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**GENDER MAINSTREAMING IN MRRD PROGRAMMES: A PRELIMINARY REVIEW
OF THE NSP**

AIRD

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List of Abbreviations

| | |
|--------------|--|
| AIRD | Afghanistan Institute for Rural Development |
| FPs | Facilitating Partners |
| MDGs | Millennium Development Goals |
| ANDs | Afghanistan Development Strategy |
| NABDP | National Area Based Development Program |
| MRRD | Ministry of rural Rehabilitation and Development |
| IRD | Integrated Rural development |
| CDCs | Community Development Councils |
| CDDs | Community Driven Development |
| MTR | Mid-Term Review |
| NSP | National Solidarity Programmes |

GENDER MAINSTREAMING IN MRRD PROGRAMS: A PRELIMINARY REVIEW OF NSP

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Aim

The purpose of this report is to provide MRRD with an overview of its gender equality policy and mainstreaming measures that have taken place under the present government. It begins by providing a review of key documents and the underlying commitments of MRRD to gender specific goals. A Gender-Based Analysis is then applied to the National Solidarity Program (NSP) in terms of its success in achieving its objectives, lessons learned, constraints and challenges with a particular focus on gender issues. The analysis relied on government publications, published research reports as well as insights from field visits to Community Development Councils (CDCs) in the provinces of Parwan and Kabul as well as the outcomes of the AIRD workshop on scaling up participatory approaches in rural Afghanistan in May ۲۰۰۶. Findings from existing research evaluations and recommendations are highlighted, challenges considered and some policy considerations for a gender mainstreaming strategy recommended.

Approach to Gender Mainstreaming

A gender mainstreaming strategy requires that a gender equality perspective is incorporated in all policies and programs by those involved in policy making. In this respect, the Afghan government and MRRD have explicitly stated its gender equality strategy in all its key documents highlighted above as well as identifying gender equality as a cross cutting theme within its development pillars. Underlying this strategy is the recognition that development policies and programs have different impact on men and women due to their different life situations and socio-economic realities. As such the different roles of men and women must be understood so that their needs and priorities could be addressed by appropriate policies that would correct gender imbalances.

A Gender Based Analysis (GBA)

It measures the immediate and intermediate outcomes of development programs in three dimensions:

Access: Ability of men and women to have equal access to policy, program or legislative activities, which includes eliminating barriers to access and/or not creating barriers for them and promoting such access

Inclusion: Representation throughout the policy/program process, which results from the ability of diverse groups (disability, age, sexuality, race, ethnicity) who participated effectively in the development of a policy, program or legislative activity

Benefits: Advantages/gains intended to results from a policy, program or legislative step and/or activity are equally available to both men and women.

Findings

- The commitment of MRRD and the government of Afghanistan towards gender equality and empowerment are clearly stated in its official documents outlined above. This was borne out of the recognition that Afghan women have been excluded from participating in the social and economic life as a consequence of 20 years of war and turmoil more so during the Taliban rule. The NSP in particular has come up with very clear targets and guidelines with regards to its gender equity policy and has further refined its approach and the implementation of its programmes based on lessons learned in the field with its FPs.
- It is clear from the literature reviewed that the NSP is a community development programme mandated to lay the foundation for a sustainable form of inclusive local governance, rural reconstruction and poverty alleviation. Its commitment to gender equity is stated as one of its guiding principles while the two arms of its programme - public infrastructure and human capital development projects - require the participation of both men and women. A more specific gender policy of the NSP is also evident.
- On Applying a GenderBased Analysis of MRRD programs and the NSP, evidence of access, inclusion and benefits of Gender Equity Policy of the NSP can be inferred from the studies reviewed. The depth, quality and long term impact of these policies, however, requires a separate assessment. These preliminary achievements nonetheless are noteworthy given the highly unequal status of Afghan women compared to men and the social and cultural constraints that governs gender relations. More importantly, these findings reflect the awareness of the challenges ahead as well as continuous monitoring of programme impact by the NSP.
- Findings from these studies provided ample evidence with regards to the achievements of the NSP in delivering the objectives of i) expanding representative and participatory governance through the CDCs and ii) community development through the implementation of CDDs. The coverage of the NSP, the total number of CDCs and membership (of which half are women), the number of projects completed, the validation of the CDC election process and the increase in

public awareness among others, are some indicators of the success of the NSP in Afghanistan.

- A consensus is also evident with regards to the increase participation of women as the outcome of the NSP programme in general and the Gender Policy of the NSP in particular. While their ability to directly influence decision making has been limited, the establishment of CDCs under the NSP is undoubtedly recognised as a factor that enables women to participate in village level activities which was not previously possible.
- Despite the overall success of the NSP, the research findings also identified barriers and challenges to the participation of women in the NSP programmes. Of extreme importance is the social and cultural limitations posed by Afghan society whereby women have traditionally assumed a subordinate role. This cultural subordination is compounded by their lack of education, illiteracy, lack of knowledge and experience in public affairs which serve to further inhibit their participation in the CDCs and CDD projects.
- It is also noted from these findings that women's participation varies according to region, ethnicity, class, age and status. Preliminary evidence indicated that the Hazara community are more open to the participation of women, older women and women with higher social status are more likely to be better received in the CDCs in leadership roles and decision making.

Limitations

This evaluation of the NSP from a GBA perspective rely on secondary materials - findings from government documents and published research materials on the NSP and gender in Afghanistan. Its assessment is therefore preliminary in nature.

As such conclusions regarding the gender equity and mainstreaming achievements based on these criteria can only be inferred as these criteria could not be directly assessed as this report is not based on field studies that could not gauge the depth of the impact of policies on gender. Hence findings from the literature in relation to participation, leadership roles and decision making are used as proxies for the GBA criteria - access, inclusion and benefits.

The fundamental point of analysis remain – that is both men and women should have equal access to policy and programmes, equal representation throughout policy/program process and equal advantages/gains from policy and programs as clearly defined by the Gender Policy of the NSP outlined in its OM. It is further limited by the information available at the time of writing. While limited, the findings from these studies should

illuminate the mode of gender relations in Afghanistan at present and identify the challenges ahead.

Beyond Gender: The NSP as a Social and Economic Entity

Gender is about men and women as well as boys and girls. Hence a comprehensive strategy on gender will have to be formulated to target specific groups of excluded men and women as well as boys and girls within the rural communities. They could include widows, the handicapped, the Internationally Displaced Persons (IDPs), the Kuchi tribe, orphans and disadvantaged children. This theme could then drive MRRD's follow-up programmes and shift the emphasis from targeting women to targeting the excluded to expedite social and economic development in Afghanistan.

