



Getting it Right: Security, Peace and Development for Afghan Women

May 2009

Policy Recommendations From the Funders' Network for Afghan Women

Introduction

The Funders' Network for Afghan Women (FNAW) is a coalition of dedicated foundations and granting organizations, as well as advocates, policy-makers and other agencies supporting Afghan women's groups. As actively engaged donors and institutions who share many years of experience working to support effective Afghan partner organizations, we are deeply alarmed at the possibility of the international community failing to end war in Afghanistan and the consequences that this will inevitably have on its population.

With the fall of the Taliban, Afghan women came back from the brink. But the gains made since 2001 are fragile. Any prospects of better lives for Afghan women and girls are inherently linked to the success of the development, reconstruction and the poverty alleviation agenda of the international community and the Afghan Government. The common ingredients for success in any efforts are those that will invest in people and that will create openings for sustainable change in the treatment of women. Below are a set of key issues and recommendations.

There is A Plan – Commit to the Afghan Compact

Observers frustrated with the lack of progress in Afghanistan often call for a comprehensive plan of reform. That plan already exists, though it is frequently forgotten by the media, policymakers, and those designing assistance programs for Afghanistan. The Compact includes Afghanistan's Millennium Development Goals for 2020 and comprehensively addresses development needs across key sectors. Meeting these objectives is inherently tied to improving security in Afghanistan. There must be a genuine commitment made to see the ambitions of the Compact through to fruition. The following report narrows in on key areas addressed in the Afghan National Development Strategy, the basis of the Afghanistan Compact, giving specific recommendations therein that we consider to be strategic for building human capital and creating an enabling environment for women's human rights.



Recommendation:

□ Afghanistan Compact objectives should be integrated into all US assistance programs in Afghanistan and referred to in all key policy documents produced by the US Government.

Moving Forward: Engaging for the Long Run

There must be a firm commitment on the part of the US administration and other donor governments that there will be no quick-fixes in Afghanistan. For any efforts to translate into successes there must be substantial investments of time, money and human resources. Critics of the international intervention in Afghanistan must take care to acknowledge the time needed to bring transformative change to a country plagued by war for 30 years, and should contribute to constructive dialogue by focusing on forward-thinking, innovative solutions, rather than on withdrawal and abandonment.

We urge application of well-devised, sustainable strategies that invest in Afghanistan's human capital, equipping Afghan women and men with the skills, support and resources to move their country forward into peace and stability. We urge robust commitment to economic and social development, empowering women's participation in these processes. We urge achievement of accountability, quality and impact from foreign development assistance to Afghanistan- all aimed at creating the enabling environment necessary to sustain women's development successes, security and basic rights.

I. Social Development

Women's Status: A Security & Development Issue

The rights afforded to a nation's women and the investments made into women's futures speak volumes about that nation's prospects for political stability and development. There is a fundamental link between human security and equity between men and women. It is no coincidence that Afghanistan ranks in the bottom five countries in the U.N.'s Human Development Index, exhibiting among the worst human development indicators in the world in its levels of illiteracy, infant and maternal mortality, lack of access to healthcare, and unemployment. Maternal mortality in particular remains at the second highest rate in the world despite increases in basic health units and the training of female health professionals. The low social status of women negatively impacts the country's economy. Social development efforts are indeed underway in Afghanistan, but are marred by a lack of coordination, poor project management, inefficiency, corruption and a lack of accountability for results.

Investing in People: Prioritize Education

There is perhaps no stronger antidote for war than a strong education system. Infusing Afghanistan's Ministry of Education with resources to recruit and train teachers, build school libraries, and open more schools for both boys and girls, will help stop the next generation from resorting to violence as a means to power by giving them more and better opportunities for their futures. But Afghanistan's classrooms need more than money. Technical assistance, mentoring and experienced advisors need to help the Ministry of Education deliver on its promises. Most teachers have no training and many do not even hold a high school diploma. They apply outdated pedagogy in the classroom and students thus lack problem-solving and analytical skills. The Government has a strong national education strategy on paper, but reaching its stated objectives has been slow-going and inefficient.

