smaller, more flexible grants for women CSOs as part of the commitment to gender equality and providing sufficient technical support and mentoring. The 'Twinning program' in ACBAR is a good example of comprehensive approach to partnership; where international NGOs mentor national NGOs over an 18 month to 2-year period and provide capacity development, policy development and field visits to prepare the NGO for registration with OCHA's Afghanistan Humanitarian Fund.

Provincial CSOs that were focused on income generation activities and sale of their products in provincial and national markets, had been more financially sustainable than those depending on project grants. The collapse of the economy has affected market sales for these CSOs, and they are looking to donors to help them re-start their activities and stimulate the local economy. FGD participants requested that donors provide vocational training project grants, grants for advocacy activities and flexible ways of transferring funds as bank accounts provided only limited payments or banks in some provinces were closed.

FGD participants said that successful previous projects included: i) loans for women and men with disabilities which encouraged them to start their own businesses, ii) vocational training programmes which permitted encouraged women to start small businesses and, iii) literacy classes which empowered women who had missed out on school. One national NGO in Kandahar was given as a good example as it had continued to run programmes for women in different districts in the province through its women-support centres that providing

²⁹<https://www.usaid.gov/afghanistan/gender-participant-training#:~:text=To%20bolster%20women's%20empowerment%20and,Programs%2C%20also%20known%20as%20Promote.>

training for illiterate women and courses and libraries for literate women. It had income generation activities for handicrafts, shampoo production, tailoring, and loans for small purchases such as buying animals or creating small shops.

This multi-sectoral approach in one resource centre - education, vocational training and loans for income generation – is a way to provide a space for women’s activities in the community which is acceptable in the current environment and will depend on the relations that the organisation has with the authorities and the local community. Further recommendations from FGD participants to donors are in the annexes.

A summary of findings from the CSO questionnaires shows:

- 77% of women led CSOs lack funding since August 2021,
- Women led CSOs interviewed worked primarily in education, vocational training and GBV with women, children, youth and people with disabilities,
- Those with funding have a wide range of budget - from below 50,000 USD (26%) to above 500,000(11%). The largest category of respondents had budgets of 110,000 to 500,000 (42%),
- There is some knowledge of the humanitarian system and cluster structure as national partners of UN agencies or INGOs (49% attend cluster meetings).

“We need to learn how to write proposals and how to communicate with donors and international organizations so that we can stand on our own feet”³⁰.

7.2 Some opportunities for funding women CSOs

There is a flexible funding mechanism being developed by UN Women with the overall aim of building organizational resilience of smaller grassroots and women led CSOs and gradually re-build the women’s movement. The project aims to provide dedicated and targeted funds on a rolling basis for women led CSOs to meet their core costs to remain operational. It would be good if these funds can demonstrate best practice approaches in designing and including women partners in the whole process.

UN Women is also working with the European Union on Spotlight which is a global programme for ending violence against women in 16 countries. There are six main pillars in the programme – policies, laws, institutions, services, data and civil society. Three of these were planned in Afghanistan – policies, institutions and data – but since the change in government there has been a review of the programme which is planned to focus in three provinces and 12 districts in Herat, Kandahar and Paktia. Four UN agencies are engaged: UN Women, UNFPA, UNICEF, and UNDP and they will have national CSO partners. There is a suggestion that funds should be provided for core costs of the partners as well as project costs. The main concern is the sensitivity of GBV activities with the authorities and security of CSOs. Advocacy on this may need to start on local levels in schools and mosques as has been suggested in the FGDs in this report.

The Afghanistan Humanitarian Fund (AHF) is the country-based pool fund under the authority of the Humanitarian Coordinator and is intended to serve critical humanitarian needs and support resilience in communities. Currently there is standard allocation of 105 million USD of which 5 million USD has been earmarked for national NGOs. A due diligence and capacity assessment is required for national NGOs to register as partners of AHF – over 50 have completed this process to date. ACBAR’s Twinning programme prepares national NGOs for AHF registration and currently has 40 partners in its 18-month programme of whom 5 are women led NGOs. To apply in the programme the NGO must have had previous humanitarian experience and be registered under de facto Ministry of Economy. This is not feasible for many women CSOs covered in the survey that are registered under de facto Ministry of Justice.

