

# I

## ANALYSIS OF CONTEXT

### 1. OVERVIEW OF WOMEN'S SITUATION

Women constitute roughly 49 percent of Afghanistan's 23.3 million people<sup>1</sup>. The development of women's human capital is strongly articulated in principle 5 of the Afghanistan Compact (AC) and highlighted as one of the three goals of gender equity in the Interim Afghanistan National Development Strategy (I-ANDS). The importance of this imperative cannot be overemphasized because women constitute an enormous reservoir of human resources that could significantly bolster the government's effort to rebuild the nation.

The current situation of women in the country presents a serious challenge to human development. The women of Afghanistan are among the worst off in the world, both in comparison to Afghan men and with women of most countries. Their situation is particularly poor in the areas of health, deprivation of rights, protection against violence, economic productivity, education and literacy, and public participation. The average Afghan woman has a life span of 44<sup>2</sup> years, around 20 years short of the global average. While in

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general, women around the world live longer than men, women in Afghanistan die at a younger age than men. And despite the high level of male casualties during the 25 years of war, men still outnumber women by significant levels in the contemporary era, with an average ratio of 104 men to 100 women for all ages.

It is the unusually harsh realities for women in Afghanistan that circumscribe women's situation and consequently shorten their life. It should be noted, however, that such realities cannot be viewed in isolation from the circumstances that the country experienced during the past decades of conflict or from harmful traditional practices that have shaped the current position of women in the family and society.

<sup>1</sup> Pre-census 2004 results; Central Statistics Office (CSO)

<sup>2</sup> *Afghanistan National Development Report 2004: Security with a Human Face, Challenges and Responsibilities*; 2004, UNDP Report



The low life expectancy of women may be partly explained by recent data. For instance, underage marriages are reportedly high among girls, precipitating a high fertility rate which stands at 6.6<sup>3</sup> children per woman. This is remarkably high, considering the global average of 2.65 children per woman in 2002-2005, and the average of 5.02 children per woman for least developed countries<sup>4</sup>. Early marriages and frequent births contribute to an extremely high incidence of maternal mortality which is estimated to be 1,600 to 1,900 per 100,000 live births and equates to almost one maternal death every 30 minutes, one of the highest in the world. Almost half of the deaths among Afghan women in the reproductive age group are from complications related to pregnancy and childbirth, 87% of which are reportedly preventable.

Afghanistan ranks among the lowest in the world in *human development* (173<sup>rd</sup> of 177 countries) and *human poverty indices* (3<sup>rd</sup> poorest). Thus, poverty and human deprivation are predictably experienced by the majority of the population. Widespread poverty, overall insecurity and harmful traditional practices affect women disproportionately and seriously limit their access to services, opportunities, and

resources that are needed for the full development of their human potential and exercise of their rights. Currently, health services remain inadequate, substandard, or inaccessible to women. This may be partly attributable to low public expenditures in health. Compared to South Asia's average of 4.7%, Afghanistan spends only 0.6 percent of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) on its public health program, and its per capita health expenditure is only \$1 compared to the region's average of \$21. Afghan culture prohibits treatment of women by male doctors, yet nearly 40 percent of the basic health facilities have no female health workers and basic reproductive health services are available only in 17 percent of health facilities in the country. Anemia is prevalent among women, occurring among 71% of pregnant women and 89% of non pregnant women<sup>5</sup>. The incidence of tuberculosis is also high for women, with three times as many women as men recorded as suffering from tuberculosis in the 25-34 year age group<sup>6</sup>. Restrictions to female mobility in seeking care and choosing their own treatment independent of male approval are also among the factors that prevent women from accessing quality health services.

