



# **Women's Economic Empowerment National Priority Programme**

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## Introduction

The starting point for the Women's Economic Empowerment National Priority Programme (WEE-NPP) is the Constitution of Afghanistan, which guarantees equal rights for women and men. But translating that constitutional commitment into normal practices requires looking closely at the constraints blocking realization of that goal. The WEE-NPP concentrates on the constraints limiting women's economic participation. But economic participation is not sufficient by itself — it would be quite impossible to increase women's participation in poorly paid and oppressive working conditions without in any way improving their access to those constitutional rights. For this reason, the focus of the WEE-NPP is to support economic participation as a means to increase women's agency in development.

The WEE-NPP begins from certain strengths. In addition to the Afghan Constitution, the top leadership of the NUG is fully committed to gender equality and has backed this commitment with credible reforms to increasing the role of women in government, providing access to property, and implementing the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security. Women's increased access to education, including more than 60,000 women currently enrolled in university, must also be counted as a strength, as is the increase in exposure to women role models through Afghan and international media, which is increasingly available across the country.

As the same time, there are several deep weaknesses that will work against an expanded role for women. For the most part, women have not engaged fully in the economy. To name a few specific instances: plough agriculture has not engaged women the way that wet-rice agriculture has; a militarized economy has not required women's labour, and Afghanistan's job market has not benefitted from the kind of industrialization that has encouraged women's labour market participation in other developing nations. High rates of illiteracy, poor health care, and a range of cultural practices such as early marriage, limited mobility, and domestic violence have also placed barriers on women's economic participation.

The government's development scenarios offer a range of opportunities that suggest that the WEE-NPP can contribute positively to changing gender roles. Macroeconomic stability, regional trade, and large infrastructure investments are the pre-conditions for attracting foreign investments that are likely to employ women, while improved public services such as health and education can provide women and girls access to better paying jobs. Improved market integration between the rural and urban areas will also create demand for products that are already being produced by women such as horticulture and small livestock. Finally, the stimulus role planned for government procurement also lends itself to pro-women purchasing policies.

The WEE-NPP will nevertheless faces significant threats. Chief among these is the risk of backlash or failure if the program does not incorporate from the beginning appropriate levels of flexibility and an ability to adapt to local environments. Short-term planning driven by premature evaluations are also a source of threat: changing cultural norms and practices often requires adopting longer time horizons than is allowed by typical "project" frameworks.

Broadly speaking, these dimensions drive the focus areas of the NPP. The two enabling components — legal reform and statistical improvements — address formal constraints on women's economic participation. The legal reform's first purpose is to align government regulations, procedures, and jurisprudence with the Constitution's guarantees of equal rights, while the statistical improvements provide the means for what the political scientist James Scott has called "making people visible" to

state planners. The four investment components – agriculture, access to finance, creative industries, and basic skills and capacity building – are intended to work together to increase women’s productivity and ability to utilize all available factors of production. The overall design of the NPP is intended to provide the physical forums, access to information, and design flexibility to give men and women more agency in negotiating new views on gender that are better aligned with their changing economic environment.

## A. Programme Overview

### Brief Programme Description

The National Priority Programme on Women's Economic Empowerment (WEE-NPP) builds poor women's capacity to strengthen the economy of their households, communities, and the entire nation. It provides start-up technical and financial resources to support women-owned businesses, and development of job skills, and financial literacy. These investments will primarily complement and be delivered through the Citizens' Charter, the Agriculture National Priority Programme, and the Human Development National Priority Programme. The programme aims to create an enabling environment for women's economic empowerment through policy and planning reforms that will remove legal barriers to women's economic participation; streamline and reduce regulatory barriers to women's involvement in marketing; and improve the quality and use of gender statistics for planning and monitoring women's economic progress.

Overall coordination of this NPP is through the Human Capital Development Council. Additionally, provincial governors and councils provide regional coordination and support, while Islamic scholars, traditional leaders, and community development councils provide guidance and support for the programme throughout.

### Vision

The equal rights of men and women are realised – as stipulated under the Constitution of Afghanistan – through comprehensive reforms that will enable women's full economic and social participation.

### Objective

The Objective of the NPP is to advance women's agency, autonomy, and well being by expanding women's access to economic resources.

### Overall Theory of Change

The WEE-NPP's underlying theory of change is that increasing women's ownership over economic assets and activities will help improve the overall well being of families and the overall economy. Further, increasing economic empowerment and changing social norms can be seen as mutually reinforcing activities that can help improve the situation of women in Afghanistan over generations. Government policies and practices can facilitate this process. First, improvements to government policy and planning change the underlying rules such as legal rights, access to public resources, and ability to seek redress. Second, targeted government programmes can open up access to resources and information unavailable otherwise. And third, as women gain more direct agency, coalitions with business and civic organizations will broaden the constituency and provide new ways to negotiate further change.

The WEE-NPP will foster a collaborative approach to learning and diffusion across the nation that combines policy and regulatory reforms at the highest levels with increased access to community voice and feedback. The WEE-NPP adopts a highly participatory approach that provides roles for men and for local religious and political authorities. This bottom-up, top-down approach to women's empowerment will ground change in a process of long-term, locally negotiated reform. While the NPP includes specific investments and programmes, the NPP itself is a long-term strategy that will evolve and adapt over time. Standard methodology for project analysis alone will not be adequate

for measuring the social goal that this NPP is trying to achieve. Success of this NPP will be measured against inter-generational changes in social practices around the position of women and girls in contributing to the nation's development.

### **Guiding Principles**

The WEE-NPP will follow a learning process approach. Six critical principles were raised during consultation meetings:

1. Support for women's economic empowerment must be long-term, sustained, and adaptive;
2. Government must exercise leadership in development by being a consistent supporter of women's empowerment in economic, cultural, political and social spheres;
3. The WEE-NPP must ensure that the commercial sector and civil society are fully engaged in the design and implementation of the programme;
4. The government must reduce bureaucratic hurdles to women's participation in the economy, such as by eliminating barriers to women's access to credit and by adopting legal frameworks that create an enabling environment for women to start their own businesses;
5. The WEE-NPP must build on existing organizations and programmes that have already shown their capacity to provide technically competent assistance to women; and
6. The WEE-NPP must provide support for internal capacity building and external coalition building so that change becomes self-reinforcing and sustainable over time.

### **Sectors of Intervention**

Successfully improving the economic operating environment for women is a whole-of-government commitment. The NPP encompasses two domains of action. "Facilitating activities" are reforms that improve the regulatory and normative environment for women's economic development. "productive activities" are programmes that provide resources directly to women.

#### **FACILITATING ACTIVITIES**

1. Increasing the accessibility and analysis of gender statistics
2. Removing legal barriers to women's participation in the economy

#### **PRODUCTIVE COMPONENTS**

3. Building capacity, educating, and training women on literacy, numeracy, small business management and demand-driven labour skills
4. Ensuring inclusive access to finance
5. Improving access to agricultural inputs, extension services, and markets
6. Promoting access to creative economy markets ("Made by Afghan Women")

### **Programme Implementation Approach**

The first 5-year plan will be broken into two key phases:

- i. The start-up phase, lasting one to two years, will focus on programme initiation and effectively delivering its products in a limited number of provinces (but covering all regions).
- ii. The scale-up phase will expand the programme into all secure provinces.

The “phases” are flexible and the programme will include reviews and evaluations so that lessons learned can be incorporated, local views reflected in adaptations, and collaboration with senior officials, business leaders, civic organizations and civil society is continually strengthened. Peer learning networks established in the early phases among political, technical, business, and civil society leaders should facilitate the programme’s acceptance and expansion.

### Roll-Out Strategy

The national programme and principles of geographical and social balance will be followed throughout its development. Linkages will be made with roll-out plans of complementing programmes, including the Citizens’ Charter and the Agriculture NPP.