The UN Transitional Engagement Strategic Framework (TEF) provides the overall framework for the three pillars that the UN have set up since the change in government: i) to provide life-saving assistance (under OCHA), ii) to sustain essential services and iii) to preserve social investments and community-level systems. To realize the second and third outcomes, UNDP has designed the Area-Based Approach for Development Emergency Initiatives (ABADEI) strategy to support community resilience in Afghanistan with livelihoods and community resilience building. Although grants for this are large and only a few NGO partners have so far been selected, this programme could also be a vehicle to engage women CSOs in the livelihoods segments as downstream partners and UNDP can encourage this approach.

Other potential funding mechanisms for women CSOs are charitable foundations in different countries which can have more creative approaches to grant-making and diaspora networks which are being re-created with the recent departure of 100,000 Afghans to different countries. More should be done to research these avenues.

8. Opportunities and Innovative approaches to safely engage women led CSOs in the humanitarian response

As has been noted in this study, women led CSOs do not necessarily aspire to become humanitarian partners and in fact their skills and capacities lie in different areas. Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) actors may be able to utilise the training and advocacy skills of women CSOs to engage women and children in communities to plan and prepare for disasters. This could be a requirement of funding for any resilience and DRR envelopes in the humanitarian response. Likewise for environment activities as many women are interested in preserving land and trees and preventing erosion as well as maintaining cleanliness in streets and neighbourhoods in urban settings.

Women FGD participants noted that cash for work and food for work was more dignified for beneficiaries than handouts. There is a huge amount of social interaction and information sharing done traditionally by women in the community. Women CSOs can pass on advocacy messages and get feedback from communities on humanitarian responses as an additional local feedback loop to complement other AAP mechanisms. These localised networks can be set up through phone systems and will help women to be involved in the humanitarian response.

Networking is extremely important for women CSOs, particularly as they are shut out of official meetings by the de facto authorities. 57% of organisations were members of CSO networks and 87 % said that it was useful to be a member of a network. 23% were aware that UN had made agreements with the de facto authorities to enable women to work. Safe and efficient ways of networking between organisations should be considered. UN agencies and well-established NGOs in different provinces can host networks and meetings. There are also some women's resource centres and women's gardens in different provinces which could be refurbished for women's organisations to network in and re-start income generation activities.

9. Recommendations

This is an important moment to provide support to women and women's organisations in the immediate months following August 2021 when there is still some room to negotiate. One difficulty has been the loss of experienced leadership and human resources amongst civil society actors and humanitarian agencies. To instill confidence in women and women's organisations there should be a series of concrete steps taken by the international community to provide support in the coming months.

For International Community, including the Donors and the UN:

9.1 *Funding grants for Women CSOs*

Flexible small grants for grassroots CSOs on provincial levels is strongly recommended to donors. This requires local management and capacity development support to partner CSOs at provincial levels. This should be implemented by an organisation with a strong presence in the province because inevitably there will be need to discuss and support women CSOs with the de facto local authorities. AWN and ACBAR coordination platforms both have experience in capacity building of their members as do many larger INGOs who are engaged in promoting local partnerships. This type of funding should be multi-year so that the CSOs have time to develop their structures and activities. It would be good if the funds can demonstrate best practice approaches in designing and including women partners in the whole process, if proposals could be prepared in local languages and applications processes were more flexible. This would help strengthen women CSOs and encourage their ideas and creativity without demanding over-rigid processes.

