FEMALE HUMAN RIGHTS IN AFGHANISTAN:
ISSUES AND OPTIONS FOR BILATERAL DONORS

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Bilateral Donors Working Group
Islamabad

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Consultant
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I take this opportunity to extend my appreciation to the contributors to this paper who generously gave time amid very demanding work schedules to share their thoughts, concerns and ideas. The frankness with which many spoke bore witness to a deep concern for that half of Afghanistan’s population which has been substantially ignored throughout the country’s long years of men’s power struggles. I hope that this report will serve its purpose well and help the bilateral donors, and others, gain committed support for Afghanistan’s women to work towards fair opportunities, and due recognition, for participation in all aspects of their daily lives.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS, AND DEFINITIONS

Abbreviations used

NGO Non-government organisation
UN United Nations
UNCDAP United Nations Coordinated Disabled Afghans Programme
UNDP United Nations Development Programme
UNHCR United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF United Nations Children’s Fund
UNOCHA United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
UNOPS United Nations Operations
WFP United Nations World Food Programme
WHO United Nations World Health Organisation

Definitions

[Terms used in this report do not have any internationally consistent definition. The definitions given here are widely recognised, but readers may be familiar with different interpretations.]

gender: refers to those roles assumed by men and women which are socially determined

reproductive role: paid activities which relate to the care and maintenance of the family and household

productive role: economic activities carried out for the purpose of generating income to the household

community role: activities carried out to maintain the position of the family within local society
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This study was commissioned by the Bilateral Donors Working Group on Afghanistan with the purpose of identifying and summarising key female human rights issues across the different regions of Afghanistan, analysing policy responses to them by bilateral donors, UN agencies and NGOs; outlining any female human rights issues associated with bilateral humanitarian/developmental assistance to Afghanistan; and identifying possible options to respond to those issues in future provision of assistance to Afghanistan.

Women's status in Afghanistan varies widely between and within regions but in general their full participation in society is constrained by tradition, politics and poverty. Women are engaged in a variety of productive and reproductive activities, however few appear to have access to or control over decision-making processes. The situation is further complicated by the current context of civil conflict in which different factions control different areas of the country and govern according to their own "rules." In the absence of a functional national constitution and system of law and order, substantial violations of both female and male human rights are occurring.

In the southern and western regions of Afghanistan (Kandahar, Herat), the Taliban leadership has suppressed female rights significantly beyond usual traditional norms: women are denied formal employment and other economic opportunities or participation in any formal areas of decision-making. Schools for girls have been closed, and only female health education is permitted. Female seclusion is enforced, and women face significant health risks. Only female health workers are officially permitted to work in these regions. Female ex-patriate staff and visitors, including diplomats and donor representatives, have been denied access to the local leadership on past occasions. There are no ex-patriate and few female staff employed by aid agencies in these regions due to the extremely difficult work environment.

In the south-eastern provinces of Nangahar, Kunar and Laghman (ruled/influenced by a multi-party shura), schools are open to girls and boys, and women are employed in the health and education sectors. Women cannot work in mixed gender offices or institutions - ie most other sectors - and there have been unsuccessful attempts in the past to keep women from working at all. In Taliban-held Wardak, Logar, Paktia and Ghazni, girls' schools have remained open, and women continue to work in health and, to a lesser, degree, in income generation. There are few female ex-patriate and only small numbers of local aid personnel working in these provinces.

In the north (Mazar-e-Sharif and surrounding areas; controlled by General Dostum), urban males and females have access to non-segregated education and employment in a variety of fields. Local and ex-patriate aid workers have reasonable mobility into rural areas. The situation of rural women, however, is similar to that of women in south-eastern Afghanistan. In Kabul (Rabbani Government), women also have access to non-segregated employment and to educational opportunities though their security (ie problems of rape, abduction, mutilation, forced marriages, etc) and pre-1992 level of emancipation are today constrained by increased poverty, conflict and changes in political attitudes. Poorer women are more adversely affected than more affluent women. Development agencies are able to more easily employ local and ex-patriate female staff in the north and in Kabul.

This information represents only a preliminary sketch based on available data and observations. In general, international development agencies working in Afghanistan lack adequate information on the situation and priorities of Afghan women and, although women are often identified as beneficiaries of poverty alleviation activities, there is little data collected on the impact of these activities on them. More detailed and specific information is needed to gain a true picture of the position of women in different areas of the country to guide development assistance planning, along with greater consultation with women about their priorities. Donor projects should include clear objectives and adequate quantitative and qualitative indicators to measure impact. Opportunities to effectively program with women should be easier to identify in less conservative parts of the country.
A key policy issue for NGOs, the UN and bilateral agencies has been how to respond to the different regional authority restrictions on female participation in the delivery or receipt of development assistance which exist predominantly in the south-east, Kabul and southern and western Taliban-held areas. Concerns about appearing to support political factions which strongly violated female human rights were reviewed in the wider geographical and historical contexts. It was concluded that withdrawal of support to such areas possibly exaggerated the political status of those in control, and further limited longer terms opportunities for women. The majority of contributors to the study felt that the UN should take a lead in gender policy and practice which it has started to do.

The majority of contributors to the study did not consider advocacy for women's (as part of human) rights to be an appropriate approach without a legitimate central government. They favoured a position of compromise, even with the strictest (Taliban) regional authorities. Non-confrontational strategies suggested and, in some instances, already found to be successful included: ongoing dialogue with regional authorities aimed at maintaining and increasing opportunities for women through improved understanding, including the participation of respected Afghans and/or Islamic scholars; increased use of gender planning and analysis approaches in program development; gender training of aid personnel and counterparts; and community-based programming; employment of more female ex-patriate and Afghan staff (there are extremely few working in the country at present), especially in light of male/female contact restrictions; and focused research on women in all regions of Afghanistan. Some UN agencies have recently begun to implement such strategies, most notably the World Food Programme.

Three-quarters of bilateral donors considered that gender integration planning was inappropriate or not possible given the present situation in Afghanistan, with many stating that their agency's gender policies did not apply or were only loosely applied to humanitarian relief because of its non-permanent nature (as opposed to ongoing development programs). At the same time, most considered gender-sensitive programming to be important. There is a need for clarification of the position of bilateral donors on application of their gender policies to such assistance channels. The study concluded that it is feasible to undertake gender-sensitive planning in a protracted relief operation such as currently exists in Afghanistan and that humanitarian assistance should be subject to the same gender policies as other bilateral agency programmes.

Based upon analysis of the issues raised, two options have been presented for bilateral donors. One option is to enforce broader funding agency gender policies on humanitarian funding for Afghanistan. Another or concurrent option is to coordinate with the UN to develop a consolidated gender strategy and/or better informed country policy for Afghanistan.
1 BACKGROUND TO THE DISCUSSION PAPER

PURPOSE

1. The current interest in the position of Afghan women stems from a conflict in values of their role in society. On the one hand are external agencies bringing assistance. They seek to increase the participation of women in the process of reconstruction. This reflects donor countries' policies on equality between men and women, and the application of development strategies which have proved to be successful elsewhere. It also results from the heightened focus on women following The Fourth World Conference on Women and the Non-Government Organisation (NGO) Forum on Women held in Beijing in September 1995.

2. These efforts are being thwarted, in particular, though not exclusively, by an indigenous politico-religious "party". The Taliban want to impose upon Afghan society their own extreme interpretation of Islam. This includes the strict seclusion of women. Women have been obliged to withdraw from all sectors of employment except health, where they may function totally segregated from men; girls have been denied the right to formal education. As a result, a number of aid projects have been halted.

3. This denial of women's participation in social and economic life has caused particular alarm because it represents a withdrawal of rights which women have previously enjoyed, as in Herat City in the west, or which women were consolidating within the aid context, as in the smaller, southeastern provincial capitals of Ghazni and Gardez.

4. It will perhaps be recorded as a quirk of history that the Taliban who so strongly oppose the participation of women are proving to be the greatest influence since the Soviets in catalysing interest in the rights of Afghan women.

5. Efforts to ameliorate this position through dialogue, to identify solutions or strategies have been frustrating and inconclusive. There are varying interpretations of these impositions by the Taliban themselves within the different regions under their control. There are differing viewpoints among aid agencies. For example, UNICEF has taken a strong stand which can be summarised simply as "if no girls in schools, then we cannot support education for boys". While the impact of this decision on the Taliban is not clear, it has set a precedent for aid agencies which all are not happy to follow, although many understand UNICEF's policy.

6. Anxieties about maintaining female programmes has deepened as authorities in other regions of Afghanistan adopt more conservative attitudes to women's participation as a result of the Taliban's accusations of their anti-Islamic values. The ultimate option open to aid agencies, not spoken as often as it is thought, is that when support cannot hope to reach half of the target beneficiaries - the women - then it is time to withdraw assistance from Afghanistan.

7. The origin of this paper lies in the increasing concerns of bilateral donors on how they should respond to such constraints on Afghan women's participation in and benefit from humanitarian/development support. The bilateral donors carry a three-fold...
responsibility. They are accountable to their tax payers, as the source of funds, who have expectations of equitable benefit between men and women. As representatives of their governments they are obligated to apply national policies with respect to women and humanitarian or development assistance. They have a responsibility to their implementing agencies to provide operational guidelines which comply with the above, but are realistic within the context of Afghanistan.

8. The purpose of the research was to prepare a discussion paper for bilateral donors which summarises the key gender issues related to humanitarian/development assistance to Afghanistan, and to identify possible options to address these issues in any future support. The full Terms of Reference are attached as Annexe 1.

METHODOLOGY

9. Background documentation was reviewed to provide understanding of the position of donors, and issues of female human rights in Afghanistan. During the course of interviews, many people provided papers on policy, practices, or relevant documentation; this has all been read, although it may not be directly referred to in this report.

10. Personal interviews were arranged with senior representatives of the bilateral donors, of UN agencies, of international and Afghan NGOs including those who have (or had) programmes in the most affected areas, and with members of the Advisory Group to the UN on Gender Issues in Afghanistan. In two cases interviews were conducted by telephone due to pressures of time and travel. Interviews were carried out in Islamabad and Peshawar, most often in the office of the interviewee. A list of all agencies which participated is included in Annexe 2.

11. In total 51 people contributed. An imbalance in sex ratios of 61% men to 39% women is explained by the paucity of women in senior positions both within bilateral donors, and particularly within UN agencies. Interviewees included 65% expatriate and 35% Afghan. Because of the latter's absence among donor and UN agencies, efforts were made to obtain good representation among the NGOs and Advisory Group. Between these a total of 27 people participated, with 44% men and 56% women, and 59% Afghan and 41% expatriate. A detailed breakdown of participants by sex and nationality is given in Annexe 3.

12. Interviews were similarly conducted throughout in an informal atmosphere by means of a number of open ended questions. Participants were encouraged to talk freely if they preferred, with prompting if key questions were not addressed. Interviews were targeted to last about one hour, although where discussion became lively they took rather longer. Confidentiality was assured: no individuals are identified in this report, and only agency names have been included in annexes.

TIME FRAME

13. The assignment was conducted over a period of 23 working days between 10 April and 21 May 1996. Although all interviewees were very willing to take part (and several did so outside of official working hours), their demanding travel schedules meant that interviews took place right up to day 21 of the planned time. Contact was considerably
frustrated by Islamabad’s frequently changing telephone system, and by Eid-ul-Azha which created a one-week standstill.