This theme has also emerged in the reports reviewed whereby there are clear indications for expanding the role of the NSP to consider the bigger issues of integrated rural development. The challenge to take on this role has been suggested in detail in the MTR of the NSP in particular and to some extent in the Exit Strategy of the OC which proposed a more comprehensive rural development programme to be undertaken by the NSP within which a gender-oriented approach is clearly embedded. Similarly, this theme has emerged in other MRRD documents, particularly that of the NABDP PH II.

Immediate Follow-up Measures by MRRD

A comprehensive gender mainstreaming strategy following the World Bank Review of the NSP 2006:

- [Actions: (1) MRRD' to prepare a strategy for mainstreaming gender in the NSP by July 10, 2006 before the Bank's MTR; (2) based on this strategy, OC to include indicators in the project performance indicator matrix by July 10, 2006; (3) OC to ensure that gender mainstreaming activities are integrated in the facilitation process.]
- Address the social and cultural barriers to the participation of women as an excluded group in the development and reconstruction of Afghanistan by addressing the issues related to the limited participation of women identified in the Workshop on "Prospects of Scaling Up participatory Approaches in Rural Afghanistan 23-24 May 2006 such as:
- Recognising that Afghan women are worse off as a consequence of the 20 years of conflict in terms of health, education, mortality, literacy, etc.

- Identifying measures that improve women's participation as an excluded group in the context of a comprehensive gender mainstreaming strategy.
- Address the Issue of gender relations/male domination as a necessary measure to increase female participation by involving and educating community leaders, mullahs, husbands and family members on the crucial role of women in development and reconstruction of Afghanistan.
- Addressing the ineffectiveness of female CDCs from a social cultural perspective by distinguishing culture from religion and hence the crucial need to sensitise men on these issues to prevent women from being marginalised.

GENDER MAINSTREAMING IN MRRD PROGRAMS: A PRELIMINARY REVIEW OF NSP

1. Introduction

The purpose of this report is to provide MRRD with an overview of its gender equality policy and mainstreaming measures that have taken place under the present government. Section II of this report will set the context by providing a review of key documents and the underlying commitments to gender specific goals. Section III briefly described the methodology for undertaking a Gender-Based Analysis of MRRD programs and its limitations. This is followed by a review of the National Solidarity Program (NSP) in section IV. This section analysed the NSP in terms of its success in achieving its objectives, lessons learned, constraints and challenges with a particular focus on gender issues. The analysis build on the work of others and rely on government publications, published research reports as well as insights from field visits to Community Development Councils (CDCs) in the provinces of Parwan and Kabul as well as the outcomes of the AIRD workshop on scaling up participatory approaches in rural Afghanistan in May 2006. Section V, evaluates the gender mainstreaming status of the NSP from a policy and action-oriented perspective by highlighting findings and recommendations of existing evaluations, considers the challenges and suggest some policy considerations for a gender mainstreaming strategy.

2. The Commitment to Gender: A Review of Key Documents

Documents reviewed here highlights the attention given to gender issues. These include national documents such as the NDF, the I-ANDS, the MRRD strategic Plan, the NABDP PH and documents relevant to the NSP in particular its operation Manual (OM) and the Exit Strategy of the Oversight Committee (OC).

The National Development Framework (NDF)

The NDF clearly states that progress towards gender equality is a critical issue for Afghanistan. The NDF proposed to adopt a two-pronged approach towards achieving this objective:

- Measures to restore the rights of Afghan women arising from the segregationist policies of the Taliban through policies targeting women e.g by reinstating women in employment and income earning opportunities, upgrading their professional knowledge, enhancing their management skills and capabilities.
- All programs must pay special attention to the respective roles and responsibilities of women and men. A process of sectoral reassessment will be undertaken in order to identify areas where the inclusion of men and women can be promoted.

The Ministry of Women's Affairs has been established in support of these objectives, particularly in promoting policy and strategy to ensure the full participation of women in society.

The Interim Afghan National Development Strategy (I-ANDS)

The Afghanistan national Development Strategy (ANDS) identified gender equity as one of the cross cutting themes to be mainstreamed into all policy framework. Gender mainstreaming is considered mandatory based on the recognition that the reconstruction and development of Afghanistan requires the full participation of Afghan women in political, social, cultural and economic life. Afghanistan's constitution guarantees non-discrimination and equity of men and women:

- Reserves a 30 per cent share of seats for women parliamentarians in the National Assembly
- Pledges to promote educational programs and health care for women
- Guarantees the rights of vulnerable women

The policy overview on gender clearly stated that the government's goal is to eliminate discrimination against women, develop their human capital and ensure their leadership in order to guarantee their full and equal participation in all aspects of life. In order to reduce gender disparities the government will support measures that promote policies and resource allocation for women-specific programs. Priority areas include:

- Female education
- Reproductive health
- Economic empowerment
- Access to justice and
- Political participation

Every government instrument is mandated to incorporate gender concerns into its operation and to establish a clear benchmark and indicators for measuring achievements. The Ministry of Women's Affairs (MoWA) has the overall responsibility for leading and coordinating government's efforts to advance the role of women. Various strategies were identified in relation to these areas.

MRRD Strategic Plan

MRRD's commitment reflect similar commitments outlined in ANDS. In its effort to overcome these challenges MRRD is committed to a gender balanced approach to rural development. This is evident from its strategic plan whereby a gender balanced development is identified as one of its six core focus areas:

- Rural Well-being
- Local Governance
- Gender Balance Development
- Programmes Transition
- Organisational Transition
- Partnership

Within its gender balanced approach to development, MRRD commits itself to enhancing effort to ensuring that women have access to community representation, improvements in the legal framework for gender equality. In terms of reducing gender disparities and enhancing the empowerment of women, measures include increasing the number of women staff at national and provincial levels and staff training on gender awareness. MRRD's strategy for gender inclusion includes:

- collaboration with other agencies
- establishing models of good practice in gender equity
- increasing the overall number and capacity of women within the ministry
- practising gender equity throughout the organisation

The underlying principles of a gender balanced development adopted by MRRD are:

- The capacity enhancement of rural women
- Poverty mitigation and economic development that is targeted equally towards men and women
- Full cooperation with MoWA and other organisations
- A gender balanced employment policy and practice with transparency in recruitment, selection and promotion
- An action focus – taking practical gender initiatives and learning by doing

MRRD also outlined a three year development objectives. One of this objective is female empowerment in local governance at the community level. It is projected that women's participation would increased from around 10 per cent to at least 30 per cent during this period (whether on the basis of mixed or female CDCs through the NSP). Similar commitments are evident in other MRRD programmes such as the (NABDP) and the NSP.

National Area Based Development Programme (NABDP PHV -2006-08)

The commitments of NABDP phase V in relation to gender are outlined below:

- MDG focused initiatives such as gender mainstreaming
- Vulnerable groups (x-combatants, disabled, women) empowered through improved access to social and economic opportunities (local poverty initiatives, private sector development, alternative livelihoods, empowerment of women).
- The NABDP will contribute to the delivery of the comprehensive rural development, counter narcotics, poverty reduction , refugees, IDPs, vulnerable women, humanitarian and disaster response benchmark..
- “NABDP is specially committed to a gender approach in its activities. The overarching objective of the gender approach is to ensure that rural men and women participate in project activities and benefit on an equitable basis by creating the necessary enabling environment and using appropriate tools and procedures.