A combination of vocational training, advocacy activities and education courses can be offered in resource centres for women beneficiaries. Flexible ways of transferring funds should also be encouraged (such as *hawala*) as banking is extremely limited in many provinces. (Additional recommendations from FGD groups in annexes).

9.2 *Women humanitarian staff across all levels of decision making*

Humanitarian partners need to hire and promote national women staff in senior positions on all levels in main offices and field operations to strengthen the participation of women in the humanitarian response. This will not only support greater inclusion of women beneficiaries but also enable Afghan women to be at the table when decisions are made. The safety and wellbeing of women humanitarian staff is a responsibility for all humanitarian partners as well as continued advocacy with donors to explain necessary additional costs necessary for employing women, which must be budgeted for. UN and NGOs should ensure that their partners are promoting women staff in a similar way. There are some successful examples of large female staff numbers among humanitarian NGOs which should be emulated. The members of the Women's Advisory Group (WAG) have already taken up this advocacy for women humanitarian staff as a priority and can ask HCT and GiHA members to present regular updates on women staff numbers.

9.3 *Engagement with de facto authorities*

Women CSOs are looking to the international community to support them and engage with the de facto authorities. Discussions with the de facto Ministry of Justice on a national level needs to be held to clarify the position for national civil society associations and whether they can continue to be registered there as in the past. If not, what alternatives can be suggested.

The idea of a 'Women's Commission' has been suggested in some discussions with the de facto authorities but the details of how this would work on national and sub-national levels need to be developed so that women can engage with de facto authorities in the provinces more easily. These discussions should start as soon as possible and be supported by the international community, including donors, otherwise there is risk of women's organisations being further marginalised.

Space should be demanded for women's economic empowerment activities, either in resource centres in the provinces or in women's gardens.

For humanitarian aid actors:

9.4 Women CSOs as field monitoring teams

Promoting the role women CSOs can play in monitoring community distributions for OCHA and the humanitarian community and following up with women beneficiaries on behalf of the Accountability to Affected Populations (AAP) working group. They should be locally based and assigned to specific areas. This would be much more cost effective than hiring monitors centrally.

9.5 Advocacy for women CSOs through WAG members

WAG members need to carry on their high-level advocacy for women at the HCT and should be encouraged and supported by OCHA to carry out regular provincial visits to talk to women CSOs and report back to the GiHA working group and the HCT on challenges and solutions. There needs to be a systematic tracking of the challenges raised in the meetings and advocacy on national and local levels as the situation changes in provinces and due to the high turnover in provincial de facto authorities.

9.6 Engaging in the clusters at provincial and national levels.

Women CSOs can play an important role as first responders in disasters and field monitors so links need to be built up between them and the clusters on provincial and national levels. On local district levels there are some networks created by some of the Disaster Risk and Rehabilitation actors with local communities which can include women CSOs. Youth groups can also play an important role as eyes and ears of clusters on local levels. Clusters should systematically invite women CSOs to give their perspectives and experience in relevant meetings, similar to the WAG which plays as advisory role to the HCT.

For the Gender in Humanitarian Action Working Group:

9.7 Training materials

Trainings have been requested by women FGD participants in proposal writing, organisation development, humanitarian systems and principles. Also training for de facto authorities on humanitarian principles and the Joint Operating Principles. Much of these materials will be available among different UN and NGO members but GiHA should ensure the materials and courses are appropriate for the level of women CSOs and in local languages.

9.8 Centralised database and follow-up with women diaspora groups

It has been challenging to establish updated contacts of women CSOs due to the turnover of senior staff and change in telephone numbers for security reasons. An updated list of women led CSOs and national NGOs with a large proportion of women's programming is now with GiHA, This can be used to provide information on women CSOs for donors and cluster partners (respecting confidentiality) and should be maintained by GiHA. A useful follow up study should be carried out to identify links with women diaspora organisations in different countries and see how they can provide support and funding CSOs and to affected populations, in collaboration with NGOs already working with Afghan diaspora.