### Beneficiaries

The WEE-NPP will orient its programming towards poor and underserved Afghan women in both the rural and urban parts of the country. Specifically, women targeted under this NPP will be those that have not been able to benefit from past women’s empowerment programmes, which have often targeted elite urban women. Beneficiaries will be identified and quantified for each component and in each province. Additional beneficiary distinctions would include:

- Geographic: rural, peri-urban, urban, nomadic communities, IDPs and returnees,;
- Economic: self-employed women, women in business as employers and employees, un/underemployed women, farm workers; and
- Social: rural and urban poor and underserved women, with a particular focus on impoverished, women-headed households, households with women as income earners, and/or who are illiterate or have limited education.

### Local Ownership and Participation

Ensuring cultural compatibility and acceptance are essential pre-conditions for the success of the NPP. The programme will be advised by Afghan senior religious scholars, political leaders, and well-known figures, including the Offices of the President and First Lady. At the provincial level, the Governors and Provincial Councils will be key stakeholders. At the community level, most activities will be launched only upon request by the Community Development Councils (CDCs). Ensuring that activities are demand-driven will increase community acceptance and also ensure long-term sustainability.

## B. Women in Afghanistan: The Development Perspective

The Government’s National Peace and Development Framework presents the overall strategy for helping women fully realize their Constitutionally protected rights and potentials.

### Box 1: Afghanistan’s National Gender Strategy

Afghanistan’s Constitution guarantees equal citizenship rights for women, but ending women’s socioeconomic marginalization and increasing their engagement with markets is also

critical for reducing poverty. The government is proposing five pillars for making its gender strategy operational. Each pillar is grounded in a cross-government action programme.

- Implementing our global commitments on women’s human rights, security and freedom from domestic violence;
- Ensuring full access to education and health services, including to higher education;
- **Launching the Women’s Economic Empowerment National Priority Programme;**
- Ensuring constitutional rights for women through the full execution of our laws; and
- Advancing women in government and business.

*Source: ANPDF, 2016*

### **Analytical Background to the WEE-NPP**

The National Priority Programme on Women’s Economic Empowerment (WEE-NPP) is the third pillar of this national strategy. Its goal is to remove the constraints on women’s active participation in the economy and to increase their skills and access to productive resources. Increasing women’s economic empowerment will be an important means for reducing poverty and contributing to national development. The WEE-NPP will work in tandem with the other pillars in the strategy to provide a comprehensive framework for transforming women’s roles in Afghan society and economy. Closely tied to this will be important government initiatives, including the prevention of violence against women and implementing the National Action Plan on UN Resolution 1325, which will help create an enabling environment for women to safely participate in society.

Advancing women’s economic contributions to national development is fundamental to the government’s programme for ending poverty and building a sustainable economy. A large number of analyses have shown that gender inequality and a lack of women’s social and economic agency inhibit economic growth and development (Klasen and Lamanna 2009; FAO 2011). The line of reasoning received further support in 1992 from the then chief economist of the World Bank, Lawrence Summers, who argued that investments in the education of girls is among the highest return investment possible in developing countries (Summers 1992).

#### **Box 2: Women and Mobility**

Social, economic, legal and security-related constraints on women’s mobility pose a key barrier to women’s economic participation. Without facilitation of greater freedom of movement by government, women will continue to face difficulties in accessing facilities such as banks, markets, or transportation; monitoring their products; or moving up the value chain by managing processing, finishing, or other value adding activities. Barriers to women’s increased mobility range from cultural restrictions to the lack of physical infrastructure, to regulatory problems such as centralized registrations that would force women to travel to distant centres.

The WEE-NPP will work to reduce mobility barriers. Some mobility problems can be solved from within the NPP itself, such as simplifying the procedures to register women’s cooperatives so that they no longer have to make long journeys. But others will require coordination with other NPPs such as the infrastructure, private sector, and agricultural NPPs to make women-friendly investments and reforms. In the Citizens’ Charter, for example, urban communities have used community funds to provide streetlights so that in winter months women can still go to their jobs safely. Highway planners are also being given guidance to include safe restrooms for women at periodic intervals in road network design documents.

The NPP management cell will include a specialist tasked with identifying investment and reform opportunities that will make it easier and safer for women to travel.

A number of quantitative studies have built on these ideas to explore the empirical relationship between gender inequality and economic growth and development. Teignier and Cuberes, for instance, using a model whereby women are inhibited from contributing to the labour force in various ways, find an implied income per capita loss of 27% for Middle Eastern and North African countries and a 10% loss for Europe (Teignier and Cuberes 2014), an economically significant result. By contrast, the countries of the East Asia miracle such as Vietnam, Thailand, China, Indonesia and elsewhere were able to engage women in multiple sectors of the economy and today enjoy high rates of growth and near-parity in terms of women's educational, health, and economic welfare achievements. The World Bank in its 2011 report on 'Gender, Equality and Development' summarized this literature, arguing that strengthening the autonomy of women was 'smart economics.'

The benefits of supporting gender equality extend beyond simply economic gain. From a macro-social perspective, better-fed and educated children are the key to the human capital formation that is needed as national economies grow. Improving the position of women has positive effects on a wide range of development outcomes: children's educational attainment (Currie and Moretti 2003), reduced infant mortality (Eswaran 2014), improved household efficiency (King and Hill 1997) and reduced fertility (Rosenzweig and Schultz 1982). The Nobel prize winning economist Gary Becker argued that we can understand the logic of why more autonomy for women produces such positive results: because women do most of the work involved in child-rearing, they have to divide their time with economic activities. It therefore makes sense for them to have smaller but better educated and fed families.

Becker's argument that cultural rules structure economic incentives has had a surprising knock-on effect, with subsequent analysts examining women's autonomy within a household and its effect on women's economic incentives. In societies where women have clearly defined rights over property and household budgets, for example, they are more likely to take entrepreneurial risks, adopt innovations, and invest in expanding household production, all values that contribute positively to national growth and development.

These considerations over the ways that female autonomy and empowerment will affect local level economic decision-making are of special relevance to a developing country like Afghanistan. While the overall argument for women's empowerment in Afghanistan rests in the 2004 Afghan Constitution, which enshrines women's equality before the law, right to an education, and constitutionally protected right to work, applying "smart economics" to public policy decision-making is equally important.

The current level of women's formal economic contribution to Afghanistan's development is low. In 2016, the Central Statistics Office<sup>1</sup> estimated the total population of Afghanistan to be 29.2 million, 48% of which are females. Among the working age women, only 29% are economically active and most are employed in the agricultural sector (66%) while 24% are in manufacturing. The share of women in wage employment in non-agricultural sector is only 10%. Only 19% of the female population is literate (versus 49% for men), although this figure nearly doubles to 36% if only the

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<sup>1</sup> Statistics in this section are taken from the 2013-2014 National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment

female population under 25 is counted. This drastic increase is a significant testimony to the advances that have been made over the past decade in increasing literacy rates of women.

With respect to employment, women still earn significantly less than men. Specifically, for the same type of job, women on average earn 30% less than men. Among those women who earned money themselves, only 34% reported that they could decide how to spend their money.

There is, therefore, tremendous potential to increase women's participation in national development in both quantitative and qualitative ways. Yet, actions to expand women's economic activity in Afghanistan are constrained by a variety of cultural, institutional, and economic factors. Afghan women suffer discrimination that is multi-faceted, inter-related and self-reinforcing. But the current international perception that Afghan women are blocked from the economy is an unhelpful over-generalization given the variation in cultural practices across the country. Furthermore, as in other parts of the world, cultural practices are more dynamic than often realized. As an economy grows and more opportunities arise, cultural beliefs about women's economic value will change.