The NABDP has also outline a gender strategy as part of its overall/main strategy which identifies the actual strategy for implementing the gender approach which include measures to:

- Create mechanisms that ensure real participation by rural women in general
- Ensure that project services reach a significant number of poor and rural women in general
- Improve the living conditions of women who are heads of households and rural women in general
- Launch a process leading to a greater equality and equity between the sexes, both within the family and in the community

٢.١. The NSP: Programme Overview^١

The main thrust, mandate and area of intervention of the NSP are clearly outlined in its latest revised Operation Manual:

A. Background

The National Solidarity Programme (NSP) was created by the Government of Afghanistan to develop the ability of Afghan communities to identify, plan, manage and monitor their own development projects. NSP promotes a new development paradigm whereby communities are empowered to make decisions and manage resources during all stages of the project cycle. The programme will lay the foundation for a sustainable form of inclusive local governance, rural reconstruction, and poverty alleviation.

^١ Extracted from the NSP Operation Manual, ١٥ January ٢٠٠٦ (p.١-٤)

NSP is the largest community development programme in the history of Afghanistan. Known in Dari as “Hanbastagi Milli” and in Pashtu as “Milli Pawastoon”, it is based on the Afghan traditions of:

- “Ashar” – community members working together on a volunteer basis to improve community infrastructure;
- “Jirga” – councils comprised of respected members of the community; and
- Islamic values of unity, equity and justice.

B. Programme Goals

NSP is designed to alleviate rural poverty and establish a foundation for improved local governance by:

- Establishing a national network of elected Community Development Councils (CDCs),
- Funding priority subprojects to improve access to social and productive infrastructure, markets, and services;
- Strengthening community capacities through participatory processes and training; and
- Promoting accountability and wise use of public and private resources.

The CDCs will serve as a consultative decision-making body that includes men, women, and traditionally marginalized members of the community. Through participation in NSP and other programmes, communities will acquire or strengthen the skills and attitudes necessary to define, manage, and govern their development.

C. Core Elements

NSP consists of four core elements:

١. **Community mobilization** - facilitating elections to establish Community Development Councils (CDCs) and helping CDCs identify priority subprojects, prepare Community Development Plans, and implement approved subprojects.
٢. **Building the capacities of CDC and community members** (both men and women) in participation, consensus-building, accounting, procurement and contract management, operations and maintenance, and monitoring.
٣. Providing direct **block grant transfers to fund subprojects**; and
٤. **Linking CDCs** to government agencies, NGOs, and donors to improve access to services and resources.

D. Guiding Principles

The quality of community mobilization processes is a critical factor in achieving successful and sustainable outcomes. The following principles guide “how” the programme is implemented:

- participatory and inclusive decision-making processes;
- gender equity;
- transparency and accountability in the use of programme funds; and
- sustainability (including but not limited to requiring community contributions for operations and maintenance).

E. Key Programme Partners

The following key actors are instrumental in programme implementation. Roles and responsibilities are briefly summarized below and discussed in more detail throughout the OM.

Executing Agency: The NSP is executed by the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development (MRRD). MRRD’s National NSP Coordination Office oversees programme policies and serves as a liaison with other MRRD departments, government agencies, and donors.

Facilitating Partners (FPs): The MRRD has contracted twenty-three NGOs and 1 UN Agency (UN-Habitat) to work directly with targeted communities to implement NSP activities at the local level. As of December 2006, over 4,000 FP staff support programme implementation.

Communities: NSP will reach 20,000 rural communities within the first four years (June 2003-June 2007).

Oversight Consultant (OC): The MRRD has contracted GTZ to provide programme oversight for the first three years.

Donors: The Programme is financed through World Bank/IDA grants, the Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund, and the Japanese Social Development Fund. Contributors include the European Union and the Governments of the United States, United Kingdom, Canada, Japan, and Germany. In addition, the Governments of Norway and Denmark provide direct bilateral aid.

NSP Steering Committee: an inter-ministerial committee established to provide advice on overall programme direction and policies.

F. Scope and Targeting

Each year MRRD develops a NSP Roll-Out Plan that identifies target districts and establishes the total number of communities within each district to be mobilized. Districts are selected based on vulnerability factors (level of poverty and risk of drought or food

insecurity), the number of returnees or internally displaced persons (IDPs), and security conditions. Other criteria may also apply.

In the first year, three target districts in each province throughout Afghanistan were selected by MRRD. Additional districts were selected in the 2nd year. Close to 1,400 communities were reached in Years 1 and 2. Operations will be expanded to reach an additional 1,900 communities in Year 3. The Government of Afghanistan intends to eventually offer NSP to all eligible rural communities.

Once priority districts have been chosen each year, Facilitating Partners are invited to submit proposals. Proposals cover 1) community mobilization in new target districts and 2) completion of NSP activities in previously-targeted districts. They include a preliminary list of target communities.

G. Eligible Subprojects

Two types of subprojects may be financed under NSP: public infrastructure and human capital development:

Table 1: Types of Sub-projects

| Public Infrastructure | Human Capital Development [†] |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Water Supply and Sanitation (latrine, toilet, public bath, reservoir, hand pump, water supply network, well, water filtration); • Irrigation (canal, reservoir, diversion weir, gabions, aqueducts, karez, dam, intake, stream cleaning, protection wall, siphon, pipes, drainage); • Hospital, clinic¹; • School building¹; • Transport (tunnel, bridge, retaining wall, culvert, roads); • Power (diesel generator², micro-hydropower², solar panel, power lines); and • Environmental Management (erosion protection, reforestation, etc.). | <p>Programmes that increase community members' skills and knowledge of topics to improve their standard of living.</p> <p>a. General Education: such as health and hygiene education, child development training, training for traditional birth attendants, literacy³, and other topics not directly related to income generation.</p> <p>b. Productive Skills Training: skills needed to increase household income. Examples include kitchen gardens, animal husbandry, bee-keeping, food processing, and vocational education.</p> <p>Materials and equipment related to training are also eligible for NSP funding; however, costs are capped at 10% of the overall Block Grant or AFA</p> <p>^{2,2,3,4,5,6} Examples include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • carpet looms and weaving materials; • tailoring and embroidery machines; • flour mills; • wool spinning materials; • stores/markets; • bakeries; and • livestock and bees. <p>Communities can have separate training programmes for different target groups, but at least 50% of the trainees overall must be women.</p> |

Table Notes:

The following additional conditions must be met prior to NSP approval of school and clinic buildings: a) they must be endorsed by the relevant Ministry (Education or Health) and included in their Development Plan; and b) funding for operational costs must be secured. Refer to Annex B for complete instructions.