PRESENTATION

14. The paper represents the views of the contributors who spoke both in official and/or private capacities. Chapter 2 provides some historical context followed by description of the present situation on female human rights in different regions of the country. Chapter 3 describes how agencies respond to constraints on women’s projects, chapter 4 addresses the key female human rights issues for bilateral donors, and chapter 5 suggests possible options that they might consider. This final chapter is the responsibility of the consultant. Any ambiguities or errors can easily be raised by reference to the paragraphs which are numbered consecutively throughout.
15. It is well recognised that the rights of women have long been under-represented in Afghanistan. Historically improvements in the status of women have been introduced by the country's more progressive governments, starting with King Amanullah in 1921 when he established the first girls' school. All such efforts have resulted in corresponding counteraction by traditionalists who have viewed these steps as undesirable, Western, and non-Islamic.

16. Amanullah's reforms of 1928 included compulsory unveiling of women, and enforced Western dress for women and men. These were additional to new rights for people to choose their own marriage partners, and women to establish their own associations. Public anger was inflamed and contributed to civil war. After Amanullah fled the country, his successor withdrew all reforms offering improvements to the status of women, and reintroduced Islamic law which reinforced women's traditional position within the family.

17. For a lively account of the period between 1928 and 1959, readers are recommended to Woodsmall appended to this report. (She also addresses education, health, economic activities, and rural community development - sectoral interests and approaches which we are re-inventing today.)

18. In 1959, Prime Minister Daud again actively advocated the removal of the veil. Despite interference by the mullahs, reforms gained support. Women were given improved educational opportunities including university entrance, and were encouraged to work in offices and businesses. In 1964 they were automatically enfranchised through a decree providing men and women "equal rights and obligation before the law". In 1971 the marriage law was amended and people could legally choose their own marriage partners.

19. Yet the family, as the most important institution in Afghan society, remained the major influence on women, and men. "Family attitudes, dominated by males, not government guarantees, decided the future of girls." As has been experienced in highly developed societies, many men resented competition from women in the work place, and raised issues of sex discrimination.

20. Further major reforms favouring women followed the Saur revolution in 1978. The government issued a decree which was intended to remove what it considered to be unfair patriarchal and feudal ties between husband and wife. In the belief that women were economically exploited, it outlawed traditional cultural practices which were economically significant. These included a prohibition on bride price and a limit on dowries; forced marriage and levirate were banned; minimum ages for consent to marriage were set at 16 for females and 18 for males.

21. The economy of many households were seriously damaged by the prohibition on bride price, for some families this represented capital which could be converted to meet future needs.
22. Literacy programmes were expanded with the aim of providing basic reading and writing skills to all adults within a year. But the coercion of women into all forms of education cut to the core of male domination over women's external relations: it threatened family honour. For the few women who were sent to Soviet states for education, this sometimes proved to be a self-fulfilling prophecy. Young women returned with emancipated ideas which many found difficult to accommodate within traditional families. Some failed to return at all.

23. The reforms of the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan met with major resistance. This was initiated in Paktia Province, and rapidly spread. These resistance groups, of "mujahideen", won popular support throughout rural Afghanistan and in the face of conflict with the corrupting Soviets, women's seclusion became more closely guarded.

24. This polarisation of attitudes survives today. The years have brought increasing acceptance of women in education and employment, and produced a capable and valuable human resource. Most male Afghans state the lack of education as the major constraint on returning to Afghanistan; many want education for their daughters as well as for their sons. Yet for many others, the mere mention of "women's rights" and related slogans immediately recall bitter memories of Soviet attempts to undermine traditional values. Such ideas are still corrupting, Western, and non-Islamic.

25. The establishment of the Islamic State of Afghanistan in 1992 has reinforced this intolerance. In the absence of an accepted government, there is no consistent national policy on the position of women.

26. The mujahideen, present in all political parties including the Taliban, retain a strong commitment to the preservation of their honour - maintained, among other things, by the seclusion of women. The Taliban, or those who are genuine products of madrassas, have additional sources of resistance to women. Their training and segregated lifestyle may have introduced distorted ideas of women; they certainly have denied opportunity to develop appropriate communication and social skills to enable interaction with women.

27. Conflict increases risks to women, and hence to honour. This was most vividly verified by the atrocities committed towards women in Kabul in 1992. This risk may today account for part of the Taliban's most extreme position in Herat, where their unwanted occupation and increasingly unpopular decrees invite challenge from the local people.

28. Of the eight UN human rights instruments existing as of September 1992, Afghanistan has been party to five. Two exceptions are noteworthy. It agreed but failed to ratify the 1981 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women which declares that the maximum participation of women is essential to achieve full and complete development of a country. Nor did it agree to the Convention on the Rights of the Child.
PRESENT SITUATION

29. A comprehensive regional analysis of female human rights requires first-hand data gained from travel and discussion with Afghans inside Afghanistan. This was beyond the scope and time frame of this study.

30. Donors interested in advocacy would be better informed by a broader analysis of human rights, encompassing both women and men. In the absence in Afghanistan of a constitution, rule of law, and independent judiciary, and the presence of control by self-imposed, significant and substantial violations occur. The Taliban's continuedrocketing of Kabul is a strong indicator of a decline in moral principles by this initially peace-bearing faction who now ignore the rights of civilians. The wearing of the veil, whether decreed by political parties or custom, represents discrimination against women. Sources of information on human rights, including women's rights, are included at the end of this report.4

31. Female human rights in the context of humanitarian/development assistance might take a narrower view, perhaps addressing pragmatic issues associated with its distribution. Even this more limited view ought to consider wider issues than those brought up by contributors to the report. For example, legal rights to land might be an issue to explore, not because there is a legal system to which one might appeal, but with a view to obtaining community support for its control and access by land-owning female heads of households. Almost everyone focussed on the loss of previous rights (see Para.2). Less than 10% of the interviewees cited violations such as the exclusion from participation in community decision making, absence of rights over one's own body which by custom continue to be denied by marriages arranged to maintain tribal cohesion, secure inheritance, settle feuds, or merely to raise cash in times of need.

32. A regional summary is provided based on information from contributors, and personal observations. Most projects supported by bilateral donors focus on education, health, income generation/loan schemes, and peripheral agricultural activities such as animal husbandry, bee-keeping, vegetable growing, or poultry. As outlined above, conclusions from so limited a survey should be considered as indicative, rather than a solid basis for decisive action.

South-eastern region

33. More than 40% of assistance directed towards benefitting women goes to the eastern provinces of Nangarhar, Kunar and Laghman.5 This area falls within the influence of a provincial government based in Jalalabad, Nangarhar Province, comprising a multi-party shura of which many members are former commanders. Both the governor and senior shura members are accessible for discussion, including with expatriate women. Due to four years without major conflict, they take an active interest in aid projects - several have their own implementing agencies. The Shura carries substantial decision making authority on which agency works where, and undertakes its own form of monitoring. Much can be achieved by both honest and unscrupulous implementing agencies by knowing the right people whose strategies of influence include kalashnikov power.
34. In Jalalabad few women, other than nomads selling bangles, are seen in the bazaar, but women are allowed to work in health, education, income generation and agricultural activities (animal husbandry, poultry). Schools are open to girls as well as boys, with female teachers working in both. Women also work in the local hospitals and in the medical private sector. These employments are either for the exclusive benefit of women and children, or carried out from home. Women are not able to take up administrative duties in mixed offices or institutions.

35. In all sectors, and throughout the region, women function separately from men. Segregated office buildings, as well as segregated services, are the usual strategies adopted to enable women to work. This is particularly the case among NGOs, and by government agencies within non-Taliban areas. Generally the UN does not employ local women and there are no female expatriate staff with permanent duty stations within the region, although there are female monitors. Exceptions to this strategy can be found within the health sector, where women use separate facilities within a building shared by men. Separate transport arrangements are also required, although the age of the driver is not an issue. This is an indication that social pressure is very strong, to the degree that even an implied relationship between a woman and man can lead to immediate end of work of one or both. Such remarks cannot be lightly brushed off, and may be spread to make cruel mischief for man, woman, or agency. The whole region is predominantly Pukhtoon, although the internally displaced represent other ethnic groups.

36. The Nangarhar Shura has attempted to prevent women from working, and for a short time was successful. This was initially within the refugee camps and was possibly an expedient to maximise control over the more liberal (especially female) Kabulis, whose more open behaviour would attract criticism, or worse, from the Taliban with whom formal communications, but not alliances, are maintained. Agency pressure, and the visible and practical benefits of women working for women, retained women's opportunities within the limitations outlined above. A significant influence here was a quantitative impact on men: one NGO suspended the work of its 2,000 male staff, until such time as its female health programme could continue.

37. Female staff from Jalalabad can and do travel and stay within relatively remote rural areas. This reflects a pragmatic tolerance by rural communities who are happy to improve their overall situation, including that of their women. As in Jalalabad, implementation is segregated although community-based approaches to project identification and planning mean that some rural women are being involved, simultaneously but separately from men, in community decision making.

38. For over a year the provinces of Wardak, Logar, Paktia and Ghazni have been under the control of the Taliban, with a regional centre located in Ghazni City. (At the time of writing, it is rumoured that some of these provinces have reverted to control by Hezb-e-Islami who, having allied with the Kabul government, have ousted the Taliban without conflict.) Whether the result of administrative weakness and poor communications with Kandahar, or more open-mindedness, the Taliban in these areas have been relatively responsive to agency pressure to continue programmes for women. Girls' schools have remained functional, and women have continued to work in the health sector, and to a lesser degree in income generation. This has not happened without a good deal of
negotiations between local Taliban leaders and senior agency representatives. Senior Taliban representatives have been prepared to meet with expatriate women; a number of NGOs have, or plan to have, female expatriate staff based within the region. All are medical professionals.

39. An exception to the above practices is found in Nuristan, where it is the women who traditionally work in the fields while men stay at home -supposedly engaged in domestic and child-care duties. It is reasonable to assume that this reflects traditions which pre-date their conversion to Islam at the turn of the century. Like their surviving tribal affiliates, the Kalash Kaffir near Chitral, this role reversal necessitates increased interaction between the sexes, but it does not grant significantly greater freedoms to its women.

40. Both the provincial capitals, Jalalabad and Ghazni, and their surrounding districts and adjacent provinces are conservative. Traditionally women have been and are veiled, wearing either the full-length burkha or a large chaddar. This is essential to women's mobility and has been adopted by the many Kabulis who have moved into the region or the Jalalabad camps for the internally displaced. They in particular suffer from this increased exclusion from social life.

41. In summary, in south-east Afghanistan women's rights are typically constrained less by the Taliban than by traditional conservative attitudes and practices which:

* impose female seclusion which is institutionally reinforced
* generally restrict female participation in professional and community life
* reduce economic opportunities, in the main to domestic production, and very localised female markets with support from men
* probably deny control and access to property or land owned through previous legislation and Islam
* limit education (both formal and informal) of girls and women due to the increased domestic pressures upon them as a result of destruction and displacement, but still expected as part of their role
* impair mother/child health, resulting from all of the above.