Important contributions over the past fifteen years have served to reverse some of the most severe injustices and human rights abuses perpetrated on women under previous regimes. Since the overthrow of the Taliban regime, Afghan women and girls have experienced several improvements in their quality of life within the past decade. Girls who were previously unable to attend school, are now able to receive an education in public schools and more Afghan women are enrolling in universities. The Afghan Ministry of Education estimates that there are currently more than 8 million students enrolled in primary or secondary school, compared to 1 million students in 2001; of this, approximately 39% of students are girls. Furthermore, Afghan women are now able to work in government offices and even hold seats in parliament as political seat quotas are guaranteed within the constitution.

Despite these advances, what makes the women's empowerment issue particularly challenging compared to other domains of development work is that gender reform combines complex issues of poverty reduction with the even more complex cultural issues of beliefs about how power is distributed within the household. These beliefs are not immutable, but they do need to be handled with care and sensitivity. Global experience shows that the best strategy for approaching cultural issues is to be inclusive, and to allow adequate time for local negotiations to mature. The WEE-NPP was designed with this lesson in mind: investments in high quality local facilitation for expanded stakeholder engagement and for a more holistic approach to getting male endorsement for the programme will have a long-term payoff in terms of continuity and local acceptance.

Institutional constraints on women's economic participation are often amenable to public policy actions and investment programmes that can ease constraints. A World Bank review<sup>2</sup> identified 22 discriminatory regulations, which are currently being reviewed by the Ministry of Women's Affairs (MoWA) and Ministry of Justice (MoJ) for action. The WEE-NPP incorporates follow-up reviews to procedures and regulations that effectively impede women's access to finance, trade, and employment. Some of the most problematic areas are due to a lack of properly targeted resources, such as ensuring a sufficient supply of women professionals who can provide skills needed for increased production, such as health, education, and agriculture professionals. Not surprisingly, these gaps are most acute in the poorest or most remote parts of the country.

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<sup>2</sup> "Women's Role in Afghanistan's Future: Taking Stock of Achievements and Continued Challenges" World Bank, Kabul: 2013.

WEE-NPP's social strategy reflects Afghanistan 1,300 year tradition of deep thinking about the role and position of women in society. Women in Islam had specified property and inheritance rights long before women in the west did. Muslim women have owned businesses and engaged in trade since the time of the Prophet; including his wife, Ayesha, who played a crucial role in transmitting the Prophet's sayings because she was literate and able to document and transmit the first hadith. If the spiritual and jurisprudential basis for women's empowerment is already present in our history and Constitution, the task now is not to import new concepts, but to embed these rights in our institutions and practice. The government's strategy for increasing women's economic participation reflects the analytical literature that has been summarized here.

### **C. Programme Description**

The WEE-NPP was developed through a highly consultative process that is described below. It is built around a limited number of core organizing principles:

- This is a long-term, national programme. From the beginning it is meant to achieve results at scale;
- National coverage and balance are important. Activities do not have to be the same everywhere, but from the outset the programme should engage all regions;
- To the extent possible programme activities should build upon and work with existing large programmes that can already provide an organizational and delivery infrastructure;
- Management needs to be kept simple and institutional demands should be as light as possible;
- The ability to deploy high quality, trained senior staff, particularly in the provinces will be critical to the success of this programme;
- Sustainability is an important objective but the locus of sustainability is in the economic activities that women undertake successfully. Given the cultural and institutional issues involved, measurement systems should focus on cost effectiveness and long-term results; and
- Learning from experience needs to be built into the technical design from the outset so that adaptive learning can take place without long delays or disruptions.

#### **WEE-NPP Design Process**

The National Programme for the Economic Empowerment of Women was first proposed in the 2014 "Realizing Self Reliance" policy statement. The Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, Martyrs and Disabled (MoLSAMD) was subsequently assigned to develop the National Action Plan on Women's Economic Empowerment, which it did in collaboration with the Ministry of Women's Affairs (MoWA) and other line ministries in 2015.

MoLSAMD conducted nine workshops in Kabul and provinces to gain insights from government agencies, academia, business community, civil society, representatives of agricultural cooperatives, women's savings groups and beneficiaries of on-going programmes. A series of separate meetings were also held with donor organizations and project teams of on-going initiatives with a focus on women's economic empowerment.

The first meeting of MoLSAMD and other national agencies took place on May 30, 2016 at the Ministry of Finance (MoF). Participants discussed the governance structure and began preparing the first draft of the NPP. Most participants were Deputy Ministers from Government agencies that will play a role in the implementation of the WEE-NPP components. Lead agencies were selected for

each of the components. The lead agencies were assigned the task of organizing follow-up, discussions on each component. Outputs from the working groups were incorporated into this NPP.

### Whole of Society Approach

The design of WEE-NPP will engage the government in building coalitions with business and civic organizations at all levels of society to foster a collaborative approach to learning and diffusion across the nation. The issues regarding women in Afghanistan are not among those that can be easily addressed through linear implementation frameworks with large budgets. The economic empowerment of some individuals may be facilitated by providing access to skills, financing and markets and improving the capacity of government agencies to implement supportive laws and rules. However, the root problem is a far deeper social issue that can be addressed primarily through a lengthy process of dialogue and learning that involves all elements of the Afghan society and leads to a transformation of social views and expectations. WEE-NPP's whole of society approach proceeds from the principle of active cooperation between the state administration, our religious and spiritual leadership, and Afghanistan's emergent civil society, including the media.

At the local level, WEE-NPP's plan for social mobilization is built around being sufficiently flexible to engage local leaders and opinion makers to provide advice and guide the speed of implementation. Of particular importance is the fact that most activities at the local level will be voluntary and require an active request from the CDCs before they can proceed. From the outset the programme, men will be included in both WEE-NPP's formulation and as primary targets for supporting social change.

## D. Programme Components

The programme components are divided into two-streams: "Facilitating" activities within the NPP are policy and legal reforms that remove constraints on women's economic activities. "Investment Activities" are the productive components or targeted programmes that will help increase women's access to resources, skills, and support.

### Facilitating Components

#### Component 1: Increasing the Availability and Analysis of Gender Statistics

**Objective: Increase the availability of gender statistics that impacts women's participation in economic activities, and strengthen the capacity to track, analyse, and use data.**

Closing the gender gap requires closing the data gap. This is an important issue worldwide but more acute in Afghanistan. Although the Central Statistics Office (CSO) gathers a large amount of data that is disaggregated for women and men, there are still gaps both in terms of the data gathered and in its analysis and release. One of the challenges in developing programmes that address women's economic empowerment is the limited amount of data on women's work. Information on women's skills and participation in the labour market focus only on the formal sector, leaving the contribution and needs of many women in the informal economy unaccounted for.<sup>3</sup> Further, line ministries and policy-makers rarely access CSO data beyond what has been analysed and published.

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<sup>3</sup> Ministry of Women's Affairs. Draft Strategy on Afghan Women's Economic Rights and Job Security from the Gender Perspective. April/May 2016.

## Sub-Components:

### a) Review existing indicators and survey mechanisms, to ensure relevant data for this NPP is captured

The CSO collects large amounts of data through its national surveys. Much of this data is published as micro-data, which is accessible for further analysis by interested entities. But the lack of capacity in many policy-making institutions to analyse and review this micro-data prevents its general use. Under this programme, the current data collection mechanisms in CSO and other institutions will be reviewed in order to understand existing gaps, particularly regarding information that can improve the targeting and design of this NPP.