- Refer to the Diesel Generator Guidelines in Annex C.

- Refer to the Micro-Hydropower Policy in Annex D (forthcoming).
- Replaces the “Women and Disabled” and “Assets Transfer” categories in the previous OM.
- NSP encourages the inclusion of literacy components. Experience from around the world indicates that adult literacy classes are most effective when combined with a practical application; for example, health or business training activities.
- This cap may be increased on a pilot basis if the following criteria are met: a) a cost-benefit analysis is conducted and indicates that the venture is financially viable (has a positive return on investment), b) the subproject targets the poorest in the community, c) a business plan is prepared, and d) adequate business support services are available. Documentation must be submitted with the subproject proposal. Guidelines are forthcoming.

MRRD’s Standard List of Sectors and Outputs in Annex E includes subprojects that are on the NSP Negative List, and thus should not be used as a reference for eligibility. It was developed to provide a consistent method for coding subproject types across various MRRD databases.

Consistent with the spirit of “community driven development”, NSP encourages creativity and innovation in the identification of subprojects. Table 1 provides examples of the kinds of subprojects typically funded under NSP, but is not meant to unnecessarily limit community’s options. Other subprojects may be eligible provided the FP and community have adequate expertise to support subproject implementation. Communities are also encouraged to link with other development programmes active in their area to expand their access to resources and technical assistance. Proposals for subprojects that are not listed in this section will be reviewed by OC/MRRD on a case-by-case basis.

It is clear from the above extract that the NSP is a community development programme mandated to lay the foundation for a sustainable form of inclusive local governance, rural reconstruction and poverty alleviation. Its commitment to gender equity is stated as one of its guiding principles while the two arms of its programme - public infrastructure and human capital development projects - require the participation of both men and women. A more specific gender policy of the NSP is outlined below.

2.1.1 NSP and Gender Policies¹

Given Afghan traditions and *purdah* restrictions that treat men and women differently and limit their interactions in public life, Facilitating Partners need to make special efforts to work towards equitable access to and control over NSP resources for men and women in each community. This requires consideration of gender issues and principles throughout the program cycle, specifically:

- gender equity in NSP participation;
- gender equity in access to NSP information and training; and
- gender equity in subproject selection, decision-making, and control of program assets.

Experience of Facilitating Partners indicates that equity can be achieved even in extremely conservative communities if the basic equity principles are presented early in

¹ Extract from NSP Operation Manual, 10 January 2006

the mobilization process and time is taken to work with community leaders to identify ways the principles can be honored without compromising cultural and religious norms.

In mid-2008 a new NSP Gender Policy was developed to identify several practical measures for promoting effective and equitable participation of women in program activities. Since the measures address gender issues that occur throughout the program cycle, they are summarized at the beginning of this Section.

Table 2 NSP Policies and Practices for Promoting Gender Equity.

| Principle | NSP Policies and Practices |
|--|---|
| Gender equity in NSP participation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gain early agreement with community leaders about the ways in which women can participate in CDCs in a culturally acceptable manner. • Organize parallel meetings for men and women so that women do not need to mix publicly with men. Even if mixed meetings are acceptable, it may be better for women to hold separate meetings so they can feel free to participate and speak openly. • Maintain records of participants in events and meetings, disaggregated by gender (particularly those related to community development planning). |
| Gender equity in CDC representation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organize separate voting venues for men and women to encourage more women to vote. • If there are cultural constraints to holding mixed-gender meetings, have the communities elect a male and female representative from each cluster and organize male and female CDC sub-committees. Explain that male and female sub-committees have equal standing under the CDC. • Help communities identify methods for sharing information and coordinating joint decision-making between the sub-committees. At a minimum: • Officers of each sub-committee should serve on the CDC Executive Coordination Committee, which finalizes and approves (signs) all NSP forms; and |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minutes of all sub-committee/committee meetings should be shared between groups. |
| Gender equity in access to NSP information | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that programme information such as the “public notice board” is posted in a public place that is easily accessible to men and women. If a mosque is chosen for information, posting information, another posting place accessible to women should also be chosen. |
| Gender equity in access to NSP training | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure equitable delivery of training to male and female CDC members. At a minimum, all key officers of both sub-committees should be trained (Chairperson, Treasurer, and Secretary). |
| Gender equity in decision making and control of project assets | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inform community leaders that at least one NSP-funded subproject should be prioritized by women and managed by the women’s CDC sub-committee or by a project committee nominated/approved by the women’s CDC sub-committee. • Ensure that all NSP forms are signed by at least 2 male and 2 female officers. |

(Source: NSP operation Manual, 10 January 2008).

If FPs are unable to carry out these practices in some communities, they need to submit a plan to the OC that outlines alternative gender equity arrangements.

Table 3: Overview of Key Changes to the NSP Operational Manual

| Key Changes | Consultations |
|---|-----------------------------|
| <p>Gender Policy Gender</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No longer any “Women’s CDCs”. Instead, each community will have a (Aug 09) single CDC with the possibility of “Men’s and Women’s Sub-Committees”, each with chairperson, treasurer, secretary. • One male and one female should be elected from each cluster (quam). May increase the total number of CDC members. • 10% minimum allotment to women replaced by the policy that at least one of the funded subprojects must be a stated priority of the Women’s Sub-committee and managed by them (or others designated by them) | <p>Gender Working Group</p> |

(Source: NSP, World Bank Supervision Mission, October-November 2009, p9)

The commitment of MRRD and the government of Afghanistan towards gender equality and empowerment are clearly stated in its official documents outlined above. This was borne out of the recognition that Afghan women have been excluded from participating in the social and economic life as a consequence of 30 years of war and turmoil. The NSP in particular has come up with very clear targets and guidelines with regards to its gender equity policy and has refined its approach and the implementation of its programmes based on lessons learned in the field with its FPs. The following section offers a methodology that could be applied as a benchmark to assess the gender mainstreaming strategy of the NSP and other MRRD programmes using the criteria identified in a Gender Based Analysis (GBA).

3. Gender Mainstreaming

A gender mainstreaming strategy requires that a gender equality perspective is incorporated in all policies and programs by those involved in policy making. In this respect, the Afghan government and MRRD have explicitly stated its gender equality strategy in all its key documents highlighted above as well as identifying gender equality as a cross cutting theme within its development pillars. Underlying this strategy is the recognition that development policies and programs have different impact on men and women due to their different life situations and socio-economic realities. As such the different roles of men and women must be understood so that their needs and priorities could be addressed by appropriate policies that would correct gender imbalances.