Afghan schools suffer from a striking lack of materials. Many schools have no textbooks, or at the best, too few. There are almost no school libraries, science laboratories, and teaching



materials. A relatively small amount of funding for each school could help them be far better resourced, improving the quality of education. Afghan women who provided input to this brief called for peace education to be introduced into schools, to stop the next generation from resorting to war to resolve conflicts. This could feasibly be done through the Ministry of Education, as well as for adults through the Community Development Councils of the National Solidarity Program (NSP).

While a large women's literacy program is under development by the Afghan Government, the lack of reading material makes it difficult to sustain a literate population. Supporting the establishment of public libraries will help change this. Literate women are more likely to be empowered socially, economically and politically in their families and communities, and literate men are more likely to be accepting and supportive of women's empowerment.

Recommendations:

- Build educational infrastructure including school libraries, science labs and playgrounds, and ensure that there is funding and quality control for the printing and timely distribution of textbooks for all pupils in all subjects.
- Improve the quality and accountability of teacher training at the Ministry of Education; ensure 50% of teacher trainees in the new teachers' colleges are female; and ensure all in-service teachers without post-secondary education receive training in pedagogy and in their subjects.
- Make a U.S. funding priority the resurrection of a public library system with investment in local libraries and plans for covering recurrent costs in every district of Afghanistan.

2. The Protection of Women from Violence

Strengthening the Rule of Law for Women's Human Rights

While still an uphill battle, there is valuable progress to protect and build upon successes already achieved women's human rights. Changes to the status of women since the fall of the Taliban Government have been welcomed by Afghan men and women alike¹. Concrete changes offer the opportunity to transform the way that women are perceived and the power they have in their society, within a single generation. Approximately 40% of Afghan girls are in school now, more women work outside of the home, and "some 60% of women also voted in the 2004 presidential election, and women won 26% of parliamentary seats in 2005."² Women are politically represented at the local level through the Community Development Councils, and nationally in parliament. In a society surfacing from three decades of violent conflict, and ranked towards the very bottom of the Human Development Index, these achievements are not modest and should be acknowledged.

Yet, war has eroded the civil and criminal legal system, law enforcement, and human rights protection, mechanisms that were only beginning to emerge last century. Weak governance, warlordism and extremism have helped to flourish a culture of corruption and impunity;

¹ See for instance, the ABC News Survey of October 2006 which found 80% of Afghans supported women in parliament, 70% agree that women should be able to work; and 88% support girls' education. In 2007, Isobel Coleman and Craig Charney reported that "Four-fifths say women's rights have improved since the Taliban fell, which is a major reason why a majority still says the country is headed in the right direction. In fact, when they are asked what democracy will bring them personally, women's rights is a leading response."

² Isobel Coleman & Craig Charney (June 18, 2007) "There's Grounds for Hope in Afghanistan", The Globe & Mail.



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women and girls are often treated as second-class citizens. Justice and security services are often places where women are most at risk. The weaknesses of these services jeopardize other gains made to date. Further, gains in women's rights are highly vulnerable to being used as bargaining chips in negotiations with armed elements, as well recently demonstrated by the proposed Shia personal status law which was criticized for effectively legalizing marital rape.

While Afghan family law contains many provisions intended to protect women from violence, uphold their right to divorce, and provide other rights under family law, such laws are rarely enforced. Women's rights are routinely violated. While there has been some progress building a new justice system nationally, the priority now is building a strong justice system at the district level as a means of better protecting the human rights of women.

Domestic violence against women in Afghanistan is so rampant, unchallenged and often extreme in its brutality. Domestic violence often encompasses cruel forms of abuse amounting to torture. Forty-three percent of all marriages in the country are child marriages; in one province (Khost), 91.6% of marriages were forced (as distinct from arranged)³. There is nearly total impunity for domestic violence in the country. The justice system is insensitive to a woman's rights to be protected from harm and prioritizes instead the upholding of family honour. The exceedingly high levels of violence against women, among the world's highest, fray the country's social fabric and severely impact its prospects for equitable development. Gender-based violence must be addressed as part of the development agenda in Afghanistan. Both preventative (such as counselling services for men and women and rights education) and responsive services (women's shelters, women's access to long-term independent housing, the prosecution of perpetrators, and access to medical and psychological services) should be expanded as priority actions.