CSO collects data in two ways: (1) primary data from surveys and censuses and (2) secondary data from ministerial and institutional registers. Among the several indicators collected by CSO through household surveys, two are most relevant to women economic empowerment.<sup>45</sup>

- Labour market: Statistics on the Afghan workforce as disaggregated by various factors, including sex (female and male), age, educational degree, place, economically active population, underemployment and unemployment, economically inactive population, characteristics of the underemployed and the unemployed, income earned by women and men as disaggregated by type of job, migration of workforce and its characteristics, child work and child labour as disaggregated for girls and boys.
- Gender equality and the enhancement of women's status: measures include the number of women who have the responsibility of family supervision, rates of child marriage, rate of polygamy and satisfaction of wives, women's literacy rates, qualitative accounts of women's situation in the workforce, percentage of women aged 14 and above who wear *burqa* before they go out, average number of days a woman goes out of the house, women's participation in decision-making processes as disaggregated by rank and educational degree of the spouses of women decision-makers, women's status in the government in terms of decision-making, factors effective for women's participation in decision-making processes, measures of women's control over resources, measures of women's mobility, etc.<sup>6</sup>

Where gaps are identified in the type of data collected, new data categories can be created and linked to existing surveys, or mechanisms for collection of data can be further improved. One key area that will need more focus is on expanding the understanding of gender statistics as more than just sex-disaggregated data. Gender data should include analysis of power relations, ownership of resources and decision-making on income and expenditure within a household. Additional data categories will be needed to inform the WEE-NPP components such as women's financial inclusion, women's access to agricultural inputs, extension services and markets, and promoting creative industries for domestic and international markets.

CSO has adopted some new tools and techniques for data collection; however further use of ICT for data collection and analysis must be explored and maximized. Low cost phone applications now exist for data collection and reporting in order to involve local communities, and more women in

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<sup>4</sup> Other related indicators collected are: population, migration, poverty, food security, education, and health

<sup>5</sup> The World Bank's Global Findex captures relevant information on women's financial inclusion in Afghanistan (<http://datatopics.worldbank.org/financialinclusion/country/afghanistan>).

<sup>6</sup> Based on consultation with CSO

monitoring results of WEE can be useful. These technologies also help to get around traditional data collection problems of male intrusion into survey situations and other forms of cultural inhibitions that affect the quality of data.

#### b) Improve the availability and quality of data analysis

Despite the large quantities of data collected in Afghanistan, there is limited capacity to analyse the data and use it for policy development. Under the NPP, the capacity of CSO to analyse data will be further expanded. Ensuring the use of gender statistics by policy and decision makers is just as important as the data collection and analysis itself. There is a need to promote the use of statistical figures and information by ministries, institutions and national and international organizations in developing policies, programmes and projects related to women's economic empowerment. In this area, the capacity of CSO will be developed to analyse relevant data on an as-needed basis to support relevant research and policy development in the whole of government.

Under this NPP, analytical capacity in CSO will be strengthened, with a specific focus on gender analysis, in the following two ways:

1. Building in-house research & analysis capacity: With the long-term goal of establishing an independent unit of research, the government will prioritise CSO's Directorate of Training and Research to receive technical support and build the capacity of its Tashkeel staff by:
  - Ensuring that there is sufficient support from CSO's senior leadership for this directorate in particular, and for the concept of statistical research and analysis in general.
  - Collaborating closely with the Administrative Reforms and Civil Services Commission (AIRCSC), completing the recruitment of Tashkeel positions through the Capacity for Results Programme (CBR), particularly for positions with a focus on statistical research.
  - Providing technical support, in the form of National Technical Advisors (NTA), in order to facilitate effective skills-transfer to Tashkeel staff.
2. Building linkages with universities and research institutes to increase the analysis of existing data by CSO's in-house researchers as well as students of statistics in all social sciences faculties: Housed in CSO's Training and Research Directorate, CSO will create an annual internship programme for 15 female students of statistics at Kabul University. These students, who will come from the faculties of political science, law and international relations, sociology, journalism, psychology and economy, will be assigned to develop analytical products to help the government, using CSO's micro-data in their field of relevance and as part of their course work.<sup>7</sup>

The detailed design for this work will be based on recommendations from the first sub-component.

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<sup>7</sup> Given CSO's need for support in this area and students' enthusiasm for engaging in practical statistical analysis as part of their coursework, CSO is already piloting this initiative with five female students of statistics. The lessons learned from this pilot will be available for reflection by the time this NPP is ready for roll out.

### c) Capture non-statistical data

Many Ministries and agencies undertake the collection of non-statistical data. For example, this includes community mapping and analysis being conducted by Community Development Councils under the National Solidarity Programme, Citizens' Charter, as well as other on and off-budget activities. This data is not systematically captured in ways that allows for its use by other actors. For example, many CDCs conduct a mapping of out-of-school children; however this data is not then systematically shared with the Ministry of Education. With regard to women's empowerment, much of the data is gathered through non-statistical mechanisms.

Often the main barrier to accessing such studies is that they are done under contracts and cannot be published. The WEE-NPP will adopt a pro-transparency policy and develop standard language for contracts that provides *a priori* permission to put final studies and datasets online provided that certain ethical and review provisions have been met

## **Component 2: Removing Legal Barriers to Participation**

**Objective: Eliminate legal barriers to economic participation, and ensure that women are better able to participate in economic and social activities.<sup>8</sup>**

Afghanistan's Constitution guarantees equal treatment to all Afghan citizens. But there is still a long way to go to align regulations and practices with the Constitution's requirements. A number of legal and policy barriers impede women's economic participation. There are also specific issues around the implementation and understanding of laws and policies that must be changed. The situation of women in Afghan society is closely tied to their right over the ownership of property, which is clearly specified in the Holy Quran, but traditional practices that deprive women of this right have strayed in their practical application. Through this component, the government aims to ensure that women's rights related to the government's legal obligations are protected.

Under this component, existing laws will be reviewed and amended as necessary; a systematic mechanism will be put in place to review forthcoming laws; women's awareness on their legal rights will be raised; and the implementation of laws will be monitored to ensure consistency with constitutional provisions.

### **Sub-Components:**

#### a) Ensure that existing, draft, and new legislation do not create barriers to women's participation

The Committee of *Tasweeb*, led by the *Huqoq* Directorate of MoWA, with membership from all justice sector agencies, will be responsible for ensuring that all existing and upcoming legislation is compliant with the constitutional rights supported through this NPP. Justice sector ministries, including the MOJ are members of this committee. This committee, in addition to receiving proposals for amendment through complaints registration mechanism already in place, will also proactively review existing laws and draft amendments, as well as push for speedy approval and endorsement of laws currently stuck in the legislative cycle (i.e. the proposed Family Law) with the aim of strengthening the enabling environment for women's participation in the economy. If any compliance issues are identified, the Committee will draft proposed amendments and submit them to the Ministry of Justice's General Directorate of Institute of Taqneen and Scientific-Legal Research for further processing.

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<sup>8</sup> This component is in line with CEDAW Recommendations to Afghanistan: 11 (Upholding women's rights achievements), 31 (Nationality), 35 (Employment) and 43 (Marriage and family relations).

The Committee will work with the Ministry of Justice's General Directorate of Institute of *Taqneen* and Scientific-Legal Research (pursuant to Article 4 of its Statute), which serves as the highest authority on scientific-legal research on legislative affairs and development and drafts reviews of legislative documents (laws, decrees, regulations and statutes as well as amendments, annexes, additions and deletions in these documents). The General Directorate will make the required recommendations for amendments. Once processed, this office will submit legislative documents to the Afghan Cabinet.

b) Raise awareness of legal rights and monitoring implementation of laws and policies

In an environment of loose implementation, it is important to build coalitions for legal reform in parliament and to establish linkages with the police, Attorney General's Office (AGO), courts, sub-national governance institutions, village elders and civil society when building awareness of existing laws and regulations that support women's economic empowerment.