Nonetheless, the existence of gender policies or gender sensitive documents does not automatically translate into gender mainstreaming strategies. Numerous efforts have been directed by governments, NGOs and stakeholders in the developed as well as the underdeveloped world over time, to create conditions for men and women to have equal opportunities for realizing their full potential and to contribute to the national political,

social and cultural developments and to benefit equally from the outcomes. With the MDG and the Beijing Platform in particular, gender mainstreaming strategies have been adopted by institutions all over the world to promote gender equality and empowerment of women. In the case of Afghanistan, the time required for achieving these objectives of gender equality and empowerment may be longer due to the severity of the social, economic and cultural constraints. Nonetheless, what should follow from these commitments would be an explicit gender mainstreaming strategy at all levels of its ministries and programs. The following section outlines the GBA approach that could be applied to Afghanistan as a benchmark to identify gender mainstreaming outcomes of policy interventions.

3.1 Methodology for Assessing Gender Impact

A Gender-Based Analysis (GBA)⁷ analyses can be undertaken to review the gender equality impact of development programs as the direct outcome of a gender mainstreaming strategy. The GBA in this case is adopted as a measure to evaluate the application, effectiveness/impact and outcomes of a gender mainstreaming strategy of MRRD programs particularly the NSP from a policy and action oriented perspective. The GBA template designed by the GBA directorate and some of its guiding principles are reproduced below. It measures the immediate and intermediate outcomes of development programs in three dimensions:

- Access:** Ability of men and women to have equal access to policy, program or legislative activities, which includes eliminating barriers to access and/or not creating barriers for them and promoting such access
- Inclusion:** Representation throughout the policy/program process, which results from the ability of diverse groups (disability, age, sexuality, race, ethnicity) who participated effectively in the development of a policy, program or legislative activity
- Benefits:** Advantages/gains intended to results from a policy, program or legislative step and/or activity are equally available to both men and women.

The ultimate goal of applying GBA is its impact on moving policy/programs/legislation towards equal outcomes relative to gender and not gender equality per se. The following principles should be kept in mind in the analysis:

- measure the movement of projects from gender neutral to gender sensitive which means the factors that affects outcomes for both men and women must be considered and compared

⁷ The gender-based methodology used in this analysis is developed by the Gender-based Analysis Directorate, Canada. The GBA approach is chosen in this case as this preliminary review is applied to findings from research reports on the NSP. It does not involve field studies where a more comprehensive Socio-economic Gender Analysis (SEAGA) like the one developed by the FAO could be applied.

- consider gender from all perspectives, such cultural/racial diversity, economics, sexuality, etc., and assess policy, program or legislation based on the realities of males, females and the diverse group thereof
- provide a means to gather data on gender realities. There is also a need to understand how to analyse and interpret data to set benchmarks related to gender for a policy, program or legislation. If there are no benchmarks, then the data can be used as a baseline to measure future improvements against
- be a “living document” to which best practices and new ideas will continually be added
- be incorporated into the measures that will normally be used to track results and evaluate policies, programs or legislations as part of good evaluation and not time-consuming separate exercise. Therefore, performance measurement activities such as who will collect the data, analyse the data should be defined as part of the program performance measurement process.

٣.٢ Limitations

This evaluation of the NSP from a GBA perspective rely on findings from government documents and published research materials on the NSP and gender in Afghanistan. Its assessment will therefore be preliminary in nature in the form of a review and assessment based on inferences derived from existing research findings.

As such conclusions regarding the gender equity and mainstreaming achievements based on these criteria can only be inferred as these criteria could not be directly assessed as this report is not based on field studies that could gauge the depth of the impact of policies on gender. Hence findings from the literature in relation to participation, leadership roles and decision making are used as proxies for the GBA criteria - access, inclusion and benefits. The fundamental point of analysis remain – that is both men and women should have equal access to policy and programmes, equal representation throughout policy/program process and equal advantages/gains from policy and programs as clearly defined by the Gender Policy of the NSP outlined in its OM. It is further limited by the information available at the time of writing. While limited, the findings from these studies should illuminate the mode of gender relations in Afghanistan at present and identify the challenges ahead.

٤. NSP Achievements at a Glance^٤

- Coverage of NSP: As of the end of December ٢٠٠٥, NSP covers ١١,٤٤٠ villages in ١٩٣ districts across all ٣٤ provinces.

^٤ MRRD Strategy and Programme, Poverty Reduction through Pro-Poor Growth, January ٢٠٠٦

- Election and training of CDCs: CDCs have so far been established in 1,307 villages through a democratic election process.
- Both men and women have participated in CDC election in every village. The total number of CDC members up to now is 30,303 and nearly half are women.
- Training have been delivered to the CDCs on the election process, the importance of people's contribution and the effective planning of development interventions.
- Block Grants: A total of US\$2,600,463 of block grants has been committed, of which USD1,083,094,63 has been disbursed to 1,170 communities for their projects

Further Achievements as outlined by the Mid-Term Evaluation of the NSP^o

- The NSP has reached 22,000 rural communities covering 38,000 rural settlements
- The NSP has benefited 10,0 million people and established 10,000 CDCs
- 14,000 projects in 8,000 communities has been financed with Block Grant disbursements amounting to US \$66,1 million and total Block Grant commitment of US \$14,6 million
- More then 4,000 sub-projects have been completed successfully

In addition the MTR identified significant evidence of:

- Increased public perceptions of national solidarity achieved through state building
- Improved state-civil society relations
- Greater awareness of the activities of the government
- Empowerment of rural communities through a new form of community governance
- Increased perceptions of community solidarity through processes of community governance
- Economic development through improved productive capacity and the provision of work
- Increased economic activity through improved infrastructure and savings through lower costs of production

^o The Mid-Term Evaluation of the National Solidarity Program (NSP). This evaluation was based on a qualitative empirical data from extensive national and sub-national level interviews, studies of 11 provinces, interfacing with provincial governors, RRD, OC and FPs, Household surveys and engineering assessment. Refer to pages ^o and 17 for summary of achievements and corresponding details of analysis.

- Improvements in quality of rural life
- Less corruption in areas that have effective CDCs

٤,١ **Impact of NSP: Findings from the Literature**

Governance and Community Driven Development (CDD) through a consultative representation in the Community Development Councils (CDCs) constitute the two pillars on which the NSP rest within its overarching aim to eradicate poverty. The mid-term evaluation of the NSP cited above offers a comprehensive and insightful study of the NSP by examining its achievements and drawbacks into its two-year implementation period. The report considers the efficiency and effectiveness of the implementation, its potential impact and longer-term contribution to governance and development in Afghanistan. The main findings above demonstrated the potential of the NSP framework in supporting its main principles and objectives of:

- expanding representative and participatory governance through the CDCs
- community development through the implementation of CDDs.

The following section will focus on the assessment of the NSP from a gender mainstreaming perspective based on the framework outlined in section ٣.