“This is the first time that someone came here to ask about women’s problems since the Taliban came to power”³¹

31 FGD participant, 16 March 2022

Annexes

- e Annexes 1 – Focus Group Discussion Questions
- e Annex 2 – Organisation Questionnaire
- e Annex 3 – List of provinces covered by FGDs
- e Annex 4 – FGD feedback on needs of different groups in the population
- e Annex 5 – Key Findings from Organisation Questionnaires
- e Annex 6 – Coverage of provinces in Kobo Questionnaire
- e Annex 7 - Recommendations from FDGs to Donors

Annex 1

Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)

(2.5 hours)

Participant numbers: 6-12

Participants: civil society members, women's organisations, national NGOs, national staff of INGOs (ie host agency) – 100 % women

| No. | Subject | Facilitation/ timing |
|-----|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| | Introduction | |
| 1. | The reason for this discussion group is that IRC and UN Women are researching women's organisations and their activities across Afghanistan to see activities, needs and challenges faced by women in different provinces. The discussion will be summarized and provided in a report, any notes taken during discussions will remain anonymous and confidential | Facilitator explains 5 mins |
| 2. | Read out consent form for participants and ask for consent | 5 mins |
| | Topic One - Current Situation for Women's Organisations | |
| 3. | A. General Discussion: What are the current needs and priorities for women in Afghanistan? Which different activities are useful for communities? Any examples of best practice? | Facilitator summarizes lists ideas on flipchart 30 mins |
| 4. | What do you think are the major humanitarian needs faced by the population where you live? For poor people For girls For boys For women (including female head of households, widows) For men Elderly people Persons with disability Persons who identify as LGBT | Facilitator prompts discussion and writes key concerns on flipchart 30 mins |
| | Break | |
| | Topic Two - Women's Organisations – Challenges and Solutions | |
| 5. | What are the biggest challenges to implement these projects/activities? Limitation on women's movements and access to work Lack of donor funds for women's organisations Banking and transfer of money challenges Lack of support from communities Others | Facilitator lists down 30 mins |
| 6. | Solutions to the challenges suggested by group members? | Facilitator lists down 15 mins. |
| 7. | What are the top priorities to help strengthen women's organisations? | Facilitator lists down 15 mins |
| | Topic Three - Any Other suggestions | |
| 8. | Any other key issues participants would like to raise? | Facilitator notes down 10 mins |
| 9. | Summary of key points. Meeting ends with thanks to all participants and hosting agency. | Facilitators reviews key points of meeting. Facilitator thanks participant for their time and inputs 10 mins |

Annex 2

Gender in Humanitarian Action GIHA Organisation Questionnaire

| | Questions |
|----|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1 | Name of interviewee |
| 2 | Contact phone |
| 3 | Contact email |
| 4 | Age |
| 5 | Education level: (Primary, Secondary, University, none) |
| 6 | Profession (housewife, teacher, medical, NGO staff etc) |
| 7 | Name of Organisation: |
| 8 | Contact details of Organization: (official phone number and email address, hyperlink to website, Facebook page) |
| 9 | Start date of organization |
| 10 | Geographical Coverage (Provinces, Districts) |
| 11 | Address of main office |
| 12 | Does the organization focus on women rights as its mandate? |
| 13 | Is the organization currently active in Afghanistan? |
| 14 | Which sectors (ie. health, education, agriculture, protection, vocational training, etc.) |
| 15 | What are your current projects? Please list: |
| 16 | Who are the beneficiaries of your projects (men, women, children, people with disabilities etc)? |
| 17 | How much funding do you have in 2022? Who is the donor? How long is the project? |
| 18 | Does your organization have partnership with other organizations? Please list |
| 19 | Does your organization have membership of a humanitarian cluster/WG/sub cluster? Please list |
| 20 | Is the leadership of your organization currently in Afghanistan or based outside? |
| 21 | How many staff work currently in the organization (men/women)? |
| 22 | Is your organization registered as an NGO or CSO? Where is it registered (Kabul, provinces)? |
| 23 | Does your organization have any prior/ current experience operating women safe space/ centres? |

Thank you for your time. This information is confidential and will not be disclosed to anyone outside IRC office.