Laws, once enacted, are enduring, but to be effective they must be enforced. One of the key areas that has been identified as in need of major reforms are practices concerning women's rights to land, property and inheritance. The inheritance of female members of family are described under articles 2007, 2008, 2009 of the Civil Law of Afghanistan but they are not fully enforced due to adverse social practices that favour men. As Afghanistan advances its national programme for land administration, the importance of ensuring women's full title to land and property will rise. This work will be done in partnership with ARAZI and reflected in the design of the NPP on Land Administration. The Department of Legal Awareness Raising functions under the General Directorate of Paralegal Support at MoJ, and is mandated to provide information and awareness to the general public on legislative documents. Experts will work in cooperation with MOWA and MOJ to prepare awareness-raising packages.

Departments of Women's Affairs (DoWAs), which operate at the provincial level, will work on sensitisation and communications campaigns to change common perceptions about legal requirements preventing women's participation. An initial review of the 22 cases of legal barrier to women's active role in the economy shows that lack of legal awareness is the primary factor that shapes commonly mistaken perceptions on legal requirements for women and thus prevents women's participation. To address this, under this NPP, DoWAs, in cooperation with Gender Officers based at the Office of the Provincial Governor and civil society organizations will work on sensitisation and communications campaigns. National guidance for this work will be provided through the Public Communications Directorate of MOWA and its Department of Advocacy and Training.

DoWAs at the provincial level will monitor policy implementation. But citizen oversight for improved accountability, and increasingly through use of social media platforms, is fundamental to the success of legal reform. Laws that are not enforced must be reported by citizens and brought to the attention of those responsible. Communities and regulatory authorities will need to be continually trained and the NPP will invest in outreach and dissemination.

Complaints will be received and recorded via email, phone or in writing, by the Departments of Women's Affairs at the provincial level and communicated to MoWA's Directorate of *Huqoq* for further action, which will include both resolving the individual case as a short-term remedy, and reviewing the barrier from a systematic perspective to ensure that other women do not face the same problem. The process will be supported by civil society organizations.

Basic legal rights training will be provided to CDCs and women's interest groups at the village level. These actors will act as focal persons in their village to ensure that women have an understanding of their basic legal rights, are linked with legal services, and are able to access basic services. A pilot will be developed to implement this programme through mechanisms established under the Citizens' Charter and based on best practices from other Asian countries, including Indonesia, India, Nepal, Vietnam and elsewhere.

## Productive Components

### **Component 3: Training in Literacy, Business Management and Labour Skills**

**Objective: Increase women's knowledge and skills to operate more effectively at home and in the marketplace.**

To succeed in income generating activities, women will need to gain skills such as basic literacy and numeracy, financial management, and household management for their families. In rural and remote areas, existing structures such as CDCs and savings groups will be used to deliver these basic skills. For women interested in further expanding their enterprise or gaining new marketable skills, further training will be provided based on market demand.

This component will complement the Human Capital Development National Priority Programme, also being coordinated by MoLSAMD. This component particularly focuses on women who lack access to formal training and education institutions. First, the component aims to provide women with basic skills to participate in economic activities, and second, to increase access to training and education facilities – particularly for women interested in professional training in agriculture, health, and education.

#### **Sub-components:**

##### a) Provide basic numeracy, literacy, and financial management training

Women in remote and rural areas who have lacked access to basic education will be supported with basic numeracy literacy, and financial management skills. This capacity building will be provided using existing structures including community savings groups, women's interest groups, and CDCs. MRRD will facilitate the provision of numeracy and financial management training, through federation of self-help and women's savings groups. This is further detailed in section 4(a). Beyond the more formal capacity building programmes, these existing structures will increase demand for additional programmes being delivered through both on and off-budget mechanisms.

Afghanistan has one of the lowest literacy rates in the world. The male literacy rate (age 15+) is 62% but the female rate is just 19%, compared to the median value for low-income countries of 70% and 57% respectively. Only one in five women in Afghanistan is literate and the literacy rate for women in rural areas is three times lower than in urban areas.

The Ministry of Education (MoE) currently supports around 200,000 women in literacy classes. Through this activity, MoE aims to increase its reach to 360,00 women in the next five years.

Expansion of literacy programmes will focus on both the quality and reach of the activities. In terms of reach, MoE will adopt a demand-driven model for literacy classes by using CDCs to conduct awareness campaigns and to identify potential beneficiaries. Where feasible, classes will be run out of existing schools and taught by existing teachers. Where classes need to be held at the village-

level, they will be attached to the relevant government school for oversight, but they will be managed by CDCs and held at local community centres or mosques. The Ministry of Education will hold a workshop with NGOs to identify operational best practices and effective models for establishing and running community-development schools in order to develop an operational guideline. This work will be coordinated closely with the Citizens' Charter, and implemented through the same mechanism.

In terms of quality, the Ministry of Education is currently in the process of updating learning material, to make it more learner-oriented and to meet the needs of different learners. This will include more relevant content, including practical guides on agricultural practices. The literacy training package is taught over nine months, in Dari and Pashto, after which learners will have the equivalent of a third grade primary education.

#### b) Provide demand-driven skills training to meet market needs

In conjunction with component 4(a) on inclusive finance, women in rural areas interested in starting small businesses will be supported with skills training to increase their chances of success. Through federations of women's savings and self-help groups and Village Savings and Loan Association (VSLAs), The Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development (MRRD) will train women on business cycle and enterprise development. Focus will be placed on opportunity identification, resource mobilization, capacity building training, market linkages, transfer of technology and mentoring.

MRRD follows a demand-driven approach to skills development with support to entrepreneurs based on market demand. MRRD will design and implement capacity building training informed by the following:

- Training needs assessment of the participants and their capacity, including entrepreneurial competencies;
- Analysis and basic study of the value chain or sector/sub-sector;
- Technical feasibility and economic viability;
- Market situation analyses;
- Levels of both business management and technical skills; and
- Matching enterprise and entrepreneur's needs and requirements.

All training programmes will be driven by the needs of beneficiaries and entrepreneurs. The focus is context-specific regarding enterprises/business and beneficiaries/entrepreneurs' problems and market opportunities.

During the training or capacity building activity, MRRD will facilitate the development of business plans for the women entrepreneurs. The business plan will highlight the existing potential of interested women with analysis of their financial and other asset capacity. The business plan will also provide a picture of how the enterprise will grow, considering its resources, market linkages, input suppliers, potential customers and value chain as a whole. Only technically feasible and economically viable businesses and enterprises will be considered for the training, as determined by MRRD and facilitators.

Technical capacity and training providers will vary depending on the nature of the value chains and sub-sectors, and MRRD will establish partnerships with different government and non-government institutions including the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock (MAIL), Ministry of Commerce and Industries (MoCI), MoWA, MoLSAMD, The Afghan Chamber of Commerce and Industries (ACCI), the private sector, NGOs, and other relevant entities. Particularly on agro-business,

MRRD will closely work with MAIL to complement efforts and ensure productivity for enterprise development. This will be done in close linkage with Component 5: *Improving Access to Agricultural Inputs, Extension Services, and Markets*. MRRD will also strengthen its partnership and coordination with MoCI to ensure sustainability and macro-level value chain assistance so that women entrepreneurs face fewer constraints on marketing their products. MRRD will also help women enterprises approach MoCI for registration and further support, which is linked to activities under Component 6 of this NPP: *Promoting Access to Creative Economy Markets*.

c) Train women as agriculture, health, and education paraprofessionals to meet local needs

Under this area, the particular focus will be on training women based on geographic gaps in vital fields including agriculture, health, and education. The Ministries of Agriculture, Public Health, and Education, will identify key areas which lack basic female service providers including: extension workers, para-veterinarians, nurses, midwives, and teachers. Currently, there is a mismatch between supply and demand in many of these fields. Each responsible Ministry will build mechanisms into its selection process to ensure women from areas that lack basic service providers have better access to such programmes. Where funding is available, scholarships can also be made available to increase access.