٤,٢ **NSP: An Assessment from a Gender Perspective**

An assessment of the achievements of the NSP from a gender perspective also be contextualized within the two key roles - representative governance and community development. The assessment outlined below applied the GBA criteria of access, inclusion and benefits to the findings from the literature reviewed using participation, leadership roles and decision making as proxies for the GBA criteria of access, inclusion and benefits.

٤,٢,١ **Findings from the Mid-Term Evaluation of the NSP**

Participation

- While the CDCs were found to be representative of their community often bringing together different family and tribal groups that had been previously antagonistic, by means of the cluster of representatives and negotiated sharing of the leadership roles. The election process has also met the criteria set out by the NSP – secret ballot, monitored by external observers (FP, OC). In Nangarhar, women were required to instruct a male to vote for them.
- Fifty per cent of the CDCs surveyed demonstrated an understanding of and a commitment to democratic governance model involving participation and accountability to the whole community (men and women).

- Although not fully empowered, the women's shuras surveyed had successfully involved and communicated with other women in the communities by creating forums for discussion of community issues
- The NSP through the CDCs has given the opportunity for women, especially younger women to meet and discuss their concerns where previously women had no contacts outside their homes.
- Women's Participation may vary by region and ethnic groups. The participation of women outside their own shura did not occur in CDC in provinces such as Nangarhar, Kundoz and Takhar. In Kundoz women could not participate in CDC meetings due to cultural reasons but made representations on behalf of women to elders or male relatives on the CDC. In Bamyan, the deputy leader of the CDC is a woman who can participate fully in the meetings although householders only referred to the male as leaders. In Nangarhar the case is more extreme as women were excluded from CDCs although they were kept informed of CDC business.
- In the Takhar community there was little evidence of women's participation.
- Cultural realities lead to request for separate CDCs by women.

Leadership roles

- Women CDC members clearly had a leadership role for the women in the community and were able to discuss and represent women's interests. However, they clearly did not have a role as leaders of the whole community even when they sat in a mixed shura. Cultural limitations to the acceptance of women in such a role were evident in all communities.

Decision making

- In two CDC in Balkh the women's CDC, though with clear ideas of their own on village issues have clearly been excluded from the decision making process
- In Kabul, Bamyan and Balkh, women had varying degrees of participation in setting community priorities but not in the work of the projects
- The separate women's CDC in Balkh appeared not to have any influence in decision making

Implications on Gender Relations

- The evidence from the NSP Mid-Term Evaluation Report (MTR) suggest that where the CDC had assumed leadership role in the community, women's leadership role of women is more commonly recognized although they still have subordinate role in regard to general decision making.
- Where leadership is shared with traditional authority figures, in spite of the existence of formal arrangements for women's representation, they had little

influence and may be specifically excluded from participation in community decision making.

- Women's ability to overcome these cultural constraints are further hampered by their relative lack of education, literacy and knowledge of public affairs.

Similar evidence of access, inclusion and benefits of Gender Equity Policy of the NSP can be inferred from findings from several studies outlined below. The depth, quality and long term impact of these policies, however, requires a separate assessment. These preliminary achievements nonetheless are noteworthy given the highly unequal status of Afghan women and the social and cultural constraints that governs gender relations in Afghanistan. More importantly, these findings reflect the awareness of the challenges ahead as well as continuous monitoring of programme impact.

٤.٢.٢ Findings on Women's Participation in the NSP^١: The World Bank Supervision Mission ٢٠٠٥.

- The Afghan economy is characterized by the low participation rate of women, and only ١٠٪ are believed to have access to employment opportunities. Cultural norms and exclusionary practices (made acute during the Taliban era) have left most women unable to make monetary contributions to household income. The women that do participate in the economy are largely concentrated in a few sectors of activity: legal agriculture and agro-processing, carpet weaving, sewing/tailoring and illicit poppy cultivation. Women's involvement in the formal sector has been essentially in the civil service, with a focus on health and education.
- The NSP is having a significant impact by affording women opportunities to be involved in electing the local development councils (above ٨٠٪ of the women eligible to vote). In some cases, more women than men have turned out to vote, which has been surprising in a conservative Muslim society. However, not always this is translated into influence in subproject prioritization, so a portion of the block grants have been set aside specifically to help women which leads to a growing interest and pressure in gaining influence in local affairs, which needs careful nurturing in ways that are not seen as a threat to cultural values on gender relations. Little advances have been attained towards the inclusion of disabled people on work sites in some provinces.

^١ The World Bank Supervision Mission) of the NSP, October-November ٢٠٠٥, p.١٥-١٦)

- The so called ‘livelihood or women income generation sub-projects’ are mostly tailoring and livestock or poultry related projects. Amounts dedicated to them are mostly around \$3,000 (10% of total subproject costs to which the communities are entitled) and implementation modalities also differ from community to community. While most of the tailoring sub-projects, for example, involve a certain amount of training and the supply of sewing machines to trainees, there are places where the trainees are entitled to keep the machines and others where they are not. In the latter case the CDCs invoke the fact that more women could be trained making the subproject last longer. In some tailoring subprojects CDC male members try to sell clothes produced in the workshop to ensure sub-project sustainability.
- In reality the livelihood sub-projects serve mostly the needs of the participants involved in them, and of their families. This may translate either in a better diet in the case of livestock projects, or access to cheaper clothes in the case of the tailoring project. These initiatives appear to be aid approaches, rather than economic development ones. They target mainly the most vulnerable segments of the village population: widows and handicapped, and their design do not bode well for income generation.
- While including income generation sub-projects may be a good add-on to the infrastructure projects NSP is now financing, they need to be designed in a way to ensure their business success. Income generation projects should also be accessible to both men and women. Especially in Afghanistan where the bulk of enterprises are operated by both women and men and where cultural norms make it difficult to single out women. A better way to ensure success of both men and women entrepreneurs might be to design approaches that are not geared to men or women specifically but which would make sure to include women among target groups.
- Furthermore income generation projects should not only target ‘vulnerable populations’. While there are successful income generation programs targeting vulnerable groups (CARE HAWA, for instance) and there are numerous vulnerable people in Afghanistan (widows, handicapped, returnees, IDPs, etc) a clear distinction needs to be made from the onset with respect to the approach taken and basically to the difference between aid and economic development.

ξ,ϒ,ζ Findings on Women’s Participation in the NSP^ν: The World Bank Review of the NSP 2006.