<sup>3</sup> *Best Estimates of Social Indicators for Children of Afghanistan*; May 2006, UNICEF

<sup>4</sup> *World Population Prospects: The 2004 Revision Highlights*; United Nations Secretariat, Department of Economic and Social Affairs

<sup>5</sup> *Afghanistan Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS2), Volume 1. Situation Analysis of Children and Women in the East of Afghanistan*; September 2001, UNICEF

<sup>6</sup> *TB Control in the Face of Conflict* (Ahmadzai, H.); November 2006



Investment in education, especially for girls/women, is important to human development. However, due to insecurity, inadequate facilities, lack of female teachers and lack of motivation to send girls to school, the status of girls/women in education remains a matter of concern. The general lack of protection of schools from attacks, inadequate and distant facilities with few female teachers result in lower enrolment and higher drop out rates among girls. Early child and forced marriages are among other factors contributing to higher drop out rates among girls. Afghan women have one of the lowest literacy rates in the world and the worst disparity with men. The adult literacy rate in Afghanistan is estimated at 36% while for adult women, it is estimated at being 21%<sup>7</sup>. The literacy rate of Afghans between 15-24 years old is 34%, and can be broken down into 50% literacy for men and only 18% for women. Furthermore, the gross enrolment rate for females at the primary school level was 54% in 2004, while the total gross enrolment rate was 94%<sup>8</sup>. Thus, boys are currently benefiting more from education than girls. Boys are twice as likely as girls to complete primary school, and this difference widens at the secondary school level, and widens further still in higher education<sup>9</sup>.

Afghanistan remains one of the poorest countries in the world. Discrimination against women manifested in imposition of limited social, economic and political roles makes women more susceptible to poverty and exacerbates the way women experience poverty. Local studies show that skewed power relations within the family result in uneven sharing of the hardships of poverty among members of the household. For example, female household members get a lower quality and quantity of food than male members<sup>10</sup> and the percentage of girls aged 7-14 who work without pay tends to be higher than boys of the same age.<sup>11</sup> A measure of disparity in women and men's economic status in Afghanistan is provided by the comparison of the female-male Gross Domestic Product calculated on the basis of Purchasing Power Parity-adjusted per capita GDP. This was estimated at \$402 for Afghan women and at \$1,182 for men in 2002<sup>12</sup>. It means that men are approximately three times more economically well off compared with women in Afghanistan. The inadequate living amenities such as roads, transportation, power and water, impede improvement in health and livelihoods of citizens, especially of rural women who are involved in mostly unpaid productive activities in addition to the routine reproductive and care duties they are undertaking.

<sup>7</sup> *Afghanistan: National Reconstruction and Poverty Reduction: The Role of Women in Afghanistan's Future*; March 2005, The World Bank

<sup>8</sup> "Ed Stats. 2006" World Bank Group Web site. [http:// devdata.worldbank.org/edstats/cd5.asp](http://devdata.worldbank.org/edstats/cd5.asp), accessed September 2006

<sup>9</sup> *Millennium Development Goals, Islamic Republic of Afghanistan Country Report 2005: Summary Report*; 2005, UNDP

<sup>10</sup> *Alingar, Laghman: a case study of rural livelihoods*; Kerr-Wilson, A. and Pain, A., 2003, Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU)

<sup>11</sup> *Afghanistan Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) 2003: Progress of Provinces*; May 2004, CSO and UNICEF

<sup>12</sup> *Afghanistan Statistical Yearbook/ Issue No. 24*; September 2003, Central Statistics Office, Kabul



The combined effects of poverty, dire state of health, and limited education seriously impair women's access to the paid economy. Afghan women's productive contributions in agriculture and livestock management are underestimated and underpaid, and limited access to economic resources such as capital, market, information, and technology hinders women's entry to the paid economy. Gender based wage discriminations were also found to be prevalent, particularly in harvesting, construction, commerce, and weaving<sup>13</sup>, and control over income by women is generally frowned upon in the country. Land, which is a highly valued economic capital, especially in an agricultural economy like Afghanistan, is generally owned by men. The loss of women's inheritance entitlements to male relatives upon the death of a husband is another reason why very few women own land, a factor that reinforces the economic vulnerability and dependency of women, especially those who are heads of households.

All these are linked to the subordinate status of women which in turn leads to the political disempowerment of women in the family and in society. The last three years has witnessed increasing participation of women in politics and public life. However, the conditions under which Afghan women

exercise political rights remain constrained by social prejudices, violence, and are otherwise subject to the control of men. For example, a report<sup>14</sup> found that 87 percent of those surveyed believe that women needed the permission of their husband or the (male) head of family before they could vote. Of the men surveyed nationally, 18 percent said that they would not allow their wives to vote at all.