42. Women's role is substantially confined to reproductive duties - that is, unpaid activities related to the care and maintenance of the household and its family members. Both urban and rural women are engaged in domestic-based production - that is work undertaken for economic purposes. This might include tailoring and embroidery, poultry, animal husbandry; although some of the end product may be used by the family, its main objective is income generation. It is doubtful if this income is sufficient to effect significant change in a woman's status. A small number of educated women take part in professional productive work, through the provision of services - as teachers, doctors, health workers - in return for salary. While these women positively contribute to development, there is not presently sufficient data on them to know how much this changes their status within the family and community. Nor do we know how they manage their domestic responsibilities - through a triple role as professional, wife and mother?, or does some other woman have to carry an additional burden?
South and western regions
43. These two regions are discussed together since they represent the largest geographical area held by the Taliban. Kandahar, in the south, is the administrative and strategic centre of the Taliban movement. It is the source of Taliban leadership; in practice it is difficult to ascertain what this amounts to since there is neither coherent policy, nor consistent practices throughout the areas under Taliban influence. Herat is the provincial capital of the western region, where the Taliban governor maintains a high degree of autonomous rule.

44. The Taliban successfully disarmed commanders and their "muhajideen" troops and speedily brought much longed-for peace. The positive impact of total security of road travel over vast distances, with only rare sight of a weapon, is a treat for any resident of NWFP; the psychological benefit for people who have endured a decade and half of war is unimaginable. Although a rare opportunity for most Afghans, such a journey might be viewed differently by a Herati woman. Perhaps for the first time ever, she would be obliged to wear a floor length chaddar to disguise her whole being.

45. The Taliban in these regions have demanded total female seclusion. Girls are denied the right to education, women the right to freedom of movement. Women are obliged to be totally covered when outside; visits to the bazaar are met with verbal abuse in Herat and are virtually unknown in Kandahar. Men too endure similar restrictions. Hair should be short, beards long, bodies shaved according to Islam; dress should be shalwar kameez as opposed to western style trousers as is common in Herat, and a turban. Men are subjected to random inspection (including armpits), hair may be publicly cropped and, according to recent reports, faces tattooed so that a beard must be grown to cover it.

46. Intolerance of all instruments of entertainment - televisions and videos in particular - have led to house searches, beatings, and public display of the offending items in places such as city gates where "streamers" of video film and cassette tape are nailed up alongside televisions and radios. Initial joy in peace has moved through scornful derision of these extreme behaviours, to bitter resentment and even fear. Fear, not least of what may yet come, is sustained by public executions and amputations according to Shariah following in camera judgments, and possibly no hearings.

47. The Taliban occupation is particularly hard felt in Herat which was formerly one of the most liberal cities of Afghanistan, with a rich inheritance of high culture. Western dress for men; higher education and prominent participation in economic life by both men and women were, in earlier times, characteristics of the city. War damage was significantly less than in eastern provinces, and under the peaceful control of Ismail Khan (Jami'at-e-Islami) rehabilitation was making progress. Although he had made at least one attempt to prevent female employment, it was short-lived.

48. In contrast to Herat, Kandahar was more traditional in character, and in line with the conservatism of its Pukhtoon inhabitants, women have been secluded. Girls attended school, and even up to higher grades, some schools were co-educational. Kandahar has been the last major city of Afghanistan to receive relief, and even now relatively few agencies are working there.
49. As in the south-eastern region, the only women officially permitted to work throughout these two regions are health workers, strictly segregated from men. There is no consultation possible with male colleagues, whether Afghan or expatriate. This was one of the key reasons why SCF (UK) reluctantly decided to suspend its pro-gramme in Herat. The female head of agency was not allowed to attend public meetings, and there would have been no advantage had she been replaced by a man since he could not communicate with his female staff.

50. Such restrictions have placed unrealistic demands upon the female health practitioners, and impact negatively upon quality of service and numbers of female beneficiaries. For example in Kandahar, the hospital compound which seems to be the centre of all health-related support in the city has 3 female Afghan doctors who try to meet the demands of a female population of around 200,000. A fourth team member has recently discontinued her professional career in compliance with her husband's wishes. In such a climate, social pressures are probably very high.

51. Female education has been discontinued, contributing to SCF (UK)'s programme suspension, and prompting UNICEF's decision that if girls were denied access to school, then it can not support the same service for boys. The decisions of both organisations are in accord with their particular mandates.

52. Taliban views on education amount to religious instruction for boys only, in madrassas. The Herati governor upholds this position, although in the surrounding rural areas interest is growing in home-based schools for girls. In Kandahar attitudes may have relaxed a little, since it has been conceded that girls may also attend madrassas, for religious education, between the ages of 6 and 9 years. In fact there is a nursery school operated by women within the compound mentioned above, and community schools for girls in rural areas are being tolerated.

53. The Taliban restrictions on women have extended to expatriates which denies any formal exchange of ideas. In capacities as diplomats, donors, UN or NGO representatives, or visiting consultants, women have been rejected at the doors of public meetings and denied access to influential leaders, even if accompanied by men. While the governor of Herat remains rigid in this respect, the equivalent authorities of Kandahar are making progress with social skills and in recent months have spoken, and even shaken hands, with a number of female visitors. While there is a general interpretation by donor, UN, ACBAR, and NGO representatives alike that Kandahar may be softening a little, the reality is that the mullahs are becoming more sophisticated in social interaction, but the position of women continues to be significantly repressed.

54. In summary, in the southern and western regions of Afghanistan under Taliban control women's rights are significantly repressed beyond usual traditional norms. This is most especially the case in Herat. Specifically the present situation:

* demands female seclusion, at times even of foreign women
* totally denies female participation in decision making in private, professional and community life
* denies economic opportunities to women except those which might be privately arranged within the household, in cooperation with male family members
denies education, both formal and informal except for health education, to girls and women
* significantly puts at risk mother/child health.

55. Further human rights concerns arise from the above, but in the current absence of facts, are raised as questions. To what extent does frustration of living under such repressed circumstances increase family violence, particularly against women? And, what will be the impact upon physical and mental quality of life for developing and unborn children, of currently overworked health facilities which the uneducated girls of today will not be able to replace in the future?

56. In these regions the role of women, with rare exceptions, is reduced solely to reproductive activities carried out within the the home, regardless of their capabilities, aspirations, or needs.

Northern region
57. Mazar-e-Sharif in Balkh Province is the provincial capital of the northern region. With relatively little war damage and sustained peace under the control of General Dostum, this area has in recent years become the second greatest beneficiary of aid after the south-east. Mazar itself, in common with Herat, has an air of prolonged economic hardship, rather than the total breakdown of social institutions typically encountered in the other regions of Afghanistan.

58. Men and women are educated and many wear western forms of dress, including denims, short jackets and head scarves by the younger women. Balkh University boasts 40% women among its students, and 20% of its teachers are female. Women are also represented in the judiciary. With the arrival of UN and NGO agencies, many women have found employment in offices where they work alongside their male colleagues and many fully participate in internal and external meetings.

59. In contrast to this apparent emancipation, are women in the bazaar who are either fully veiled or wearing a large chaddar. This form of veiling is widely found in the surrounding areas where women move relatively freely within their own village environment. A vital factor here may be that there is still greater community cohesion than in many other areas of Afghanistan where whole villages were shattered by conflict. Here people still know their neighbours. Elsewhere no man now trusts his neighbour; he may not know him if he is a displaced person; he may have belonged to another political party. In pre-war times in any rural village women could walk with their children to school; neither they nor their men folk suffered from the anxieties extant today, when basic trust no longer exists.

60. From Mazar women can, and do, travel to work within the surrounding rural communities, where rooms will be available for overnight stays, often in an office or its guest house. Such trips may be made alone, or with other female colleagues; there is no necessity to be accompanied by a male family member.

61. Although this remains very much "a man's world", conservative attitudes are increasingly being exposed to the non-traditional capabilities of women. The "grey
beards" of district rehabilitation shuras are now asked to arrange for female staff to consult with their illiterate village women.

62. The apparent greater freedom in Mazar itself may stem from well established communist influences rather than from more open ethnic attitudes; liberal attitudes are not so apparent in the rural areas. Further efforts to emancipate women of the region might widen the gulf between liberal and more conservative, even suspicious, traditional attitudes. Concerns have been expressed by local people to Afghan female monitors about the possible ulterior motives of NGOs which have missionary origins.

63. By tradition, many women of the region are concerned with economic production from childhood, since family units gain reputation and even wealth from carpet weaving.

64. Female human rights issues in this region might be considered to be double faceted. One aspect would produce a list similar to that for the south-east, but possibly to a lesser degree. These would apply particularly to the more rural areas of the region where illiteracy and lack of resources keep people poor. The other aspect would be concerned mainly with the educated urban women; concerns on their behalf might be directed towards equal opportunities with men - in work, in law, etc.

65. An issue on which no detailed knowledge is offered, but which should be addressed in terms of female human rights, is child labour, used particularly in carpet weaving. This needs sensitive consideration within the cultural context. A skilled girl will almost certainly attract a high bride price. This shifts her from a productive role into both productive and reproductive roles. Not enough is known about her daily life. The issue is to what extent is such a woman economically exploited, or given greater attention (to keep her in production) which has positive implications for her own and her children's health?

Kabul

66. The capital city is now substantially a heap of rubble with only a quarter of its former population (generally the poorest) remaining to contribute to the massive task of reconstructing its physical, economic, and social infrastructure. During the mujahideen take-over its women were subjected to substantial trauma, under threat of rape, abduction, enforced marriage, or mutilation, which was one of the major reasons for families leaving the city to find security for their daughters, wives and sisters.

67. Concerns for, and by, women are still real although it is difficult to quantify incidences, define responsibility, or confirm the current situation. Women have been forced into "marriage" to commanders, many of whom today are living within the city centre with their eight or ten "wives". Women and girls have reportedly been abducted for sexual services, and subsequently abandoned - or murdered. There are no accurate data on these women; they remain hidden, denied - "outside society" in every possible sense. Children, usually girls, have been sold in the mosque by their fathers to optimise chances of survival for them and his remaining family. Men have murdered their whole families as a more humane end than what they saw as inevitable death by starvation.

68. Some women, through poverty, have turned to prostitution as a desperate means to feed their children. Those who have been courageous enough to justify their course
of action in the face of official admonishment, have been met with heads hung in shame - there is recognition of their extreme need, shared pain at the violation of religious and human values, and a powerlessness to offer an alternative solution. There is not enough information on the personal circumstances of these women, in particular about their family situations.

69. The "government" members themselves have mixed attitudes towards women with some clearly supporting women's active participation, countered by the restrictive views of others. Over the past two years or so these internal differences have directly impacted on women's economic activities in particular. There have been notices to all agencies that women are not to work in offices and should be sent home. This was not effectively implemented through strong objections of women, of offices, and of more liberal government influences. At the very point of departure of female delegates to the Beijing conference, which had been negotiated with considerable effort by UN agencies and ARIC, the government withdrew its permission.

70. The overall impact on women in the city is further influenced by the government's great sensitivity to how external political interests see them. Thus, for example, actual or fears of criticisms from the Taliban that the Kabul government is un-Islamic will result in increased conservatism. The recent negotiations with Hezb-e-Islami had speedy and observable impact on women in the city; the small head chaddars have been replaced by larger chaddars, and women move in groups rather than in ones or twos. It is difficult to ascertain the process by which such changes are effected. Since more Pukhtoon people were in evidence in the city during that period, it may be that women (at request of their men folk?) took precautionary steps to reduce attracting attention, rather than respond to any real threats.

71. The Kabul government's internal and external political insecurity means that women are permanently in a subliminal state of uncertainty. In the absence of any government policy on women, their opportunities are subject to the personal decisions of influential individuals. Thus, women are working within the Ministry of Education; they have all been removed from the Ministry of Transport. It is not clear whether denial of opportunity results from personal values, concerns for a stable work force, or security of women in an uncertain environment.