Annex3

FGD Participants in 15 provinces

| | Place | FGD in each province (1, 2, 3) | Number of participants | No of heads of CSOs | Facilitator |
|----|---------------------|--------------------------------|------------------------|---------------------|-------------|
| 1 | Kabul | FGD 1 | 10 | 6 | OS |
| 2 | Parwan | FGD 1 | 15 | 1 | OS |
| 3 | Bamiyan | FGD 1 | 13 | 2 | OS |
| 4 | Bamiyan | FGD 2 | 10 | 3 | OS |
| 5 | Bamiyan | FGD 3 | 12 | 6 | OS |
| 6 | Herat | FGD 1 | 12 | 2 | OS |
| 7 | Herat | FGD 2 | 12 | 2 | OS |
| 8 | Badghis | FGD 1 | 10 | 6 | OS |
| 9 | Kabul | FGD 2 | 12 | 5 | TR |
| 10 | Nangarhar | FGD1 | 13 | 2 | TR |
| 11 | Nangarhar | FGD2 | 11 | 2 | TR |
| 12 | Laghman | FGD1 | 12 | 3 | TR |
| 13 | Wardak | FGD1 | 12 | 3 | TR |
| 14 | Kandahar | FGD1 | 9 | 4 | TR |
| 15 | Kandahar | FGD2 | 15 | 2 | TR |
| 16 | Helmand | FGD1 | 12 | 3 | TR |
| 17 | Balkh | FGD1 | 12 | 3 | AA |
| 18 | Balkh | FGD2 | 14 | 7 | AA |
| 19 | Samangan | FGD1 | 7 | 3 | AA |
| 20 | Logar | FGD1 | 20 | 11 | AA |
| 21 | Kunduz | FGD1 | 10 | 4 | AA |
| 22 | Kunduz | FGD2 | 11 | 2 | AA |
| 23 | Takhar | FGD1 | 15 | 7 | AA |
| | | | | | |
| | 15 Provinces | 23 FGDs | 279 Participants | 89 | |

Annex4

Feedback by FGD participants on different needs and constraints in the population.