*Health:*

According to the 2014 Afghanistan Midwifery Report, in 2012, only 23% of the estimated need for professional midwives was met, and if the country maintains its current graduation rate, only 8% of the estimated need will be met in 2030. As the 2015 Lancet Midwifery report stated, 87% of essential health services are provided by nurses and midwives; expanding the midwifery and nursing education programmes will improve the quality of care, promote respectful maternity care and enhance behaviour change for this purpose. Meanwhile, to ensure health access in remote areas, community midwifery programmes and community health nursing education programmes will be expanded. This will also contribute to the economic empowerment of Afghan women by creating a viable career for midwives, as midwifery is a socially accepted profession for women.

Roll-out of this programme will follow the existing Community Midwifery Education Programme and the Community Nursing Education Programme being implemented by the Ministry of Public Health and partner NGOs. Over the next five years, the Ministry of Public Health plans to roll-out these programmes across 34 provinces. One key issue that will be addressed in this process is the formation of a regulatory body for nursing and midwifery accreditation in private sector institutions. Through this process, the programme can provide linkages not only through public institutions, but also through private institutions that meet the required curriculum and standards of the Ministry of Public Health.

*Education:*

Currently, the Ministry of Education employs over 200,000 teachers across the country, 33% of which are women. The availability of female teachers is a major factor in ensuring girls can access education institutions. In rural and remote areas there is a much lower number of female teachers in girls schools, which is a major factor behind girls lower enrolment rates. In order to overcome this issue, and also to provide economic opportunities to more women interested in pursuing careers as teachers, the Ministry of Education plans to undertake a teacher training programme for women that can work with CDCs to overcome the female teacher availability gap.

This project will provide new employment opportunities to up to 30,000 rural women (those with the highest available education) to become teachers in rural schools over the next five years. This will increase the percentage of female teachers from 33% to 42%; engage educated rural women in

meaningful employment and income generation; and encourage families to allow girls to enrol in schools staffed with female teachers.

Using the Education Management Information System (EMIS) data, MoE will determine which schools are in need of female teachers. CDCs will be the key stakeholder at the community level and will be given the responsibility to come up with a school development plan where they can identify educated women within the surrounding communities that should be recruited. This will be a compact between CDCs and government through the mechanisms being strengthened under the Citizens' Charter. The local educated women recruited will teach in grade levels appropriate to their training as contract teachers. At the same time, they will be enrolled in in-service teacher education programmes of MoE. They will also be provided with accelerated learning courses to improve subject matter knowledge and teaching practices. After five years, the Ministry of Education will gradually absorb contract teachers into Tashkeel positions.

Further, in line with the National Education Strategic Plan, an initiative will be piloted to accept initial entry into the system of recruits who do not have the minimum required grade level 14 in education, or have no formal training in pedagogy. The top graduates of grade 12 in rural areas will be given the chance to apply for teaching positions in the local community and they will be at the same time enrolled in in-service teacher education program. They will work towards the necessary credentials through an approved professional development plan. Participation in training workshops or packages may be granted credit towards the credential by the Equivalency Review Board.

The Credentialing System is already in place but it requires a structural plan with new policies, guidelines and procedures for coordination to be agreed between departments of academic supervision and teacher training. With support, roll-out will be managed by Provincial Education Directorates (PEDs) and District Education Directorates (DEDs) under their supervision.

#### *Agriculture and Livestock:*

Similar to the community-driven midwifery and nursing programmes, the Ministry of Agriculture will intensify its demand-driven training of female para-veterinarians and extension workers. In line with the roll-out of horticulture and livestock programmes outlined in component 5, MAIL will train female extension workers and para-vets based on existing gaps in roll-out areas. Service providers in these sectors will work for government on contract for short-term delivery, and later will be transitioned to the private sector as per the Ministry's strategy to privatise input services. Extension workers and para-vets will be trained through existing schools of agriculture in the country, as well as through provincial agriculture resource centres and markets for women outlined in component 5(c), Establishing Special Women's Markets.

#### d) Construct Women's Dormitories in Provincial Centres

To increase women's access to higher education institutions, vocational training, and other education facilities, which are primarily present in urban areas, dormitory facilities will be built in selected institutions that have the potential to take in large numbers of female students. This will enable more women and girls from remote and rural areas to access post-secondary education and training institutions, particularly as related to activities under sub-component (c) above. It will also help increase the number of professional women in agriculture, health, and education, which over time will be needed to support sub-component 2(b). This component will be led by the Ministry of Urban Development and Housing, with the aim of constructing one women's dormitory in each of the 34 provincial capitals over the next ten years. Once construction is completed, the dormitories

will be handed over to the Ministry of Education.

## **Component 4: Ensuring Inclusive Access to Finance**

### **Objective: Improve Women's access to finance through informal and formal channels**

The WEE-NPP component on Access to Finance will expand women's access to economic resources. Working across ministries as well as in partnerships with NGOs and the private sector across 34 provinces, the government will work to ensure inclusive access to finance.

This part of the WEE-NPP will focus on three priority activities. First, a systematic approach will be developed to expand the reach of village savings and self-help programmes through community-level interventions such as revolving funds. Second, the programme will further expand access to credit for sector-specific associations such as cooperatives, for women undertaking activities in agriculture or handicrafts. Third, the government will work with the private sector to identify and eliminate bureaucratic constraints preventing women's access to formal credit channels.

#### **Sub-Components:**

##### a) Increase access to informal credit through village savings groups

Savings groups have emerged in several parts of the country through government programmes, NGO efforts, and self-organization/community-based programmes. Especially for women, these are important sources of grouping (often 8-10 members) to come together among peers, save small amounts of money, and lend to each other for various needs. They often function as an informal social safety net, with members borrowing small amounts, for example, to cope with a health or livelihood shock to the household. In Afghanistan, as in other countries, these savings groups have a good repayment record because of the strong social accountability involved in borrowing from peers' own money.

However, by themselves, savings groups are insufficient to fully support women's economic empowerment because members, especially poor women, generally lack enough cash for the group to invest in high productivity activities. Furthermore, savings groups often lack quality and consistent access to training, information, and markets to support their productive activities, and women in savings groups also lack a broader platform beyond small groups to collectively address social constraints to economic empowerment at the community level.

In India and Pakistan these limitations have been addressed by 'clustering' or 'federating' of small women's saving s groups into coordinated, community-level platforms supported by local organizations and government assistance.

This sub-component will develop and Afghan-specific model of such clustering with the potential for sustainability and scalability. It will build on MRRD's experience in implementing the Afghanistan Rural Enterprise Development Program (AREDP) — a programme financed by the Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund (ARTF) for entrepreneurial development — but it will eventually operate on a larger scale and across a broader area. The programme will coordinate closely with experienced NGOs and other actors to create a systematised mechanism for clustering or federating self-help groups and providing them with access to village-level revolving funds. The revolving fund will be a grant entirely owned and managed by the clusters. The aim of the fund is to expand members' access to finance (members own savings will be reserved for basic needs and shock mitigation). The revolving fund at the village level will support prospective entrepreneurs, and will be jointly delivered with basic training outlined under component 2.

As this component will be very input intensive because it requires village-level delivery of interventions, the Government will not have the capacity to begin full-scale implementation across the country. The roll-out will be coordinated through both MRRD and NGOs. MRRD will work with other organisations that have had positive results in this work to form a regulatory body to develop an operational guideline and monitoring programme. A steering committee made up of on and off-budget implementing and managing entities of this programme will meet on a quarterly basis to coordinate national implementation, share best practices and challenges, and plan further scale-up.