72. Within this framework women do make substantial contributions. Women have a voice in Kabul, and it can be a strong one. The Women's Higher Association has made official representations to the government on behalf of women, and they have been heeded. As a quango organisation, it has government appointees; never the less it is encouraging to see that 'manipulation' can work in both directions. The wives of many government ministers are professional women and, although totally secluded in work place and in dress, they are effective. Over the past year the number of women's organisations has risen from one to three; a year ago one existed and one other was prevented from establishing itself due to severe opposition from a party leader. Progress may be slow, but it is steady and positive.

73. Women are working in health, education, administration (government and aid agencies), and radio. In many offices work is carried out alongside men; in others women have their own space. With the exception of the women's associations which are strictly
segregated as they always have been, women do not need to work in physically segregated buildings.

74. Female resources in Kabul are highly professional - educated, competent, and committed. Their efforts, together with those of many international aid agencies, are directed towards meeting the basic needs of the many poor women, among whom are substantial numbers of widows or sole heads of households.

75. As yet, there are few, if any, efforts at involving women in decision making at local community level, although current plans by Oxfam for health training will do so. There are no known programmes requiring women to travel beyond the city environs. Within the city women work, in pairs, in all districts (for example, on district surveys) usually travelling by private vehicle. There is a public transport system and women do use this.

76. Schools are open and there is reasonably high attendance by girls of all ages, although this is a matter of family values. Among the more conservative, girls are withdrawn after puberty; this does not seem to be related to social status, but requires specific research. Women attend the university.

77. It needs to be borne in mind that none of these educational establishments currently have academic materials, and all lack other material resources. In addition, the quality of education is severely handicapped by under-qualified and inexperienced teachers. Although the government is now in process of printing its revised school curricula, the absence of such resources at university level cannot be so replaced. Female professors are now more likely to be organising tailoring classes for needy women. Thus, academic education of girls - and boys - is a nominal concept with major implications for their, and their country's, future. Practical input, on basic health, environmental care, mine awareness, reaches some children through programmes by UNICEF, IFRC (planned but not yet implemented), and SCF (US).

78. In summary, in Kabul the emancipation which women enjoyed until 1992 is today constrained by poverty resulting from the total destruction and looting of the city, and aggravated by a political lack of confidence. In contrast to the north where the status of women varies according to their urban/rural location, in Kabul it is cross cut by social class. More specifically:

for the (relatively) affluent women
* participation in professional life is subject to the influence of individual men rather than policy
* freedom of movement is constrained by variable political winds;

for the poor women
* poverty deprives them of basic human needs such as food - which is equally shared by men
* poverty deprives some of personal dignity which drives them to engage in survival strategies such as prostitution
* poverty reduces some women and girls to a form of currency.
for rich and poor women alike, conflict has brought
* risks to mother/child health
* risks to rights over her own body from external, rather than traditional (paternal) sources.

79. In Kabul women's role is substantially concerned with production. This may be the result of choice, as for most of the higher social class women. For the poor, it is the result of necessity. The productive opportunities in which they engage are, probably exclusively, provided by aid agencies. Gender and development strategies emphasise the need to have women involved in production in order to move forward the development of a country. To view such productive activity in Kabul as contributing positively to women's active participation in society would be to misrepresent their impact. They keep women - and indirectly men - alive. As seen in all other regions of Afghanistan, there is a more conservative traditional element within Kabul also, which places greater value on reproductive activities, and denies women choice.

SUMMARY

80. From this superficial analysis, it is clear that women's status in Afghanistan today widely varies even within regions. Women's access to full participation in social life is constrained - even denied - by tradition, by politics, and by poverty. In all cases these are dominated by men. We have no ideas of numbers of women within each of these variants, nor of what proportion of the female population in each variant that we presently reach.

81. Women's control over social life is more limited. Although their participation in economic activity is considered to be an indicator of position in society, we do not know if this reflects their personal choice, or pressure from influential others in the family. Nor do we know what happens to a woman's earned income, or how she deals with the multiple duties most have to fulfil. We also lack information on women's participation and control within the non-domestic work place, although there is plenty of anecdotal information and observation to suggest that they remain dominated by men. We have no knowledge of other aspects of social life over which women might have influence.

82. All women engage in reproductive activities; even very young girls tend their younger siblings, fetch water, feed domestic-based animals. But we have no detailed knowledge of what activities women undertake, for how long each day, or who makes decisions concerning these spheres of activity. Many women are involved in productive work, especially home based, but we lack knowledge of their proportion of the female population, how much time they spend, how they distribute their end products. We do not know the value of income, or the impact on women.

83. Few women appear to have access to or control over community decision making which would indicate public recognition of their status alongside men. But this conclusion may result rather from a western view of how decisions ought to be made, than from the absence of an indigenous strategy for hearing women's voices.
CONCLUSIONS

84. The conservative traditional attitude towards the status of women (Jalalabad) is the only "model" encountered in similar form in all rural areas of Afghanistan. Urban life provides variants, both much more liberal (Mazar, Kabul) and much more restrictive (Kandahar, Herat).

There is a need for research to draw up a profile of these women’s lives, in order to develop a tool to describe the regional variations and aid the planning of appropriate interventions.

85. As providers of assistance concerned about the rights and status of women we are singularly uninformed about the women whose lives we want to improve. Above all we do not know what the women of Afghanistan want.

There is a need to ask the target group what its problems are and how it wants to solve them.

86. Although much assistance is said to be targeted at rural women, it is distributed through provincial cities and it is questionable whether it benefits rural women. Beneficiaries are likely to be the provincial urban poor (also needy, but not the target).

Projects targeted at rural women need to be implemented through rural communities.

87. Assistance aimed at poverty alleviation for women does not certainly do so. There is a lack of quantitative and qualitative measures to support any conclusions. In many cases we do not how much a woman earns, or what impact it has upon her. In no case do we know if such earnings are actually retained by her for her own benefit. If her income is absorbed by the whole family, then poverty alleviating projects may require more creative thinking by implementers; they may better be targeted at men, or at least include men as well as women.

Projects aimed at poverty alleviation for women must have quantitative and qualitative indicators.

If a woman’s income earning capacity is enhanced (irrespective of the use of earnings), and this increases her social status, then the purpose of the project needs to be clearly stated. This would reflect a proposed change to her present position in society and thus be addressing her strategic needs, rather than basic needs pertaining to her everyday condition. Clear indicators would also be necessary, and quite difficult to determine.

88. Attempts to address women’s issues beyond poverty alleviation, in order to change their position, or status, in society, have not been defined, or understood, in those terms. These might include training - in leadership skills, communications, project management, PRA and similar approaches - which have potential to change women’s roles to grant them more decision making capacity within society (if this is what they want).

Such projects might most effectively be targeted at the women of provincial towns inside Afghanistan because it is they who can transmit their skills to rural women.
It is recognised that it may first be necessary to train Afghan women based in Pakistan as resource persons, but this should only be undertaken provided the next link in the chain of transfer of skills is in place, and provincial women cannot be trained directly.

There is justification for higher level professional training of women in liberal areas, such as Mazar, Faizabad, Kabul where a good level of education already exists. This might include accountancy, management, administration, counselling, information management. This should be linked to opportunities to take control of benefits themselves, rather than depend upon men.
89. A key issue for all concerned with women in Afghanistan has been how to respond to the regional authority restrictions on female participation in delivering, or receiving, assistance. As outlined in the previous chapter this has occurred in the south-east, in Kabul, and most recently in the south and west under the Taliban. Few agencies have taken a position of counter-rejection, of clarifying that "while you have values, so do we and on this occasion yours are compromising ours such that we cannot justify continuing this programme". Two examples are briefly outlined to illustrate the strategies adopted, and their impact.

90. Emergency Relief Unit, an NGO, provides health education and city sanitation in Jalalabad. Although the agency has no formal policy on women, it was established with female health education as a key objective; city sanitation followed. At the end of 1994/early 1995 ERU refused to comply with demands to stop employment of its female staff who were essential to deliver its programme in Jalalabad’s camps. ERU’s female director personally took the decision to discontinue the city sanitation programme, giving employment to 2,000 local men, until the women’s health education programme could continue. Provincial authorities initially refused to believe her action; as she held firm, they were convinced. They allowed the female programme.

91. At the end of 1995 UNICEF announced its decision to discontinue support to boys’ schools in areas where the Taliban refused female access to education. This included the south and western regions, but not Taliban-held areas within the south-eastern region (see previous chapter) where education opportunities remain open to both sexes. The decision came from UNICEF’s executive director in New York, and was taken on the grounds that child rights - including equality between the sexes - is part of UNICEF’s mandate. The Taliban publicly reported UNICEF’s decision, but is not known to have made any subsequent comment upon it. Meantime girls’ schools are closed according to Taliban instructions; boys’ schools suffer from overcrowded classes resulting from a loss of female teaching staff who are confined to home on Taliban instructions.

92. A key factor for agencies making such a stand is the physical risk to staff, of self, or the agency itself. In the case of ERU, the risk was calculated. Although there had been serious harassment, the director had a three-year relationship with the local authorities, believed she had the respect of the shura (or at least enough of its influential members), had the moral support of her implementing co-partners (UNHCR), and the encouragement of her team. In particular, she had the support of the public who benefitted from the sanitation programme which was highly visible and in great demand. ERU was in a strong position; in particular it had developed a good local network with supportive contacts in high places. These strengths are available to only a few agencies who have been established in one location for several years; they were not available to SCF (UK) when confronted with the Taliban in Herat (see para. 49.)

93. Many respondents to this study felt that UNICEF has made little impact on the Taliban. While their decision benefitted from high level authority (whose distance serves to reduce risk to local staff) and the weight of the various UN agencies who publicly supported the UNICEF position, it perhaps suffered from an absence of well established
local relationships6 which might have gained them support and influence. Possibly, the Taliban's failure to react reflects the fact that UNICEF discontinued programmes to which the Taliban attached little value. The views of the people, parents of the children, are not known.

94. Although a large majority of respondents in this study understood the position taken by UNICEF and a few NGOs have adopted supportive actions, some 40% of all respondents did not in fact agree with it. Their reasons, in addition to the absence of impact mentioned above, included:
- it augmented the Taliban's views of their own authority when in fact they are an occupying force, lacking even support of the people
- to act on policy is not appropriate in the absence of any human rights legislation in the country
- it has blocked the possibility of positively influencing the Taliban by means of continued dialogue, and the boys who can be agents of change.

COMPROMISE

95. In line with the major disagreement with policy-directed response, interviewees were strongly in favour of compromise. Seventy-nine per cent believed that the first priority is to continue assistance, and deal with obstructions to service provision through discussion. This view was most consistent among members of the Advisory Group on Gender, and the bilateral donors who had also expressed the greatest objections to the UNICEF action.

96. Compromise, however, is not to be made at any price. All contributors qualified it as a strategy stating that it must:
- uphold mutual respect
- be compatible with agencies' own policies and objectives
- consider the longer term implications.

97. Two examples of compromise which had resulted from UN discussions with the Taliban and had been heatedly debated within the Advisory Group on Gender were the UN's proposal of segregated offices for men and women, and the Kandahari Taliban's proposal of women's associations. Although during interviews these options were consistently introduced as examples of compromising strategies, in the interests of keeping ideas as broad as possible they were not necessarily discussed. There was generally insufficient knowledge about women's associations in Afghanistan for views to be expressed. It is assumed that what the Taliban are proposing is similar to the Women's Higher Association in Kabul (established in the 1940s) which was briefly described in Para.72.