| | Major issues |
|-------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Poor people | <p>Equitable long-term assistance (food, water, shelter) is needed</p> <p>Widows often get passed over by male members of shuras and leaders (wakil guzar) as they feel fear and shame in requesting their needs</p> <p>Create equal work opportunities for poor women and men</p> <p>Access to free medicine for the poor</p> <p>Reduction in number of humanitarian organisations providing assistance</p> <p>Some widows and ex-government workers are forced to leave their government housing which are rented out to new workers of the authorities</p> |
| Girls | <p>The problem of child-marriage and selling of girls due to the economic problems of the family</p> <p>Lack of family permission for girls to be educated because of current situation and destroyed schools</p> <p>Increasing child harassment and rape</p> <p>Gender based discrimination against girls</p> <p>Child labour in fields and streets</p> <p>Increase in pandemic sickness like measles and polio</p> <p>Malnutrition among girls and boys</p> |
| Boys | <p>Illegal immigration due to lack of work and sexual harassment</p> <p>Lack of internships and job opportunities</p> <p>Depression about the future, "feeling hopeless"</p> <p>Increase in narcotic addiction</p> <p>Prevention of boys playing sports and other activities due to family concerns about their security</p> <p>Resorting to crime or smuggling to support the family</p> |
| Women (esp. widows and female heads of households) | <p>Right to work</p> <p>Right to education and literacy</p> <p>Widows are facing forced marriages with their in-laws to keep their children with them</p> <p>Increase in honour killings</p> <p>Lack of access to health and hygiene services</p> <p>Safe shelter is essential for women who are facing GBV</p> <p>Need to re-activate women parks, women shuras and women's centres</p> <p>Lack of a mahram prevents widows from renting homes</p> <p>Verbal and physical harassment by de facto authorities on women especially in humanitarian assistance distribution process</p> |
| Men | <p>Lack of job opportunities</p> <p>Lack of access to their human and legal rights</p> <p>Lack of issuance necessary documents like marriage certificates, tazkeras, passports, business licenses</p> <p>Beating of women and children by the head of family because of lack of job and financial problems</p> <p>They are facing psychological problems</p> |
| Elderly | <p>Lack of access to their benefits of retirement</p> <p>Assistance should be provided to the elderly forever. At least free health care should be provided for them</p> <p>Elderly persons are facing financial problems because their sons left the country or have been killed or murdered and they have to support remaining family members (children and women)</p> |
| People with Disabilities | <p>People with disabilities (PwDs) are faced with having no jobs, they are unacceptable persons in society. In the previous government there was a policy that government offices must recruit 3% of PwDs in different positions, but now that rule is not accepted.</p> <p>People don't like to marry with a person with disability (male or female).</p> <p>There is no pension for civilian PwDs, only those who were in the military</p> |
| LGBT | <p>Our society has not accepted LGBT people unfortunately they have become taboo in society and have never been discussed. Mullahs in the mosques must make people understand that they are also human beings and God created them</p> <p>Bad customs and culture of bacha bazi continues</p> <p>Lack of support of LGBT among their families and community, families are ashamed of their LGBT children</p> <p>They need advocacy and support of human right agencies</p> |

Annex 5

Key findings from Kobo Questionnaire

A questionnaire was conducted with women led and women focused CSOs/NGOs in Kabul and the provinces in Farsi and Pashtu. A total of (96) respondents were interviewed in (25) provinces, some face to face and some by telephone.

Total number of staff belonging to these organisations = 6,655 (3,554 male / 3,101 female)

| | Question | Response |
|-----|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. | Gender of respondent | 97% female |
| 2. | Education level of Director of organization | 91% - University level |
| 3. | Does the organisation focus on women rights as its mandate? | 97% - Yes |
| 4. | Is the organisation currently headed by a woman | 95% - Yes |
| 5. | Is the organization currently active? | 69% - Yes 31% - No |
| 6. | In which sectors did you work before August 2021? (Multiple answers from 51 respondents) | 65% Education 61% Vocational training 51% GBV 29% Health 28% Child protection 26% Agriculture 16% Women empowerment, advocacy 6% Capacity development 3% Income generation, savings groups 20% Others (handicrafts, driving, literacy etc) |
| 7. | If you have stopped operating – at what date? | 83% - since August 2021 10% - stopped in last 12 months (before August 2021) 7% - stopped more than 2 years before |
| 8. | Reasons for stopping activities (multiple answer) | 87% - lack of funds 67% - fear of authorities 20% - banking problems 7% - office was looted 3% - staff have left the job, or country |
| 9. | Do you have projects in 2022? | 23% - Yes 77% - No |
| 10. | Have you faced delays in projects starting? | 26% - waiting for donor approval 74% - no funds |
| 11. | Who are the beneficiaries of your projects? (Multiple response) | 99% - women 36% - children 33% - men 32% - youth 20% - persons with disabilities |