Women's access to housing is a special area in relation to women's security and rights. One area that stands out is the need to make available housing for women, who experience or are at risk of domestic violence and forced marriage. Outside of a handful of emergency shelters for abused women, there are no housing options for women who cannot live with their families, or who face abuse in their homes. This situation helps to preserve women's economic dependence on men and keeps them vulnerable to violence.

Recommendations:

- Support the Afghan Government in its programs for the training, recruitment and professionalization of the police, including introducing protocols for investigating domestic violence allegations and support for the establishment of a well-funded police watchdog organization. Work with local groups to develop a mandate for monitoring the police force's respect of the rights of women and girls.
- Support the Ministry of the Interior to recruit and train more women police, including for senior appointments; draw on global experience and partnerships to find appropriate strategies to prevent and respond to violence against women and in communities.
- Finance the establishment of at least one family court in each province as part of a national network of such courts, provide US technical assistance and mentorship to Afghan prosecutors to prosecute cases of violence against women, child marriage and forced marriage; and work with the Afghan Ministry of Justice on a robust program to crack down on bribery in the court systems.

³ http://www.globalrights.org/site/DocServer/final_DVR_JUNE_16.pdf?docID=9803



- Uphold women's human rights in law and in practice in any engagement with political groups or factions in Afghanistan and ensure that repressive measures against women, including the denial of education and medical care, are never re-imposed.
- Support the establishment of protected social housing and assistance programs focused on supporting protecting and empowering women at risk from domestic abuse and violence

3. Economic Development

Addressing Poverty as a Cause of Insecurity

The 2007/2008 National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment found that almost every other Afghan is living under the poverty line, with an additional 20% about to cross over⁴. Grinding poverty, the result of a 40% unemployment rate or very low wages, is causally linked to insecurity and to corruption. The children of the poor are more likely to work than to go to school, maintaining the cycle of poverty, which is ultimately linked to the country's prospects for peace and security. There is much evidence pointing to the impact of unemployment, lack of vocational skills, livelihood destruction or interference (for poppy farmers) and poverty on the ability of the Taliban to effectively recruit new fighters. Individuals frequently fall into fighting for the insurgents out of economic necessity and joblessness⁵.

Continued development and long term commitment to the country's universities and vocational training institutions are critical. In particular, it is vital to ensure that graduates can find employment and that businesses are aware of the training opportunities. Building a skilled workforce is a powerful way of rapidly moving Afghanistan away from dependence on foreign assistance. While vocational training institutions have opened, trainers are needed who can spread practical skills to women and men. Much like the public schools, vocational training institutes suffer from a lack of quality in training and diversity in skills programs, and need to be more accessible to populations in the provinces.

Recommendations:

- Through human and technical assistance from vocational training institutions abroad (i.e. South Africa, India, Pakistan, Canada, and the US), create a national program to mobilize partnerships with Afghan vocational training institutions, aimed at building the pathway to marketable, more varied post-secondary employment opportunities for Afghan women and men throughout the country.
- Work with the Afghan Government to create and fund a robust employment-creation plan, targeting rural areas affected by the insurgency. Special attention should be made to ensure that the plan targets the most vulnerable, addresses local needs and proper monitoring measures are put in place.

4. Aid Effectiveness

Quality Counts More than Quantity

Supporting the sustainable development of Afghanistan's education, public health, civic reform, security, and legal and justice sectors is pivotal for long-term security. Unfortunately, US-funded programs have in some cases had less-than-optimal impacts and have been marred by inefficiency, damaging Afghan perceptions of the international community. Profit margins on reconstruction contracts are often 20% and sometimes as high as 50%. One report noted that

⁴ <http://www.cso-af.net/nrva2007/main.php>

⁵ See, for example, <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/talkingtothetaliban>



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there are “up to five layers of subcontractors, each of whom usually takes between 10-20% profit on any given contract but in some cases as much as 50%”⁶, and a news report provides the following example: “A stretch of road between Kabul and the airport contracted by USAID to the Louis Berger Group cost \$2.4 million per kilometer, compared to \$100,000 to \$600,000 per kilometer for normal roads even through difficult terrain”⁷.