98. A general pattern, however, seemed to favour segregated offices, provided this was not considered permanent. For interested readers, a copy of the Advisory Group’s strongest objections to this strategy is included as Annexe 4. In fact, many NGOs have already adopted this strategy in both Taliban and non-Taliban areas, for example in the south-east. Various means are found to maintain communications with male bosses and colleagues; none (yet) strictly observes the total seclusion apparently demanded in the south and western regions. Female staff attend main office meetings/seminars
accompanied by husbands, some of whom are employed in low-paid positions within the organisation. Some women work directly from home to community, and male bosses visit the women's homes where male family members are present. (These female staff had received training before such seclusion was necessary.) These approaches are within Taliban areas, carried out with great discretion. In Jalalabad male bosses visit the female office for face-to-face meetings with female staff.

99. Agencies adopting such practices admit that it is not ideal, but they have not yet functioned long enough with these constraints to have refined their communications, or the means of ensuring that female staff maintain a close identity with the organisation and its activities. But they are willing to continue trying, and believe satisfactory solutions can be found. All believe it is worth continuing.

100. The experience has some positive and unpredictable side benefits. More communications are committed to paper, including agenda topics for the next joint meeting. These people have said that they are improving their communication skills, and the management of meetings. Because time is limited, their thoughts have to become more structured; they plan ahead. These are all valuable lessons, and are skills which many Afghan (and expatriate!) staff have not adequately developed.

STRATEGIES

101. Contributors introduced and discussed a wide range of ideas, some evolved from practical experience. These are included in Annexe 5 as a simple list, without elaboration. From the many proposals made, an unexpected pattern emerged of a small number which were more frequently suggested as the most viable, practical or necessary. These are discussed below.

Dialogue

102. The urgency with which the significant majority of contributors expressed the need to maintain dialogue on women with regional authorities, and particularly the Taliban, cannot be over emphasised. But committed dialogue, with the purpose of achieving mutual understanding and respect, in the hope that this might lead, in the short term, to satisfactory compromise and, in the long term, to increased tolerance of female participation in society.

103. Successes at the level of implementation, resulting from this strategy, were cited by a small number of contributors, particularly NGOs. One had succeeded in retaining its female staff in Herat where the women now operate as health educators within areas of planned operation. In this way they are able to retain their contact, and credibility, with rural communities. A second is very hopeful of gaining permission in rural Helmand to retain planned educational facilities for girls. As yet, these cases are too few to be able to suggest any formula, but salient points they identified are:

- willingness to compromise on ways forward within the agency mandate
- patience and tolerance in both verbal and non-verbal communications
- ability to speak the language, even if not fluently
- maturity of years

20
Moslem, with good Q’ranic knowledge and prepared to challenge (non-aggressively) Taliban interpretations of Islam.

Several contributors suggested that formal representations on behalf of women’s issues should include an Islamic religious scholar, preferably a female, from another Muslim country, or a highly respected Afghan.

contributions already made to Afghanistan which met with Taliban approval - specifically, the construction of a village mosque.

A point worth noting in this context, and raised by an Afghan contributor, is that there is sufficient interest by Islamic countries in mosque construction so that it is not necessary for limited funds from non-Moslem sources to be spent in this way.

104. Many contributors questioned the effectiveness of the UN’s representations on women’s issues to the Taliban. Only one person expressed unqualified praise for UN efforts on behalf of women’s rights. The criticisms are most succinctly and diplomatically summarised as “too little, too late”. [In reality, many contributors were unaware of current initiatives in support of women that UN agencies are taking - see Paras.158-160.]

Many contributors (both male and female) felt that communications were so diffused in cultural sensitivity that the Taliban were probably at a loss to know what the message was. There was a general opinion that despite the many courtesies associated with Afghan discourse, Afghans like plain speaking. Since regional authorities are very direct about what they were not prepared to tolerate, then we, in turn, should clearly state our position.

105. This point leads one to suggest that it may be useful to have printed information sheets, in Farsi and Pushto, to leave with regional authorities, district shuras, etc. These might usefully include a brief description of what each category of player in Afghanistan does i.e. UN agency, bilateral donor, NGO, followed by an outline of the purposes and objectives of the agency in Afghanistan, and the criteria for granting assistance. These would serve as an instructive tool for those authorities, like the Taliban, who have very little experience or knowledge of the aid community - donors, UN, NGOs, coordinating bodies - who make frequent visits, often posing the same questions, which in their terms are possibly both irrelevant and tiresome. There is an Afghan saying which crudely translates as, “A thousand ‘no’s’ are worthy of a single ‘yes’”. As a definitive answer, a “no” does not call for reflection; an information sheet randomly skimmed might inspire it.

106. Concern about dialogue being reduced to an exchange of conditions related to very clear ideas about how the whole issue of women should not be presented. With very rare exceptions, contributors to the study believed that to talk about women’s rights to any authority in Afghanistan, not only the Taliban, was counter-productive. The reasons were variously expressed, but essentially meant that the concept is culturally challenging and likely to be negatively received; the outcome would then close the doors to further discussion which might, gradually, open minds. Thus, contributors do not see any place for this form of advocacy.

Women’s rights, human rights, and gender

107. Many contributors recognised that women’s rights are embedded within human rights but generally, and reluctantly, concluded that while there is a shared responsibility to raise awareness of human rights when opportunity arose, there was little one could
hope to do in the absence of any formal government.

108. As a strategy to further the cause of women, 61% of all contributors supported the idea of incorporating gender - the socially defined roles of men and women - into all stages of assistance programming. This reflected an almost unanimous view held by the UN and NGO groups. It was striking that three quarters of the bilateral donors did not believe that gender policy was applicable to Afghanistan. In this respect they were unique; no-one else shared this view.

109. For most of these donors, the reasons were related to the source of their funding, this being humanitarian/relief funds as opposed to development funds. While the latter usually carry gender policies, the former are primarily channelled through multilateral agencies such as the UN or ICRC, and gender policy considerations are assumed to be applied by those agencies. This topic is discussed in the next chapter. For other bilateral donors (about 45% of those who did not support gender policy), their reasons were that other priorities take precedence in Afghanistan, such as demining and food.

110. Bilateral donors showed a consistent divide when asked how important they considered gender issues to be in Afghanistan at the present time. They equally considered gender to be a priority and a lower order issue. In contrast, 60% of UN and over 80% of both NGO and Gender Advisory Group contributors considered gender to be a key concern at the present time. It is worth noting that these two groups account for almost all of the Afghan representation in this study, and NGOs - or at least those with well-established contact inside Afghanistan - are closer to the realities of the people. Overall, 67% of contributors agreed on the urgency, with 29% viewing gender as of secondary importance, and 4% as irrelevant.

111. Contributors generally liked the neutrality of a gender approach, the fact that it could consider the problems of men too, possibly in a new light, and use discussion of men's roles as a way to broaching women's. Many were realistic in recognising that to successfully apply a gender policy would take time to define and explain, to train, to develop tools, to adapt implementation right from project identification through to reporting. None the less, there was agreement that the process must start, and now.

112. It was noted that gender was not well understood by many bilateral donors, who make decisions and/or recommendations on the funding of projects. For example, many viewed water and sanitation projects purely in engineering terms and overlooked vital social factors such as the users of the service. Because of this limited vision, there is a failure to consider the need to consult women who are the main collectors of water. Food aid was assumed to reach men and women equally; the well recognised fact that purdah restricts women's mobility did not seem to generate more specific concerns as to how implementing agencies might make sure that women are equal beneficiaries. The lack of awareness of the scope of gender analysis in both rehabilitation and humanitarian projects could be overcome by brief training in gender awareness, similar to that provided for senior UN staff.

113. There was a common misconception that having projects for women, and employing female staff, fulfilled gender requirements. In fact the majority of female projects now being implemented in Afghanistan suffer from the same single-sex bias as
those outlined in the previous paragraph in which we seek to have women included. Just as women are overlooked in deciding the location of public water supplies, female income generation projects are a classic case where men are ignored; yet it is the men who need to undertake purchase of raw materials, and some marketing of end products. [See later discussion in Paras.142-143.]

Female resources

114. A major drawback to introducing gender within most organisations is the lack of resource persons, particularly female. Expatriate women are initially needed to act as front line public spokesperson, to liaise with men, to train men and women, and support Afghan women.

115. Afghan women are needed to undertake research on women inside Afghanistan, and to lead the work with local women at all stages of implementation. More care is needed in the selection of these women. Presently, in every region of Afghanistan, one finds a substantial number of women’s projects in the hands of Afghan women displaced from Kabul. Their competence, interest, and their need for work are not in question; their appropriateness to the local situation very much is. It is essential for sustainability and for credibility of community level women’s projects that skills are held within the community. This "ownership" requires early attention, since to the conservative traditional mind, Kabul women are virtually synonymous with westerners. If attitudes should harden within rural communities, then the work they have done will come under attack and women will be the major victims. The use of local women may not rule out attention but it might minimise the possible negative impact.

Research

116. There is a lack of factual information about Afghanistan’s women, in particular on what they want, on the networks through which they can be reached, and on regional variations. (Similar lack of information exists about the men.) Many of the relevant questions have been raised in the conclusions to chapter 2. The need for sensitivity in selection of resource persons in rural areas is highlighted above.

117. Research has a vital role to play in terms of both needs and impact assessments. Presently there is much replication of projects without locally based knowledge or needs assessment; everyone is poor, therefore there is justification for income generation so yet more tailoring, embroidery, etc. projects are introduced. Yet the market was deemed to be flooded with disabled tailors back in 1993 when UNHCR’s massive support programme was discontinued. One wonders what became of them and their contribution to tailoring needs in Afghanistan. Are we now merely increasing the competition to that highly vulnerable group, and thereby reducing the potential benefits to all, possibly to a non-viable level? What has happened to the traditional transmission of skills among women, which has survived for centuries? Are we contributing anything new, or merely acting as a conduit for supplies which families cannot presently afford?

118. Our heads similarly remain buried in the sand with respect to known facts. While females are believed to represent only around 10% of all mine victims in Afghanistan, only around 2% of people in physical rehabilitation programmes are women. Where are the other 8%, why are they not seeking treatment, and, most importantly, what are we doing about accessing them?
Many contributors considered working with communities as a way of circumventing some of the negative impact of "policy" which might be imposed by regional authorities. From the regional overview of chapter 2 it was found that despite what Taliban said about girls' education, within rural communities the people were keen to set up their own home-based education programmes and that, thus far, these had been ignored by authorities.

This "bottom's up" approach also linked closely to the proposed gender strategy, since it lends itself to the respective and related needs of women and men being realised by communities themselves in a non-confrontational or threatening way. This integration between the sexes was also emphasised as a desirable objective in terms of sectoral interests. Several contributors were keen to see more agencies cooperating together to support community development in a holistic way. This strategy would permit a continuity of short or medium term interventions which would pave the way to longer term rehabilitation/development support.

Given the reservation likely to be experienced in some areas to female projects, then a community approach gives time to build confidence and trust. Importantly it provides opportunity to learn more about how communities work together, and what the respective male and female networks are. A key point with community based interventions is that they cannot be undertaken at great speed. This is not an insurmountable problem with proper phased planning of projects by competent implementing agencies.