One area in which the new Government has supported women successfully has been in ensuring strong involvement of women in national institutions, including the civil service and the National Assembly. The 20 percent female representation in the Constitutional Loya Jirga led to significant advancements for women in Articles 83 and 84 of the Constitution, guaranteeing seats for women in the upper and lower houses. Some of these formal gains were realized in the elections, where, according to one report<sup>15</sup>, 19 women representing 7.6 percent of the seats in the lower house would have been elected without quotas, and affirmative action provisions in the Constitution allowed women to win an additional 49 seats. In the provincial elections, the results were similar. Out of the 124 seats reserved for them, women won 29 seats outright. In the civil service, 17.9 percent of the total posts are

<sup>13</sup> *Women at Work: Gender, Wealth, Wages and Employment in Rural Afghanistan, 2002-2003* (Maletta, H.); November 2003, Ministry of Agriculture and Animal Husbandry, Information Management and Policy Unit, Government of Afghanistan

<sup>14</sup> *Voter Education Planning Survey: Afghanistan 2004 National Elections*; 2004, The Asia Foundation

<sup>15</sup> "The recent elections showed some surprising gains for women" by Wahidullah Amani and Salima Ghafari, (ARR No. 195, 15 Nov. 05) Institute for War and Peace Reporting



occupied by women,<sup>16</sup> though many observe that they are largely consigned to traditional and marginal positions. At the community level, the government has mandated the National Solidarity Program (NSP) to ensure women's participation as actors and beneficiaries in the program. The concrete impacts of this policy to women's leadership and political participation remains to be determined.

The growing involvement of women in non-domestic activities and constant advocacy for equality with men may be fuelling increased violence in the home and public spaces. However, women's low status within society, disempowerment and the pervasive culture of female subordination remain the leading causes of violence against women (VAW). Forced marriage, especially for underage girls and widows, as well as physical, sexual and verbal abuse are rampant, but lack of formal reporting, recording and analysis of cases hinder the adoption of measures to address them. Domestic violence, perpetrated largely by intimate partners,<sup>17</sup> is still a hidden phenomenon that necessitates education and legal measures such as improved family law, protection for women at risk, counseling, and support for the economic autonomy of survivors of violence. Public violence, assaults and verbal harassment

that are specifically motivated to undermine women's advancement<sup>18</sup> systematically deny women their rights to participation in Afghan society.

## 2. STATE MEASURES TO ADVANCE WOMEN'S STATUS

### 2.1 Progress during the era of Bonn implementation

Following the end of over two decades of armed conflict, Afghanistan worked with the international community to adopt the Bonn Agreement which served as a framework for the establishment of democratic governance in the country. The implementation of the Bonn Agreement resulted in the adoption of a national Constitution, and the reinstatement of the government apparatus with its executive, legislative and judicial bodies.

The Bonn process laid the foundation for increasing women's involvement in government and for more concerted action to advance the role of women in the country. The Agreement called for specific attention to the role of women, and established the Ministry of Women's Affairs to act as lead ministry for the advancement of women's status. The participation of women was deliberately ensured

<sup>16</sup> *Afghanistan Statistical Yearbook*, Issue No. 24; September 2003, Central Statistics Office, Kabul

<sup>17</sup> *Counted and Discounted: A Secondary Research Project on Violence Against Women in Afghanistan*; May 2006, UNIFEM

<sup>18</sup> "The Situation of Women and Girls in Afghanistan", Report of the Secretary General, United Nations Economic and Social Council, Commission on the Status of Women, 48<sup>th</sup> Session; March 2004



throughout the Bonn process, establishing a precedent for increasing women's involvement in decision-making and political life in the country. Women comprised around six out of 60 delegates to the Bonn negotiations held in November 2001, and during the emergency *loya jirga*, 12 percent of the participants were women. Furthermore, 20 percent of the seats in the Constitutional *Loya Jirga* were reserved and filled by female delegates.