Areas of the NPP that will be implemented by MRRD will be implemented through structures in place under the Citizens' Charter, including district-level MRRD officers. Federation of savings groups and enterprise groups will be informed by the various information gathering work that will be done by the CDCs and Facilitating Partners, including community and socio-economic profiling, together with seasonal calendars and women's mobility mapping. The VSLAs will be strengthened by participatory producer-led value chain analysis and their sustainability encouraged through self-evaluation methods to support the achievement of their economic goals.

Over the next five years, this programme will be rolled-out in up to 12,000 communities, aligned with the Citizens' Charter roll-out, depending on security, community acceptance, and the availability of resources.

#### b) Increase access to credit through associations and cooperatives.

Engaging with existing producer associations and cooperatives will be important for enhancing opportunities for women to access credit in addition to increasing the potential for employment and marketing agricultural and creative products.

The Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock (MAIL) has operated several agricultural credit programmes over the past four years. These include programmes run directly under the Agriculture Development Fund the focus has been on supporting women-owned businesses in agriculture. In particular, an Islamic credit system known as *Zahra*, was established in 2012, which has helped women-run businesses begin and expand their work, including the Saffron Production Association in Herat.

These sector-specific loans will be reviewed and scaled-up where there is a high potential for return.

#### c) Identify and eliminate constraints to formal banking

The private banking sector will play a vital role in the success of this NPP. There are a total of 17 commercial banks in Afghanistan, including three state-owned, nine private banks, and five foreign bank branches. These banks offer both conventional and Islamic banking products. Fund-based financing methods include term loans, overdraft, SME financing, and Islamic financial products such as *murabahah*, *mudarabah*, *musharakah*, and *ijarah*. Non-fund based financing is in the form letter of credit and bank guarantee.

The new Afghanistan banking law and the central bank's rules cover areas such as operating procedures, contract specifications and the operation of a centralized *sharia* board to determine whether products obey Islamic principles. In October 2015, Afghanistan's central bank, Da Afghanistan Bank (DAB), stated that all banks should provide Islamic banking services in compliance with the law.

Governance of the access to finance activities needs to strike a balance between prudent financial oversight and the need for microfinance institutions to remain flexible and innovative. Afghanistan already benefits from a microfinance regulatory system and these principles will be applied to the WEE-

NPP activities as well. Through this component, the government and private sector will partner together to review existing constraints on women's access to finance. The Ministry of Finance and DAB will work with public and private banks to set-up a working group to identify and eliminate bureaucratic constraints around women's access to formal banking and micro-finance. Bank employees will be informed on the positive business impacts of ensuring access to services for women. Further, mobile banking innovations will be used to track both public and private use of new advances for enabling women in isolated parts of the country to access credit. To strengthen the sector while retaining the emphasis on expanding women's access, the Steering Committee will include the Central Bank and Ministry of Finance in order to provide high-level support and consistent oversight. Working under the guidance of the Steering Committee, specialized microfinance service providers such as Women's World Banking will also help local organizations improve their outreach and cost-effectiveness.

## **Component 5: Improving Access to Agricultural Inputs, Extension Services, and Markets**

***Objective: Increase women's capacity to engage in agricultural markets, enable a transition from subsistence farming to surplus production to improve food security and increase household incomes***

Among working age women, only 29% are economically active and most are employed in the agricultural sector (66%).<sup>9</sup> Agricultural development, food security and poverty reduction are inextricably inter-related and women potentially have a central role in this linkage. Despite their limited engagement in rural development compared to their potential role, they already play a critical role in addressing food insecurity and pervasive rural poverty. Contrary to public perceptions that women are restricted to the four walls of their homes, rural women spend a considerable part of their time on agricultural and livestock work, including the collection of agricultural and livestock produce. Since women's work is restricted to the initial stages of the value chain, the work done by women in agricultural labour is considered to be normal daily family work. As a result, they do not earn income, nor is their work and labour valued and appreciated (and it is also under-reported on formal surveys). However, access to land and regular irrigation are major barriers to the development of these resources.

Component 5 is designed to generate employment, reduce poverty, decrease malnutrition and improve the welfare of socioeconomically destitute and vulnerable families in rural, semi-urban and urban areas. The NPP will reinforce women's role in agriculture by increasing their access to resources, opening up marketing channels for women's products, and reducing the risks and volatility that women producers currently face.

### **Sub-Components:**

#### **a) Increase Agricultural Production through Kitchen Gardens, Nurseries, and Greenhouses for Women**

With the aim of strengthening women's role in agricultural production, both for home and market, this sub-component supports kitchen gardening at homes and green houses and nurseries for agricultural cooperatives. Training on kitchen gardens will be provided to women by female extension workers, who are hired on an as-needed-basis by MAIL to conduct training for beneficiaries on land preparation, horticulture, food processing, hygiene, nutrition, and packaging.

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<sup>9</sup> Central Statistics Office. Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey. National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment, 2013-2014

Women who are successful in this activity will then be encouraged to form cooperatives and associations, through which MAIL will then provide inputs and training to establish nurseries and greenhouses. This work will be coupled with extensive training on food production, processing, packaging and market linkage. These groups are also linked to financing mechanisms, as outlined in component 4(b).

Currently, close to 20,000 women are reached through this sub-component through MAIL's existing programmes. MAIL will further scale-up this activity and reach out to roughly 200,000 women over the next four years to provide the inputs and training for kitchen gardens. Considering the fragility of local economies, before the full scale-up plan is designed, an extensive study will be conducted on market feasibility of expanding the programme in areas where there is a risk of oversaturation in the market.

Under the WEE-NPP, goods and services will be procured as per existing legal procedures for Government. The majority of activities are implemented by MAIL. MAIL will also support the alignment of off-budget programmes in-line with this activity through its operational guidelines and through national and provincial level working groups that meet regularly to share information and experiences.

#### b) Strengthen Livestock Farming by Involving Women

Experience from neighbouring countries such as Bangladesh has shown that for the very poor, asset distributions can be a critical first step in building productive home economies, even taking into account moral hazard problems and the potential of such programs to go off track if not well handled. But tightly controlled programs managed through credible partnerships will strengthen poor women's ability to secure basic incomes from small numbers of livestock through the distribution of milking cows, goats, sheep, chickens and honeybees with specific identification tags, particularly to women living in remote or mountainous areas. This will be coupled with capacity building in the areas of raising milking cows, goats and sheep, aviculture and apiculture and honey production, based on a standard curriculum already in place and being used. Special attention would be given to issues of nutrition, hygiene, stable system reform, raising domestic animals, dairy products processing, packaging and marketing standards.

MAIL's Home Economic Directorate(HED) currently covers about 600 families in 10 provinces. Though small, the directorate built a model that can now be scaled up under the NPP, which is fully aligned with both the goals of the Comprehensive Agricultural Development Program and the government's policies to ensure the inclusion of nomads in development programming. The subcomponent will follow the below procedure:

- Identification of beneficiaries and their mobilization in groups;
- Identification of locations for livestock farms (green lands get cows and mountainous areas get goats);
- Delivery of goats/ cows by companies with expertise in livestock farming on the basis of the standards determined and monitored by MAIL;
- Registration of livestock farms under women's names to ensure women's ownership; and
- Delivery of training by MAIL contracted female extension workers.

The roll-out will be expanded to close to 2,000 families in 2017, with the aim of reaching 10,000 vulnerable families over the next five years.

### c) Establish Specialised Women's Markets

This sub-component completes the value chain for the first two sub-components and ensures that women can earn higher profits from their agricultural and livestock products. In the absence of special women markets and cold storage, women producers, under the pressure of finding market for their products quickly after harvesting, agree to lower prices and thus do not make the profit that they are entitled to. With women's special markets, pressure for survival would be reduced and women's ability and talent for creativity in the area could be harnessed. This is in addition to the opportunity of pocketing higher profits.