This chapter has looked at how agencies respond to female human rights issues in Afghanistan. Some clear messages have been communicated by the contributors to the study. While the majority believe that it is important to have a policy on women, they do not believe that this should take precedence over their shared objective to deliver assistance. Following from this, they clearly favour compromise and have proposed dialogue with regional authorities as the key strategy to achieving mutually acceptable ways of delivering assistance. Other strategies included a strong gender policy which diffuses alarm in accessing women and allows a closer look at the inter-related roles of men and women in society. It was recognised that a gender strategy requires an increase in female resource persons, solid facts gained from research, and a community approach to interventions.

There is confusion within Afghanistan both among authorities and beneficiaries about the various roles played by agencies providing assistance.

Information sheets could be prepared in Dari and Pushto describing the roles of bilateral donors, UN agencies, NGOs, together with a simply stated outline of their key objectives, and criteria for granting assistance.
124. The prime objective of all concerned agencies is to deliver assistance to the people of Afghanistan, and the politics of regional authorities ought not to assume authority of legislative bodies.

125. Agencies need to be willing to work towards compromise on reaching women, using strategies such as:

- **dialogue**

  > Representational teams for all agencies should include women. On particular issues, they might also benefit from including respected Afghans, or Islamic scholars.

- **gender sensitivity throughout all programming**

  > Bilateral donors would be well advised to undertake gender training themselves in order to fully appreciate what is involved, and to avoid embarrassing credibility gaps with better informed implementing agencies.

- **female resource persons**

  - current, first-hand information - from women inside Afghanistan - on their needs, networks, and norms.

  > Donors need to maintain close links with all other agencies on gender issues - through agreed linkages with the Islamabad Advisory Group to the UN on Gender, or other appropriate fora.

126. Programmes ought to be targeted at community level in order to allow sensitive and acceptable absorption of gender considerations in a sustainable manner.

> Before approval, projects should be carefully checked to see if the impact on women is sustainable, measurable, achievable, realistic and time bound. These criteria ought to apply whether the project addresses women’s practical needs such as poverty alleviation, or strategic needs such as capacity building.
4. KEY ISSUES FOR HUMANITARIAN/DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE

127. Whereas previous chapters have taken a broad view of women's issues in Afghanistan as seen through the eyes of all contributors to the study, this chapter focuses more closely on the concerns of the bilateral donors. The subject matter arose from their own discussion points, but has been categorised by the consultant into four main topics. These relate to the interplay between aid and politics, the type of service to target in support of women, the ethics of accountability for monies spent, and who best can spearhead gender issues. Clearly this study can but touch upon such concerns; each topic could be the subject of concentrated exchange.

DO WE SUPPORT VIOLATORS OF FEMALE HUMAN RIGHTS?

128. A number of donors have questioned the morality of seeming to support, through contributing aid, an occupying force whose values are not shared by the people it now seeks to rule. This relates to the Taliban control, particular as it is represented in Herat. Although not the only issue of concern, the status of women is a major one and, like the apparent process of execution and amputation, violations of internationally recognised rights are not unique to Taliban held areas. For purposes of illustration, the present argument draws upon the regional descriptions of women given in chapter 2.

129. The four images of women might, rather crudely, be represented as a continuum of how they are viewed by the contributors to this study:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Herat/Kandahar</th>
<th>Jalalabad</th>
<th>Kabul</th>
<th>Mazar</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>religious extremism</td>
<td>cultural conservatism</td>
<td>conservative liberalism</td>
<td>urban liberalism</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

representing, with respect to women's participation in society,

| DENIAL | REPRESSION | CONTROLLED ACCESS | CHOICE |

As concluded in Para.84, the "Jalalabad model of cultural conservatism" is found in all rural areas of the country. Where women's activities have unusually (that is, at the initiation of aid agencies) moved toward conservative liberalism as in Gardez, the Taliban influence has resulted in dialogue which has brought about compromise in the form of segregated offices. In effect this is a pull back toward the Jalalabad model.

130. History (see chapter 2) has provided precedents for strong backlash against any exaggerated form of urban liberalism. That backlash bore similarities with the religious extremism seen today among the Taliban. Unfortunately history does not seem to tell us much about how that has been dealt with in the past. Two points are relevant here.

131. One is that in the absence of clear information, we must assume that this denial of women is initially tolerated (certainly the women have little opportunity to object), but that it mellows in time towards cultural conservatism. This interpretation is borne out by the fact that such denial is not more widespread throughout the country, although it does appear in other regions in remote rural areas.
132. Second, that if women in Afghanistan want to change their status, then it is they who must register their demands and mould their own place in society. Interestingly when asked who should take the lead in representation of women's rights in Afghanistan, more than half of the Afghan contributors, both men and women, stated it to be the responsibility of Afghan women. Recent demonstrations in Peshawar, and earlier in Kabul and Delhi, are perhaps the first public indications of this. Research will hopefully show how women inside Afghanistan feel, who have limited means of publicly expressing their views.

133. Thus when set in a broader context, the position of the Taliban does not seem so tenable. The denial of women, which they impose, is a difference of degree from what appears to be the most consistent status, of repression. Ultimately it is up to the women of Afghanistan to set their own standards. As unpalatable as their status may be to western values, the right to change is theirs, not ours. It would be irresponsible of aid agencies to start a process which will never be around long enough to support with the many social institutions which are needed to give freedom of choice to women, and men. This was the view of the majority of contributors who objected so strongly to taking up women's rights as an issue in the present context.

134. As was discussed earlier in chapter 3 in the context of compromise, there was a strong view that our prime responsibility is to deliver assistance to needy people, and the bilateral donors were among those who most strongly upheld this view (Para. 95). Most contributors believed that to "fight" the Taliban only increases their credibility, and is tantamount to political recognition of their right to rule (at least at a local level). In summary, service delivery is not consistent with politics, and to discontinue aid to Taliban areas on account of their position on women is seen by most contributors as an unjustifiable political act.

135. This view does not deny support for women in a move towards greater participation, but this should be approached through more subtle means as outlined in the last chapter.

WHICH PROJECTS TO SUPPORT?

136. Many contributors to this study talked of a primary target for assistance being poor rural women. Although the reasons were not always discussed, there was an underlying assumption that in terms of quality of life, rural women were the neediest.

137. Points have already been raised, in Paras. 86-7, about the uncertainty of reaching rural women, and the lack of indicators to assess both need and impact of poverty alleviating projects. There are additional points to be remembered concerning rural communities. One is that the position of truly rural women has probably never been significantly different from what it is now; their lives have always been tough and dominated by men. Years of war have worsened their condition and position, but not substantially changed it. Notable exceptions may be widows and female heads of household who have increased in numbers, and in times of general hardship are less likely to be willingly given support by extended families.
138. A second point concerning rural societies is that unless there is a high percentage of internally displaced people in temporary residence, village communities are usually constituted of members of the same tribe or clan. Thus, although not necessarily all closely related, there are likely to be sufficient related families who will all contribute towards meeting the basic needs of their poorest members.

139. In contrast, many urban areas both large and small across the country have suffered major destruction. The quality of life for the inhabitants, men and women, has significantly deteriorated; they have lost not only all possessions, but also the social institutions to which they have been accustomed. For them the qualitative change is substantial both to condition and position. In urban areas which have endured the effects of internal displacement, and still suffer from destructive conflict, not only kinship but all of society’s infrastructural networks have been seriously disrupted and some families are destitute of any support. Examples are commonplace in Kabul, and the camps for internally displaced in Jalalabad, Mazar and Herat.

140. Thus, assistance targeted purely at poverty alleviation on the basis of greatest need should be clearly justified by supporting facts. It may be more urgent in urban environments cited above rather than in rural areas, both of which may have pressures from increasing numbers of returnees.

141. If there is strong evidence of poverty, then this must be equally experienced by the men for whom the principle of honour is bound up with his capacity to provide for his family. To target only women with poverty alleviating projects runs the double risk of challenging the man’s honour (and hence resistance to the participation of women in the project) or of exploiting the women who, in the face of great need, may be pushed to increase her productive output alongside her other household (reproductive) duties. Her increased productivity may be interpreted as integrating her into development, but it is at the expense of reinforcing her subordination to men.

142. This returns us to the desirability of adopting gender sensitive and community based support which contributors favoured (see chapter 3). Projects then should show some co-planning and cooperation between men and women, which cover the whole project cycle within community resources. An example might be women undertaking poultry rearing, financial control through a community loan scheme, and training of other women; with men undertaking manufacture of incubators, production of chick food and external marketing as income generation. Here the productive roles of women and men are not challenging traditional social values, and the women’s role can be seen to be a useful resource within the family and community; with men undertaking tasks not accessible to women, and also earning income to support their own families, their respective contributions are effective and sustainable. This example might require the integrated approach suggested by some contributors (see Para.120) with different agencies providing particular expertise, for example in poultry related activities and financial and marketing skills. Although representing a development approach, this intervention can be achieved through short-term humanitarian funding.

143. Just as men’s roles must be considered within projects implemented by women, so also must women be considered in projects implemented by men. These are usually the "rehabilitation/development" projects. Thus, when building a bridge - for community
benefit - one would expect to see evidence of women being consulted on its location, and data on how many women and how often they need to cross it, for example to reach a clinic. Its ultimate width should consider the spatial needs of transport plus people crossing at one time, including women (in flowing burkhas!) accompanied by several small children. Final evaluation should include disaggregated data on users, and women's as well as men's opinions on its value to the community.

144. If interventions adopt an integrated approach to community support, it is likely that both the reproductive and productive roles of women are addressed. With a participatory approach to community development which is now being adopted by some NGOs (through PRA/RRA/PAN techniques) women are being brought into community decision making. Once all three roles of women are addressed - reproductive, productive, and community - there is the beginnings of opportunity to change the position of women in society in ways that women in Afghanistan want.

145. For donors with a commitment to women, the issue is not rural or urban. Nor is it as simple as relating present to past. Given the absence of current data, it is meaningless to give guidelines on, say, education targets for girls in a given province of so many plus or minus a certain percentage. While such pre-war figures exist, they have little relevance today to numerically different populations lacking almost all social institutions and having changed social values.

146. Most providers of assistance to Afghanistan would agree that there is no longer place for welfare support - for men or women - except in front-line conflict, natural disasters, or seasonal crises which coincide with either of these. As indicated in Para.112 this sort of relief project requires clear consideration of the social role of women. Anti-poverty support, most often given through humanitarian funding, has been the focus for women for some time, both to meet basic needs and to integrate them into development. This report has raised concerns about how far such projects actually do benefit women.

147. Now there is need to scrutinise projects closely to assess the efficiency with which they address women's practical needs, the conditions of her everyday life. However, as indicated in Para.88, such projects should not ignore her longer term strategic needs. Thus women given income generating opportunities should also receive training in accounting skills, and organisational management so that gender inequalities are not maintained and in the future it is they, not men, who have control over project benefits. In addition, there is a need to introduce women into the rehabilitation/development projects, which can be achieved through adopting gender awareness at all stages of programming.

SHOULD GENDER APPLY TO HUMANITARIAN AID?