Large consultant salaries, projects with bloated administration budgets, and luxuriously funded programs which fail to produce timely and/or significant results have fuelled resentment among the populace and translate to wasted American taxpayer dollars. Afghan women interviewed by Counterpart International for this report pointed to the need to support big-impact, long term infrastructure projects which help secure the economy over the long run, are visible signs of international assistance, and create jobs. At the same time, in many cases, modestly funded grassroots projects with commitments to long-term programming have had compelling impacts in the development sector, and the US should explore how it can channel resources to such initiatives without adding too many additional levels of administration and budgets. One successful women’s educational initiative in Kandahar expressed its concern that skilled and dedicated community mobilizers with the capacity to make real change were not being supported because they did not have the time or awareness to go through lengthy proposal application processes. On the other hand, organizations and consulting firms which are known to have unethical project management and financial practices have no difficulty securing donor funding. In many cases, NGOs operate according to where donor funds are accessible and are thus oriented to work as service delivery organizations, rather than pursuing long-term agendas for social change, as part of an effective civil society. This creates a vicious cycle of short-term projects not connected to the goals of ANDS. The training resources of the National Solidarity Program could be reviewed and shared with other accredited community-based interventions. All external assistance programs must do a better job in sustaining continuity: building on successes and replicating effective models, as well as building true capacity within Afghan civil society organizations to take over development and peacebuilding work when the international community steps back.

Building and nurturing the development of Afghan human capital, along with mechanisms to prevent and spot corrupt practices should be integrated into every project. The development agenda has been marred by corrupt practices among national NGOs, including personal skimming into project budgets, kick-backs, awarding procurement contracts to friends or relatives, absenteeism, false reporting, and other problems. Such practices negatively affect the reputation of the NGO community, including unfairly for those who manage projects ethically. Such practices spur resentment from local populations. Similarly, corruption and inefficiency in the Afghan Government is counter-productive to development ambitions. Afghanistan currently stands in 176th place (of 180) on Transparency International’s Perceptions of Corruption Index (2007). The international community needs to work with the Government to stop corruption within Government ministries and to speed up the reform of the civil service, led by the Afghan Civil Service Reform Commission. The US Government must intervene in the continued use of patronage networks in the Afghan Government. Afghanistan urgently needs good governance to facilitate security, the rule of law, and the protection of women’s human rights from the bottom up and top-down.

⁶ Matt Waldman, ACBAR Advocacy Series, “Falling Short, Aid Effectiveness in Afghanistan”, (March 2008).

⁷ Statistics from Kevin Rafferty, “The International Community is Betraying Afghanistan,” Japan Times, April 10, 2008, <http://search.japantimes.co.jp/cgi-bin/ea20080410a1.html>.



Recommendations:

- Build better accountability mechanisms into the US development agenda in Afghanistan. As a starting point, there must be more transparency in USAID-awarded contracts. Programs should be designed to deliver results within reasonable amounts of time, while also being allowed time to grow results and adapt to lessons learned over time. All programming should make use of Afghan resources, including human capital, infrastructure and locally produced inputs as well as work within the Afghan agendas.
- Take a lead role in revitalizing the Special Consultative Board for Senior Government Appointments and ensure it is able to act according to its mandate. Provide significant technical assistance for the prevention and prosecution of corrupt practices at all levels of the Afghan Government.
- Work with Afghan partner NGOs to promote ethical project management mechanisms, efficient budgeting and implementation, and prevent and treat seriously corrupt practices.

Conclusion

The continuing challenges highlighted in this document should serve as the impetus to finally becoming serious about bringing peace to Afghanistan. As was recently well articulated: “we shouldn’t give up on our strategy of institution building – the fact is that it’s not so much that it has failed, but that we have hardly tried”⁸. To bring sustainable peace to Afghanistan, and stability to its neighbourhood, as well as assured security in the United States and elsewhere, the US Government must commit to a long-term engagement in Afghanistan, recognizing that lasting change demands an investment in assistance programming of the highest quality and, accountability. Most importantly, it must respond to and reinforce Afghan-led initiatives. The United States assistance program should be dedicated to **building human capital at all levels** among Afghans, and especially among Afghan women. Fostering a vibrant **enabling environment for women, their health, education, rights, and peace of mind will lead the way to sustainable, successful development for all in Afghanistan.**

We have wedged open the window of opportunity in Afghanistan, and now we must enter it. Much is at stake, in Afghanistan and beyond.

⁸ <http://www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?id=5371&l=1>