^ν The World Bank Review of the NSP, May 16-29, 2006, p. 7-8)

- The establishment of female CDCs under the NSP has enabled women to take part in village level activities which was not previously possible. Some women are traveling to neighboring villages to attend training classes, and in some instances to undertake procurement of subprojects. Some female CDCs have organized literacy classes for their members and are managing community savings. These are notable results of the NSP. However, in villages where female CDCs have been formed, participation in election of CDC representatives by female was generally high, but their ability to directly influence decision making on the choice of subprojects and use of Block Grants for income generating activities has been limited. Progress with regard to inclusion of vulnerable groups to benefit from block grants is poor.
- The government policy has clearly formulated gender equity targets within the education and health sectors, which along with the NSP are among the programs with the largest popular outreach and coverage. There is a general nation-wide support for the urgency of reaching women/girls with health and education services. There is also recognition about the role of women in promoting health hygiene and similar social programs.
- In the case of the NSP, the policy has always been to have one CDC for a village community. The revised operation manual approved in February 2000 allows possibility to have women CDCs. From the governance point of view, creation of both men and women CDCs may not be an instrument to strengthen local governance and inclusive development. Also, there is a risk that separate women CDCs may weaken the participation of women in decision making on important community issues. On the other hand, cultural barriers prevent the participation of women in local governance in a single CDC that is usually dominated by men. The merits and demerits one common CDC vis-à-vis separate male and female CDCs need to be further discussed in the forthcoming period.
- Previous mission recommended gender mainstreaming strategy, operational guidelines and gender indicators but those have not been implemented. The NSP should design a specific, gender mainstreaming strategy and operational guidelines. It would be useful to form a committee or group led by Human Rights and Gender Department of MRRD to address gender issues in the program and provide the MRRD/OC support to develop a gender mainstreaming strategy. Some potential activities would be: (i) sustainable livelihood activities that build on rural women's traditional skills (livestock, horticulture, and agriculture); (ii) social protection projects such as literacy linked to skills development, improving women's community allotments (vegetables, herbs, other plants), training in group savings/microfinance which could support income generation, health emergencies, and female schooling etc. Donors may provide additional support to this department to strengthen its policy and strategy development capacity.
- **[Actions:** (1) MRRD' to prepare a strategy for mainstreaming gender in the NSP by July 10, 2000 before the Bank's MTR; (2) based on this strategy, OC to include indicators in the project performance indicator matrix by July 10, 2000;

(۳) OC to ensure that gender mainstreaming activities are integrated in the facilitation process.]

ξ,ϒ,ξ Findings on Women’s Participation in the NSP: AREU[^]

Forms of Women’s Participation

- One of the new types of leadership the NSP is gradually ushering into communities is a sort of women’s leadership. The inclusion of women on CDCs has, in some instances, given a platform for women to discuss their ideas and potentially influence development. However, giving legitimacy to women’s opinions, decisions and right to information has been riddled with problems. Contextually, while the state of women’s rights in Afghanistan has been given a lot of international attention, Afghan institutions and programmes such as the NSP have not specifically addressed this problem. One reason for the lack of gender inclusive programming may be that “for the majority of government officials in Afghanistan, a gender approach is regarded as an elusive theoretical import with little contextual relevance”. Where the gender approaches presented by the international community may be elusive and irrelevant to the context of the Afghan government, they lack even more understanding and applicability to the communities who outright reject them.
- Where the NSP is rolling out, many communities have not agreed to comply with the requirement to include women in elections or in CDC membership (if elected). Still, FP reports and field research have found that there are many ways in which women are participating in the NSP. Where women are already recognised within their community’s cultural context as leaders or have recognised talents in management, community organising or accounting, they have been elected not only to their CDCs but also as leaders in their CDCs. Though this situation is rare, over half of the FPs have been able to name an example of one or two such cases. The next section further illustrates the way women are (and are not) engaged in CDCs.

Types of CDCs and Women’s Participation

AREU research has found ϳ main types of women’s participation in CDCs:

- **Mixed CDCs**

[^] Palwasha Kakar, “Fine-Tuning the NSP: Discussions of Problems and Solutions with Facilitating Partners”, AREU Working Paper Series, November ۲۰۰۰.

The ideal form of a CDC that exists, though rarely, in Afghanistan is the mixed CDC of men and women who are equal participants and decision-makers. This form seems to exist where women already have outspoken public roles in the community. Especially in communities where women leaders pre-date CDCs, which happens across ethnicities in Afghanistan, women are elected and participate in the CDC. Moreover, in all such cases mentioned by FPs, these women are further elected to leadership positions within their CDC.

The not-so-ideal side of mixed CDCs happen in communities where women do not have publicly vocal roles. Still there are cases where women are elected to the CDCs to comply with NSP policy. Unfortunately, the majority of mixed CDCs fall into this category. Often these women CDC members are token members who do not participate in discussions or decision-making. They may not even attend the meetings except when the FP is present. AREU field research in Bamyan found that women may send a male relative to sit in on the meeting in their place. However, in most cases they may want to participate, but in the mixed setting such women may have a hard time speaking up or having their words respected enough to be considered.

- **Segregated CDCs**

The NSP compromise to mixed CDCs are gender segregated CDCs. Women are allowed to participate in elections and be selected as CDC members. Then both men and women are popularly elected to the CDC by the whole community but the men and women sit separately. Both meetings are part of the same CDC. They share and discuss each other's written minutes. They may also have representatives that go to each other's council and report back and forth, such as the son or husband of a female CDC member or the wife, sister or mother of a male CDC member.

- **Women's CDC Branch**

A common problem in women's participation in the NSP is that communities do not allow women to participate in elections for mixed gender representation due to their cultural norms. In other words, communities do not like men to vote for both men and women, nor women to vote for both men and women. In some communities such as those observed in Herat, FPs (DACAAR and UN-Habitat) have been able to convince communities to allow women to vote and elect only women to form a women's branch of the CDC. In such cases, men vote for male representatives for the men's CDC and women vote for female representatives for the women's CDC.

In other cases, such as in the Rodat District of Nangarhar, communities do not allow women to participate in elections at all. Instead, a few select women who are interested, have some degree of mobility in the community, and may have some level of education are asked by the FP or appointed by the women of the community to form the women's branch of the CDC. Therefore, there are two types of women's CDC branches and each case depends on whether women are allowed to elect each other or not.

Often FPs such as IRC use this second form of a women's CDC branch to give input to the male CDC decision-making and to represent some form of women's voices in the community where women are not allowed to participate in elections or have their own council. The women's branch may act more as an advisory or lobby group to lobby for specific projects the women want. The first type of women's CDC branch mentioned usually take on a more formalised role and may share their minutes with the men's CDC or have a male relative represent the women's CDC to the men's CDC and back. This representative would summarise the points of each meeting to the four key members of the CDCs—president, deputy, treasurer and secretary.

The problem with all of these forms of segregated CDCs is that it is still up to the men to make the final decision since they sign for the money and the bank account is registered to them. The men can choose to integrate the women's opinions or not. There is no formal mechanism that ensures women's decisions are taken into account and integrated with men's decisions.