148. As was revealed in earlier discussion on gender (Para.108), three quarters of bilateral donors did not consider that gender planning was appropriate to Afghanistan at the present time. Yet half of that number also stated that they felt it ought to be, and considered gender to be a priority issue right now. This reflected a distinction in the application of gender policies between humanitarian (once upon a time generally termed "emergency") and development funds. While for almost all nations, the latter attract gender conditions in project support, funds from humanitarian sources do not.
149. By far the greatest sums for Afghanistan are granted from humanitarian sources, being transferred directly from government offices to multilateral agencies such as the UN family and the ICRC. Most of this money seemingly goes to UNICEF, UNHCR (for returnees), UNOCHA (for demining), and WFP. Much smaller sums may be from development sources of which some is similarly channelled together with own-country and other international NGOs. (In the absence of any recognised government, there can be no true bilateral aid or development support.) Embassies and High Commissions may be asked to make recommendations and in some cases decisions on the above. Most disburse relatively smaller sums which, in the main, are considered to be from humanitarian funds.

150. Many of the donors offered rationales for the division in application of gender policy. The continuing conflict in Afghanistan and absence of any central government mean that it is viewed as a protracted relief operation. Yet the non-application of gender to humanitarian funds might be viewed as stretching a leniency which is accorded to genuine life threatening emergencies but is not intended as a carte blanche. Distributions of food or shelter in displaced persons camps or in Kabul City can (and in some cases do) include gender considerations to ensure that women receive proportional benefit. Support directly targeted at women may provide quantitative data of them as beneficiaries, but gives no indication of the quality of impact either on their conditions of life or their position in society. Additionally, in areas were peace has been maintained for some time, interventions are moving towards community involvement which is usually associated with rehabilitation or even development approaches. Thus, Afghanistan represents a variety of contexts which do allow opportunity for gender policies to be applied.

151. In addition it was felt that responsibility for gender is in some cases delegated to the multilateral agencies who are assumed to consider it, but who are frequently recognised as failing to do so. As mentioned in Para.104, the fact that the UN's visible support for women is relatively recent means that several people interviewed were unaware of what the UN agencies are now doing.

152. Finally, there was recognition that donors were not meeting their obligations to national tax payers, the ultimate source of all funding, who no doubt expect that women benefit equally with men from assistance given. As all donor agencies increasingly demand greater transparency from implementing partners, it is proper that they in turn are seen to be transparent. With a worldwide heightened awareness of women's issues, the day of such accounting might not be too far off.

153. The overall message given by contributors to the study is that gender sensitive programming is a present priority. If donors seek to operate within the mainstream thinking on Afghanistan, then they too need to bring gender into their decision-making on funding, irrespective of its source. In addition to the points outlined above, there is a strong suggestion that the non-application of a national gender policy on humanitarian funds is a misinterpretation of fact. Donors are urged to seek formal clarification of the position.
WHO SHOULD LEAD THE CAUSE OF WOMEN IN AFGHANISTAN?

154. Opinion was divided on who best could spearhead gender in Afghanistan. The question resulted in six options including the UN, bilateral donors, NGOs, local communities, Afghan women, and a mixture of all. Thirty-six per cent of contributors concluded in favour of the UN, followed by 22% supporting both Afghan women and a mixture of all agencies.

155. Almost everyone felt that as the author of most international human rights charters, the UN has a particular responsibility to represent women’s (and others’) rights wherever it works. With the notable exception of UNICEF, almost all UN representatives did not support this view, saying that there was a separate office for this purpose, whose representative visits Afghanistan twice yearly. Nevertheless, the majority of UN contributors favoured UN representation over all other bodies, and were in favour of gender sensitive operations, within cultural constraints.

156. Reservations were expressed by many about the UN performance to date and have already been noted in this report (see Paras. 93, 104). This accounted for the present reticence in favouring them, since a greater number of contributors felt that the UN ought to take on this responsibility. Their reasons included the fact that in principle the UN:
- commands respect, almost by definition, which NGOs have to spend years to earn (see Para. 90 for an example)
- is politically neutral, whereas some western countries are believed to have political interests in Afghanistan
- carries little risk of reprisal or closure to the concerned individuals or their agency
- has access, if it chooses, to all the necessary resources to provide good quality gender support.

157. One of the strongest arguments for the UN spearheading gender issues in Afghanistan is the fact that it is the vehicle of most of the international funding provided to Afghanistan every year. If donor nations have a gender policy, then the UN ought to be representing it, even with the constraints of no formal government in the country. It is to be noted that of the humanitarian funds that the UN receives, almost all are targeted at female programmes.

158. In fact the UN has already adopted some responsibility for gender issues. As its coordinating agency, UNDP
- has drafted a strategy paper for Afghanistan for consideration and comment by all UN agencies. In due course that strategy will be released.
- has supported the Advisory Group on Gender Issues which has resulted in the plan to establish five similar in-country regional working groups. With an expatriate female facilitator, these will coordinate female local agency members to identify and work towards locally defined objectives concerning the conditions and position of women. The Working Groups of Mazar and Kabul are already established.
- has arranged two 2-day training programmes on Gender Awareness for senior UN and NGO staff in Islamabad. Although the first was poorly attended (8 participants) the second was well supported (over 20 participants) and found to be informative, relevant, and enjoyable. There is more demand for this training and a strategy needs to be developed to get it out to agencies in Peshawar and...
Afghan women have made representations for female involvement in the UN Peace Mission and, on Ambassador Mestiri’s recommendation, are following up with official requests for this.

Afghan women have been trained and are now training others in leadership and communication skills aimed at building confidence and enhancing their work performance. These will move out to regional offices in due course.

An in-depth situational analysis is planned by an Afghan/expatriate team on regional authorities’ position on women, the current female programme support to Afghanistan, and present female management capacity. (These terms of reference may change.)

159. Several UN agencies have employed or propose to employ/contract female staff to develop gender awareness in programmes and/or among implementing staff (UNDP, UN-OPS, UN-CDAP).

160. WFP has developed a five-year plan of action committed to women to achieve equality, development and peace. This includes a strong gender policy with clearly stated, timed objectives to bring gender into all levels of the organisation from in-house staffing and training, to project implementation and reporting. It is already progressing towards producing disaggregated data as a first step in quantitative analysis.

161. As a multilateral agency, WFP is one of the largest recipients of internationally donated humanitarian funds. Its food aid is distributed both in "emergency" as well as "rehabilitation" (food-for-work) contexts. Its action plan will apply to Afghanistan as to all other countries of the world. This adoption of a gender strategy by a multilateral agency committed to humanitarian support does not conform to the views held by some bilateral donors that gender is not relevant or possible in humanitarian contexts. Rather it suggests that WFP may be leading a trend which ought to be supported by others.

SUMMARY

162. This chapter has discussed in more detail issues that have been touched upon throughout this paper, and seem to be particular concerns of the bilateral donors. These include responses to occupying forces which violate human rights and impede equal delivery of assistance, the selection of projects for support, the application of gender policies in the context of funding sources, and leadership of gender issues in Afghanistan. Clear messages have been given by contributors to the study. The longer term interests of women in Afghanistan ought to be directed by the women themselves, and that to withdraw support in Taliban areas on grounds of human rights runs risk of reducing women’s longer term opportunities. Irrespective of whether funds are donated from humanitarian or development sources, gender analysis is relevant and necessary in Afghanistan; projects need to demonstrate efficiency in terms of clearly defined objectives for women, and impact indicators. The UN should be encouraged to take the lead in gender issues, and has started this process.
The violations of female human rights by the Taliban is not sufficient cause to discontinue assistance to areas under its control.

In line with majority opinion, it is important to maintain windows of opportunity both to keep women in the work force and retain hope for female beneficiaries. Support can be maintained through health-related programmes. Disability could be a useful target sector, especially those programmes that provide valuable life skills which touch upon physical, emotional and psychological awareness of men, women and children.

The situation also represents a good opportunity to provide higher level training of female medical professionals to provide skills currently primarily invested in men.

All proposals for funding should demonstrate gender awareness and overall efficiency of intervention.

Projects which lack gender awareness are unlikely to achieve shared benefits between women and men. Projects which specifically address women need to include clear objectives and benefits to women’s condition and/or position, and address the means of their achieving independent control of benefits in the future. Where men are an integral part of a project, for example in purchasing or marketing, then their active involvement also requires clarification.

Gender planning and analysis applies equally to humanitarian and development funding sources.

If in doubt, this should be taken up with home offices.

The UN is the most appropriate agency to lead the cause of women in Afghanistan.

Several UN agencies have already developed a gender strategy for Afghanistan. Donors need to consider appointing a liaison person to maintain contact and report back on progress to the Bilateral Donor Working Group. Donors might also consider making specific requests for regional data.
5. **POSSIBLE OPTIONS FOR BILATERAL DONORS**

167. Previous chapters have generally outlined the present condition and position of women throughout Afghanistan, described how agencies respond to the various constraints they encounter in the delivery of assistance, and discussed some of the major concerns expressed by bilateral donors in particular. This chapter suggests two options for consideration by bilateral donors. Since these are derived from previous discussions, the related issues are not repeated. Instead, each option is accompanied by a simple list of positive and negative points of argument.

**MULTILATERAL CONDITIONALITIES**

168. *Recommend that home governments impose gender as a condition on all multilateral funding, including humanitarian, with no country exemptions.*

169. Points in favour could include:
- In line with most countries' national policies on gender, international awareness of gender, and UN (major multilateral vehicle) mandates.
- Gender needs to become part of everyone's everyday (sub)consciousness, it is especially valuable in supporting the progress of underdeveloped countries, and all aid should set an example - including 'emergency' where women often are especially vulnerable.
- There is great need in Afghanistan to support women who, through losses of men in conflict, account for more than half of the population, and include disproportionate number of widows, heads of household, or supporters of disabled husbands.
- Afghanistan also suffers from some of the lowest world statistics in terms of meeting women's basic needs; almost all multilateral aid to the country is targeted at women but does not certainly reach them in proportion to sex ratios within the population. Gender policy would ensure that due attention was given in planning and analysis.

170. Points against could include:
- In the absence of a legitimate government, multilaterals cannot apply such conditionalities and therefore cannot accept them.
  [NB Not acceptable; UN strategy on Afghanistan, when it is finally agreed and published, will justify its position by drawing upon Afghanistan's 1975 Constitution, the later Soviet "Basic Principles" and Najibullah's 1986 revisions, all of which granted increased rights and status to women.]
- Home government disagreement that multilateral funding can realistically support a gender policy.
  [NB WFP's Five Year Action Plan represents an agency which has already made such a commitment to gender.]
- Need for solidarity among bilateral donors to influence acceptance by multilateral agencies; bilateral donors may not share the same commitment to gender, or to this as an option.
GENDER STRATEGY

171. Bilateral donors coordinate with the UN on its currently proposed situational analysis on women and then work together to develop a gender strategy.

172. Points in favour could include:
- increased quantitative and qualitative information gained from first-hand in-country discussions with agencies and beneficiaries.
- feedback on the impact on women of a cross-section of programmes in sectors of health, education, income generation, agriculture, water/sanitation and relief.
- clarification on regional variations concerning the status of women, including urban and rural differences.
- observations on strategies adopted thus far to overcome restrictions on women, together with further recommendations and ideas from in-country women and implementers.
- cooperation and coordination with, and potential for influence on, the UN in the development of a gender strategy tailored specifically to meet the in-country situation.
- opportunity for an increased understanding of the interests of and the constraints on donors and multilateral agencies, and through them on implementing partners and women in Afghanistan.
- more relevant and current information to develop an independent strategy if preferred.
- more relevant and current information to develop own country strategy within the framework of its national assistance policy.
- improved support for own implementing agencies through clear, practical guidelines.
- a "tool of accountability" for national taxpayers, if asked.
- a consolidated approach which would increase the weight of opinion and possible leverage on different authorities in Afghanistan.
- a joint strategy, if developed, might in the future usefully be reviewed in collaboration with regional- or national-authorities, thereby adopting a participative approach and supporting in-country institutional development.