| | | |
|-----|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 12. | Who are your donors? | 47% - INGOs 24% - International donors 12% - UN 12% - Private funds 5% - Diaspora |
| 13. | Does your organisation have partnerships? | 22% - Yes 78% - No |
| 14. | Does your organisation attend cluster meetings? | 49% - Yes 51% - No |
| 15. | Is your organisation a member of a CSO network? | 57% - Yes 43% - No |
| 16. | Is it useful to be a member of a network? | 87% - Yes 13% - No |
| 17. | Do you know of agreements made by the UN with the de facto authorities regarding female staff? | 23% - Yes 77% - No |
| 18. | Did you make your own agreements? | 48% - Yes 52% - No |
| 19. | Is the leadership of your organisation currently based outside Afghanistan? | 5% - Yes 95% - No |
| 20. | In which (de facto) Ministry is your organisation registered? | 48% - (de facto) Min of Economy 49% - (de facto) Min of Justice 1% - provincially registered 2% - not registered |
| 21. | Does your organisation have experience in managing women safe space centres? | 10% - Yes 90% - No |
| 22. | Is your organisation facing any of the following challenges? (Multiple answer) | 93% - Lack of donor funding 44% - Higher costs (ie Mahram) 39% - Difficulty to get permission to work 34% - Frozen bank accounts 24% - Harassment/pressure to stop working from de facto authorities 19% - Loss of key staff 17% - Loss of female staff 1% - Prefers not to answer |
| 23. | How has your organisation managed these changes? (Multiple answer) | 51% - closed our offices 29% - negotiated with authorities to allow some activities 9% - works from home 4% - have sent the women home and working with men only 4% - using our own budget 4% - separated office for women and men 1% - Prefers not to answer |
| 24. | What support do you need to help overcome these challenges? (Multiple answer) | 96% More Donor funding 75% More advocacy by UN with authorities 67% More training in financial, technical sectors 64% UN agency or international NGO to share the risk 45% More advocacy by NGO networks 13% More support for women CSOs 3% Equal allocation of funds and projects to local NGOs 3% |

Annex 6

Coverage of Provinces in Kobo Questionnaire

96 Women CSOs in 25 provinces

| Province | Number | Percentage |
|------------|--------|------------|
| Badakhshan | 4 | 4.2% |
| Badghis | 7 | 7.3% |
| Baghlan | 4 | 4.2% |
| Balkh | 6 | 6.3% |
| Bamyan | 7 | 7.3% |
| Farah | 1 | 1.0% |
| Ghor | 1 | 1.0% |
| Helmand | 4 | 4.2% |
| Herat | 8 | 8.3% |
| Jawzjan | 1 | 1.0% |
| Kabul | 16 | 16.7% |
| Kandahar | 6 | 6.3% |
| Kapisa | 1 | 1.0% |
| Khost | 1 | 1.0% |
| Kunduz | 4 | 4.2% |
| Laghman | 2 | 2.1% |
| Logar | 5 | 5.2% |
| Nangarhar | 6 | 6.3% |
| Nimroz | 1 | 1.0% |
| Paktya | 1 | 1.0% |
| Panjsher | 1 | 1.0% |
| Parwan | 2 | 2.1% |
| Samangan | 2 | 2.1% |
| Sar_e_Pul | 2 | 2.1% |
| Takhar | 3 | 3.1% |

Annex 7

Recommendations for Donors from FGD Participants

- e Donors are requested to consider and cover all women (educated, un-educated, disabled, widow and elder) when designing/ setting projects and allocating funds,
- e Provide facilities for women to access and attend national and international markets and exhibitions,
- e Create marketing and networking facilities for women products and services,
- e Provide support for vocational trainings and activities for women who are living in city/ village,
- e Design and hold capacity building/ developing trainings and workshops,
- e Support women's organisations in awareness raising programs in different sectors (health, hygiene, psychology, rights etc) for women, girls, boys and men,
- e Internship and entrepreneurship opportunities for new graduated girls and boys,
- e Support small companies (bakery, tailoring, chocolate producing, saffron, turkey and poultry farms) that are led by women and girls.
- e Create capacity building and awareness raising programs for men and male authorities to accept women work outside,
- e Provide trainings on women's rights from an Islamic perspective for men and male authorities,
- e Ensure that in humanitarian activities, coordination meetings include the participation of female representatives of each district of city,
- e Design and prepare training materials in literacy, the speeches of the prophet and religious knowledge by women for women.