Summary

- While there are major problems surrounding women's legitimacy and participation in the NSP, FPs have come up with innovative solutions to begin to deal with them. IRC is trying to overcome gender biases by developing specific regional gender programmes and increasing female staff to 50 percent. IRC is also using the Ulema Council's Special Action Committee on Religious Affairs to support the authority and give religious backing to women's participation in overcoming cultural norms. Lack of time remains to be a problem until the Oversight Consultant/MRRD chooses to change the time frame in which the basis of gender inclusive participation and elections is to take place. DACAAR has set up two separate CDCs in communities that take turns implementing projects to ensure women's decisions are taken into account and that they have access to the same information and funds. Finally, a five year capacity building plan is being implemented by AfghanAid to address the lack of women's leadership experiences, confidence and literacy to prepare a new generation of female CDC members.

5. Lessons Learned: Policy Considerations for a Gender Mainstreaming Strategy

Findings from the above studies provided ample evidence with regards to the achievements of the NSP in delivering the objectives of i) expanding representative and participatory governance through the CDCs and ii) community development through the implementation of CDDs. The coverage of the NSP, the total number of CDCs and membership (of which half are women), the number of projects completed, the CDC election process and the increase in public awareness among others are some indicators of the success of the NSP in Afghanistan.

A consensus is also evident with regards to the increase participation of women as the outcome of the NSP programme in general and the Gender Policy of the NSP in particular. While their ability to directly influence decision making has been limited, the establishment of CDCs under the NSP undoubtedly recognised as enabling women to participate in village level activities which was not previously possible.

Despite the overall success of the NSP, the research findings also identified barriers and challenges to the participation of women in the NSP programmes. Of extreme importance is the social and cultural limitations posed by Afghan society whereby women have traditionally assumed a subordinate role. This cultural subordination is compounded by their lack of education, illiteracy, lack of knowledge and experience in public affairs which serve to inhibit their participation in the CDCs and CDD projects. Nonetheless, it is also noted from these findings that women's participation varies according to region, ethnicity, class, age and status. Preliminary evidence indicated that the Hazara community are more open to the participation of women, that older women and women with higher social status are more likely to be acceptable to take part in CDCs and in leadership roles.

Based on the research findings and evaluations outlined above a gender inclusive approach should consider that:

- Women's participation in Afghanistan although limited at present, should be seen as the first steps towards full participation that will have a long term impact on equality and women's empowerment in the future
- Time will be the mitigating factor as the culture of subordination will be slow to change, particularly as Afghan women are mainly illiterate, lack education and a knowledge-base that will lead to emancipation
- A comprehensive gender strategy/policy will have to consider the sensitivities that governs cultural and political realities that governs gender relations in Afghanistan
- The gradualist approach to establishing CDC and to engage the participation of women taken by FPs is most appropriate as it builds trust within the communities. This is particularly significant in overcoming cultural constraints especially by engaging the Mullahs and village leaders in this process. This approach has been proven useful in persuading resistant communities to embrace change especially in the preparation to include the participation of women in the CDCs.

7. Beyond Gender: The NSP as a Social and Economic Entity

As stated from the outset, the purpose of this report is to provide MRRD with an overview of its gender equality policy and mainstreaming measures that have taken place under the present government with specific reference to the NSP. The documents

consulted and reviewed for this purpose suggest detail recommendations and follow-up actions that could be taken by MRRD in relation to the NSP in general as well as the gender-specific actions. As such these recommendations have not been reproduced here. In fact this report has merely pointed out the literature and its findings that could serve as a guide to detailed analysis and policy action.

Nonetheless, evidence of access, inclusion and benefits of Gender Equity Policy of the NSP has been inferred and noted from the studies reviewed. The depth, quality and long term impact of these policies, however, requires a separate assessment. These preliminary achievements nonetheless are noteworthy given the highly unequal status of Afghan women and the social and cultural constraints that governs gender relations in Afghanistan. More importantly, these findings reflect the awareness of the challenges ahead as well as continuous monitoring effort by the NSP as to the impact of its programmes.

As a closing note it is best to be reminded that gender is about men and women as well as boys and girls. Hence a comprehensive strategy on gender will have to be formulated to target specific groups of excluded men and women as well as boys and girls within the rural communities. They could include the widows, the handicapped, the Internationally Displaced Persons (IDPs), the Kuchi tribe, orphans and disadvantaged children. This theme could then drive MRRD's follow-up programmes and shift the emphasis from targeting women to targeting the excluded to expedite social and economic development in Afghanistan as a whole while at the same time not leaving women behind.

This theme has also emerged in the reports reviewed whereby there are clear indications for expanding the role of the NSP to consider the bigger issues of integrated rural development. The challenge to take on this role has been suggested in detail the MTR of the NSP in particular and to some extent in the Exit Strategy of the OC which proposed a more comprehensive rural development programme to be undertaken by the NSP within which a gender-oriented approach is clearly embedded. Similarly, this theme has emerged in other MRRD documents, particularly that of the NABDP PH II. sequire

٦.١ Immediate Follow-up Measures by MRRD

A comprehensive gender mainstreaming strategy following the World Bank Review of the NSP ٢٠٠٦:

- [Actions: (١) MRRD' to prepare a strategy for mainstreaming gender in the NSP by July ١٥, ٢٠٠٥ before the Bank's MTR; (٢) based on this strategy, OC to include indicators in the project performance indicator matrix by July ١٥,٢٠٠٥;

(۳) OC to ensure that gender mainstreaming activities are integrated in the facilitation process.]

- Address the social and cultural barriers to the participation of women as an excluded group in the development and reconstruction of Afghanistan by addressing the issues related to the limited participation of women identified in the Workshop on “Prospects of Scaling Up participatory Approaches in Rural Afghanistan ۲۳-۲۴ May ۲۰۰۶ such as:
- Recognising that Afghan women are worse off as a consequence of the ۲۰ years of conflict in terms of health, education, mortality, literacy, etc.
- Identifying measures that improve women’s participation as an excluded group in the context of a comprehensive gender mainstreaming strategy.
- Address the Issue of gender relations/male domination as a necessary measure to increase female participation by involving and educating community leaders, mullahs, husbands and family members on the crucial role of women in development and reconstruction of Afghanistan.
- Addressing the ineffectiveness of female CDCs from a social cultural perspective by distinguishing culture from religion and hence the crucial need to sensitise men on these issues to prevent women from being marginalised.

Documents Consulted

Government Documents

The National Development Framework (NDF), Revised ۲۰۰۲

The MRRD Strategic Plan

The Interim Afghan Development Strategy (I-ANDS)

The NSP Mid-Term Evaluation, PRDU, University of York, May ۲۰۰۶

The Joint Government and Donor Supervision Report on the Implementation progress of the NSP, April-May ۲۰۰۵.

The World Bank Supervision Mission of the NSP, October-November ۲۰۰۵

The World Bank Review of the NSP, May ۱۶-۲۹, ۲۰۰۶.

The National Solidarity Programme (NSP) Operation Manual, ۱۵ January ۲۰۰۶

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