173. Points against could include:
- a delay in obtaining more detailed information (targeted completion date for UN study is end August).
- bilateral donors fail to reach consensus on such participation, particularly on the need to incorporate gender into humanitarian funded programmes.
- bilateral donors commit to participation and UN fails to follow through with the development of a strategy.
- the need to regularly review such a strategy as information resources grow, or as the in-country situation changes.
1. During the course of this study there was a distinct shift from discussion of women’s rights to consideration of gender issues. By definition this includes men, as well as women. With apologies, the report scarcely mentions them. This reflects the terms of reference which were clearly to address the position of women in Afghanistan. It does not deny that in future approaches to assistance in Afghanistan men should be considered alongside women. They too endure violations of human rights, and are deprived of basic and strategic needs.

Particular cases might include the Taliban themselves whose troops are largely made up of youths who, possibly for reasons beyond their or their parents’ control, were brought up with restricted educational opportunities. They support a cause - and restrictions on women - about which they lack a capacity to make an objective judgement.

The sexual abuse of boys and harrassment of youths by mature men, which seems to be an assumed right of many power-mongers, is an aspect of human rights which also justifies exposure.

When considering the social status of women we might pause to review the position of men upon whom it is an honour, even a key aspect of their manhood, to provide for their families. With years of conflict, many are no longer able to do this. At a pragmatic level, one might reflect upon programmes directed towards poverty alleviation and begin to think creatively about income opportunities for men.
END NOTES


5. Courtesy of Nancie Hatch Dupree. Figures available from the ARIC/ACBAR database which, without confirmation, are indicative only.

6. This is not intended to imply particular criticism or inadequacy on the part of UNICEF or its regional representatives.

7. At the level of implementation it is clear that most beneficiaries think that all assistance comes from the UN - a misconception which is reinforced by the fact that many NGOs (for security reasons) have adopted the UN transport livery of white with blue lettering.

8. This figure excluded members of the Advisory Group to the UN on Gender.

9. This would usually include the internally displaced too; most flee to areas where they have some family relationship although over time contact may have been limited. There are, of course, exceptions.
Annex 1

Terms of Reference

Purpose of Assignment
The purpose of this assignment is to prepare a discussion paper for bilateral donors which summarises the key gender issue related to the provision of humanitarian relief/developmental assistance to Afghanistan and identifies possible options to address these issues in the provision of any future bilaterally-supported humanitarian/developmental assistance to this country.

Scope of Services
Specifically, the consultant shall be responsible for the following tasks:
1. Review all background documentation relevant to this assignment.
2. Conduct interviews with all bilateral donors to Afghanistan to obtain their views on the current female human rights situation in Afghanistan and possible responses to it.
3. Conduct interviews with UNOCHA, UNICEF Afghanistan, UNDP and any other relevant UN agencies to review their policies and experiences in defining an appropriate response to the female human rights situation in Afghanistan.
4. Conduct interviews with a representative cross-section of international and Afghan NGOs to obtain their views on the current situation and possible appropriate responses, with particular attention to those NGOs who are active in affected areas of Afghanistan and/or have defined policy/programming responses to date.
5. Conduct interviews with representatives of the Advisory Group to the UN on Gender Issues in Afghanistan, with particular attention to the views of Afghan women.
6. Prepare a draft discussion paper which:
   - Summarises the female human rights situation in different parts of Afghanistan;
   - Summarises and analyses the policy responses taken by bilateral donors, UN agencies and NGOs to date;
   - Identifies the key female human rights issues in the provision of humanitarian/developmental assistance to Afghanistan;
   - Identifies possible options for a response to the issues by bilateral donors. The implications ("pros and cons") of each possible course of action should be assessed and described in the report.
7. Prepare a final draft of the discussion paper based on feedback received from the Bilateral Donors Working Group on Afghanistan.
8. Make a presentation on the research findings to the Bilateral Donors Working Group on Afghanistan.
9. Undertake any other tasks that may be required for the successful completion of this assignment, as agreed between the consultant and the Commonwealth of Australia.

Confidentiality
The discussion paper is intended to be an internal document for the use of bilateral donors only, and this assignment is expected to be carried out in the strictest of confidence. The findings, the discussion paper, the deliberations of the Working Group meeting and any other matters raised in the course of the assignment are not be discussed, shared or distributed to any individual or organisation without the written authorisation of the Bilateral Donors Working Group on Afghanistan.
LIST OF INTERVIEWEES

**Bilateral donors**

- Australian High Commission
- British High Commission
- Canadian High Commission
- Canada Fund for Afghanistan
- Royal Embassy of Denmark
- Embassy of Finland
- Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany
- Embassy of Japan
- Royal Netherlands Embassy
- Embassy of Sweden
- Embassy of Switzerland
- Embassy of United States of America
- European Union

UN offices

- UNCDAP
- UNDP
- UNHCR
- UNICEF
- UNOCHA
- UNOPS
- WFP
- WHO

**Non-Government Organisations**

* : Afghan organisations

- ACBAR Agency Coordinating Body for Afghan Relief
- ADA* Afghan Development Association
- ANCB* Afghan National Coordinating Body
- DACAAR Danish Committee for Aid to Afghan Refugees
- HAFO* Helping Afghan Farmers Organisation
- ERU Emergency Relief Unit
- NAC Norwegian Afghanistan Committee
- NPO/RRAA *Norwegian Project Office/Rural Rehabilitation Agency for Afghanistan
- IRC International Relief Committee
- NCA/NRC Norwegian Church Aid/Norwegian Refugee Council for Afghanistan
- SCA Swedish Committee for Afghanistan
- SCF (UK) Save the Children Fund (UK)
- SCF (US) Save the Children Fund (US)

**Advisory Group to UN on Gender**

(including 9 Afghans of which 6 were women)
## INTERVIEWEES BY CATEGORY, SEX AND NATIONALITY

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<th>Category</th>
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<th>No. of People</th>
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<th>Female</th>
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<td><strong>20</strong></td>
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7 April 1996

to: The Advisory Group on Gender Issues in Afghanistan

from: Pamela Collett, Save the Children (USA)

subject: Comment on UN proposal to establish separate offices for UN women employees in areas of Afghanistan controlled by groups opposed to women's human rights

The issue that brought about the formation of the Advisory Group continues to be the central issue effecting our work in Afghanistan, that is, women's right to work outside the home as employees of UN agencies.

The UN in order to uphold its own charter, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Vienna Declaration of Human Rights, the Convention to Eliminate all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child as well as the Platform for Action from the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing does not have a choice about the question of whether UN offices should be integrated by gender. The UN offices MUST be integrated.

ALL UN offices should have women and men working together (expatriate and Afghan). Part of the reason why this is an issue is because the UN has NOT employed women in all of its agencies throughout Afghanistan. The UN must explain to all groups opposed to women's human rights (such as the Taliban), that offices where UN staff, male and female can work together, is a basic requirement for the UN to operate. Otherwise, all programs except the most basic humanitarian relief should be suspended. The UN should spell out what that would mean, in terms of which programs would be suspended and which would be continued. If the groups opposed to women's human rights, such as the Taliban, continue to refuse to allow women and men to work together in UN offices, the UN to be faithful to its charter has no choice but to implement a gradual suspension of all programs, except those concerned with basic humanitarian relief, and relocation to other areas of Afghanistan where women can work in offices with men.

This is not to say that all delivery of services must be integrated by gender. The UN agencies can operate clinics, other health services, and education centers for women as well as girls' schools, etc., as long as there is rough equality by gender in the total number of beneficiaries from all programs.

A possible entry point for integrated UN offices could be in the area of health. In Herat, Taliban officials have said they would allow female health workers to work outside the home. The UN should discuss with the Taliban the health needs of women and girls and the importance of having programs in health which would require UN offices with women and men working together. The health and education services could be provided for girls and women only.

To develop and provide needed services for women and girls, there must be educated, trained women working outside the home. These women must work with and
communicate with men, both because the UN recognizes and safeguards the right of women to work outside the home in UN agencies and because sound programming demands it. There can be no effective development or rehabilitation work without women's participation in all phases of the program cycle, including planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation.

The Advisory Group must uphold women's right to work outside the home and continue to oppose any proposals to establish women-only UN offices. This also applies to men-only offices. That is, all existing UN offices must be integrated, with expatriate and Afghan women working with men, if the UN agencies are to continue using donor funds that are supposed to benefit women and girls equally with boys and men. If there are no women working in UN offices, it is not possible for the UN to have access to Afghan women and to find out about their needs and their views. Without access to women, UN programs cannot benefit women and girls equally as they are mandated to do by donor requirements and the human rights conventions of the UN. Women-only offices are also not feasible because coordination with local authorities would be impossible as women are not allowed to meet with them in Taliban-controlled areas. Save the Children (UK) took the difficult and painful decision to suspend their program in Herat because they realized that without access to women they could not achieve their goal of supporting children's rights. The Advisory Group should encourage the gender integration of all UN and NGO offices throughout Afghanistan.

Donors to UN agencies working in Afghanistan require that the human rights of women and girls must be upheld and promoted by UN agencies. They do not want their funds spent on programs that favor men and boys at the expense of women and girls. As there are limited funds available for Afghanistan, the resources should be used where they can be used most effectively. For all programs, this means the active involvement of women. Where women and girls do not benefit, non-humanitarian programs should be withdrawn and relocated to areas of Afghanistan where women and girls will benefit equally with men and boys.

Many donors are becoming weary of providing funds for Afghanistan. Weakness on gender issues provides another reason for donors to reduce contributions. On the other hand, if the UN is prepared to take an active role in supporting the fundamental human rights of women to work outside the home and of education for women and girls, this would be a powerful reason for donors to give additional support to UN programs in Afghanistan.

Afghanistan was ranked last out of 130 countries on both the UNDP's 1995 Gender Development Index (GDI) and the Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM). The GDI measures female share of earned income (a very low 7.1% for Afghan women), female life expectancy, female literacy, and female school enrollment (only 9.6% for Afghan girls). The GEM measures seats held in parliament, administrators and managers (0.7%), professional and technical workers (13.5%) and earned income share. Working in such an environment of lack of human rights for women and girls, the UN could make a strong argument for additional funds for programs, which go beyond simply humanitarian assistance, to actively support women's and girls' human rights. The international community expects the UN administration to show initiative in upholding its charter, not to seek ways of accommodation with the reactionary views of groups such as the Taliban.
OPERATIONAL STRATEGIES FOR TALIBAN AREAS

Dialogue
Gender planning and analysis, staff training
Community based approaches
Increased female resources (expatriate/Afghan) in all agencies
Research/social analyses on women in Afghanistan
Use respected Afghans/other-country Islamic scholars, especially female, in all representational teams
Select gender-neutral projects
Move to longer-term, integrated development programmes
Target rural areas
Concentrate on human resource development
Replace formal with informal education
Utilise madrassa education, with expanded curriculum
Establish working groups to discuss/recommend ways ahead on specific topics/sectors
Take a united stand against the Taliban
Adopt segregated offices
Produce disaggregated data
Impose conditionality
Use positive opportunities to best advantage
Be creative
Quantify leverage (ie value of aid vs income from trade - legal and illegal)
Take risks
Move