Under Article 22, the national Constitution enshrined the policy of non-discrimination and equality in rights and duties between women and men. The democratic processes that were laid down by the Bonn Agreement also saw unprecedented levels of involvement of women as they made up 40 percent of the registrants for the presidential election and filled 27 percent of the seats in the National Assembly. The government ratified the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women, adopted gender mainstreaming as the strategy for advancing women's status under the Berlin Plan of Action, and positioned gender as a cross-cutting perspective in the national development framework. The era also witnessed developments in the lives of Afghan women as they joined the electoral and civil service reform processes and returned to economic, political and social fields that have been unjustly closed to them for over two decades. Girls and women went back to schools and government started to look into areas where women's rights are most seriously violated. The government established a Commission on the Elimination of Violence against Women (CEVAW), composed of nine government ministries and institutions which were tasked to initiate policy and program measures that would strengthen the government's response to violence against women (VAW).

## 2.2 *Developments after the completion of the Bonn Agreement: The National Action Plan for the Women of Afghanistan*

### AFGHANISTAN COMPACT AND ANDS HIGH LEVEL BENCHMARK ON GENDER

*The National Action Plan for Women in Afghanistan will be fully implemented; and in line with Afghanistan's MDGs, female participation in all Afghan governance institutions, including elected and appointed bodies and the civil service, will be strengthened.*

With the completion of the terms of the Bonn Agreement in 2005, the new Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and the international community signed the Afghanistan Compact during the London Conference of 31 January to 1 February 2006. This event marked the continuation of partnership between Afghanistan and the international community to restore peace and reconstruct the country, building upon the gains of the past five years.

The Afghanistan Compact seeks to pursue an agenda for restoring peace and rebuilding the nation under the pillars of (a) Security, (b) Governance, Rule of Law and Human Rights, and (c) Economic and Social Development. Under this Compact, the Afghan Government commits itself to building peace and prosperity while the international community commits to providing support for the realization of human development objectives.



To concretize these commitments, the Government of Afghanistan and the international community adopted the Afghanistan National Development Strategy (ANDS) during the Paris Conference of 2008. Among others, the ANDS embodies an analysis of the priority problems affecting Afghan women and men and sets out policies, outcomes and benchmarks for measuring progress in the coming years.

*The NAPWA is a central component of Afghanistan's effort to implement its commitments to women in an organized, systematic, coordinated and sustainable way. It aims to bring together short and long term measures that Government and its partners will pursue to advance women's status.*

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It is within this context that the development of the National Action Plan for the Women of Afghanistan (NAPWA) became a reality. Both the Afghanistan Compact and ANDS reiterate a commitment to implement the Constitutional guarantees of non-discrimination and equality of women and men in rights and duties. Within the Afghanistan Compact's principles of cooperation, both the Afghan Government and the international community committed to "recognize in all policies and programmes that men and women have equal rights and responsibilities" and to

*"build lasting Afghan capacity and effective state and civil society institutions, with particular emphasis on building up human capacities of men and women alike."*

The ANDS positioned gender at the core of the national development agenda by recognizing it as a cross cutting theme and prioritizing three goals, namely: (a) to attain the 13 gender-specific benchmarks of the Afghanistan Compact/I-ANDS, including the five-year priorities of NAPWA; (b) to realize the gender commitments that are mainstreamed in each of the ANDS sectors; and (c) to develop basic institutional capacities of ministries and government agencies on gender mainstreaming.

The NAPWA is a central component of Afghanistan's effort to implement its commitments to women in an organized, systematic, coordinated and sustainable way. It aims to bring together short and long term measures that Government and its partners will pursue to advance women's status. The full implementation of the NAPWA is the main measurable benchmark through which government seeks to realize its goal on gender equity and thus address the difficult situation of women that was described above.

The NAPWA vision of a peaceful and progressive country where women and men enjoy security, equal rights and opportunities in all aspects of life is linked with the overall effort to restore peace and reconstruct the Afghan nation. NAPWA has been conceptualized within the context of the national vision of a better life for all and its implementation will therefore be pursued within the same context. Its full implementation is not only about fulfilling the benchmark of the Afghanistan Compact and ANDS. It is about attaining a better life for all – women and men alike.