Under this sub-component, MAIL will establish regional, and gradually provincial level special women markets, as per the following procedure:

- Identify feasible locations for women's markets for their agricultural and livestock products;
- Establish women's markets and connect them to national and international markets, with the aim of expanding women's activities and helping their businesses grow;
- Promote and support women's active role in these markets and help them improve their agricultural and livestock products;
- Support women in having an appropriate and secure location for agricultural and livestock markets; and
- Include cold-storage facilities to enable off-season sales that can yield higher returns.

Over the next five years, the aim will be to complete four regional markets, with the long-term goal of one women's market per province.

### **Component 6: Promoting Access to Creative Economy Markets**

**Objective: Improve women's access to quality inputs, designs and markets, and facilitate export and income generation for women and families undertaking creative activities.**

After agriculture, handicrafts are the second largest source of employment in the country. The ANPDF articulates the use of cultural heritage and industries to promote sustainable development. This is in line with international trends, where developing countries have almost 50% of the global market for creative goods.

Afghan women possess historically great capacity for producing handicrafts, through which they try to meet the economic needs of their families. Recognizing this, non-governmental organizations run handicrafts projects as they play a major role in ensuring livelihoods. The livelihoods of most women depend on income earned through handicrafts, including carpet-weaving; embroidery; needlework; embroidery; karakul hats; silk; cashmere; leatherwork; and sewing. These handicrafts generate income, create employment, contribute to economic growth and maintain historical and cultural skills.

However, handicraft focussed programs have often suffered from too much focus on producing "more", without sufficient attention to skills, design, finishing, and access to markets. As a result, interventions have often increased the overall supply of handicraft products without finding the demand that would purchase the outputs or increase the earning power of the producers. Major gaps that have been identified in this industry include the low quality of products due to lack of relevant market-driven training, low quality inputs, and lack of access to markets. Under this component, the Ministry of Commerce and Industry will establish a Women's Small and Medium Enterprise Development Directorate (WSDD), which will serve as a coordinating entity to help women-owned and run business overcome these major obstacles. The directorate will work closely

across all departments in MoCI, as well as with other Government departments, the private sector, and civil society organisations. However, while MOCI will provide government coordination and access to government policy reforms, the focus of this work will be to work closely with the private sector at all stages of production, transport, and marketing, with MOCI providing the cover for de-regulating constrained access, such as the rules on women's cooperatives.

### **Sub-Components:**

#### a) Simplify business processes for import and export

The Afghanistan Central Business Registry (ACBR), MOCI and AISA will be engaged in developing a simplified procedure for the registration of small businesses that will serve the large number of women who are attempting to start their own businesses. The new procedure will support the specific registration process for import of inputs and export of products.

A review of the current process will be undertaken by MoCI and external consultants to reduce the steps required for business registration and import and export processes. A guidebook will be developed by MoCI for import and export processes, and the existing business registration guidebook will be updated based on any recommended changes.

MoCI's WSDD will help women-owned businesses that are struggling with import and export processes. Any systematic obstacles that are identified through this support would then be referred to the relevant MoCI department or relevant agency to be addressed and, where appropriate, for updated procedures to be put in place.

#### b) Improve product quality and design

The second sub-component is focused on enhancing knowledge of materials, product design and markets, with the objective of helping women produce better products with sophisticated designs that will elicit greater returns. Women who are already producing handicrafts will be supported by NGOs and the private sector to improve the quality of products, and integrate local designs and products with market trends. Women will be provided advanced knowledge of materials, product design, and creative packaging to increase market appeal.

#### c) Promote the "Made by Afghan Women" export brand through embassies and international trade forums

MoCI, through the Export Promotion Agency Afghanistan (EPAA), and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs will work with Afghan embassies to link female producers to international markets. MoCI will support this work by sending sample products to embassies, which can then be shared with relevant markets. The embassy's commercial attaché can serve as a useful link in connecting women entrepreneurs to trade symposiums. They can do this by sharing timely information about events, facilitating women entrepreneurs' participation (including handling visa processes), or by establishing show rooms for Afghan Women SMEs in other countries.

MOCI, in collaboration with MoWA, will facilitate the membership of the country's businesswomen in regional and international trade forums as well as supporting their active participation in world trade councils and commissions in order to develop commerce and business. MOCI in collaboration with ACCI, MOFA, MOWA and the SAARC Secretariat will also facilitate linkages across domestic, regional and other international markets by enabling visits to similar businesses in the region and to B2B and C2B conferences, as well as by participating in international exhibitions.

#### d) Aggregate for export

Due to the volatile security situation in Afghanistan, many businesses are unwilling to take major risks by investing in the country. In order to begin changing this perception and provide some security for both domestic and international investors, the Government must find a mechanism to reduce risk for investors and promote the business environment.

Particularly in relation to promotion of women's products, which often have a limited reach due to some mobility limitations on women in parts of the country, the Government can facilitate export and promotion through aggregated marketing. For products such as carpets and local handicrafts, competitive government purchasing for furnishing offices in the new *Darulaman* government centre and in provincial and district offices will itself become a major source of demand that will develop improved marketing, warehousing, and quality control.

Improved handicraft design and marketing has yielded big returns to poverty reduction in a broad range of developing countries, even in isolated and poor areas. In nearly every case, the government's role has been to facilitate private sector linkages that allow producers to respond to market demands, without the government getting involved in the details other than in traditional public sector domains such as education and training. Under this NPP, best practices from around the world will be reviewed, and studied in the Afghan context for implementation in the medium-term.

## **E. Implementation Arrangements**

The key to understanding the implementation arrangements for the WEE-NPP is to recognize that it is a statement of government strategy, not a uniquely designed "project." Most of the activities within the NPP build on existing programs run by line ministries, NGOs, or private sector entities. The NPP provides a framework for scaling these existing programs, improving their profile and staffing, and linking them into a national public policy commitment. The NPP does, however, contain some new programs and activities, which will require new institutional and management systems to be set up. However, implementers can draw from an available wealth of experience developed after 15 years of development experience in Afghanistan in order to keep the start-up costs to a minimum and instead focus on reaching large numbers of poor women as quickly as possible.

WEE-NPP falls under the Human Capital Development Council. Overall coordination is by MOLSAMD, which chairs a deputy minister level working group that includes all participating Ministries. Each ministry appoints a responsible deputy minister to oversee their ministry's programme. In the provinces, governors will be accountable for programme oversight, with feedback provided from the provincial councils and public dialogues with civil society, business groups, and academic organizations.

Financial flows follow the model used for the Citizens' Charter. Funds for line ministry activities go directly to that ministry or to CDCs. Financial reporting follows standard Ministry of Finance reporting and audit requirements.

Each Ministry will be responsible for its own programme implementation and budget execution. Annex 1 summarizes the proposed budget.

### **Women’s Economic Empowerment Unit in the Ministry of Labour:**

Much of the WEE-NPP will require close coordination and collaboration with other ministries and with private sector and civil society organizations. To provide the proper oversight and coordination, the Ministry of Labour will be forming a management unit chaired by a Director General and reporting directly to the Minister. The functions of the cell are to:

- Coordinate WEE-NPP activities and enable reforms with other ministries;
- Ensure good spatial documentation, distribution and management of WEE-NPP activities;
- Provide updates and briefings to the Human Capital Council, the High Council on Governance, Law, and Justice, the Council of Ministers, and the Ministry of Finance;
- Commission high quality evaluations and reviews;
- Maintain constructive national and international external dialogue; and
- Coordinate WEE-NPP’s strategic international partnerships, particularly with women’s empowerment programs in other Asian countries.

## **F. Learning and Evaluation**

The design of the NPP calls for continuous learning and adaptation. Different stakeholders have different learning needs; however, they all need to work from continually updated empirical evidence and from evaluations than have been performed in the past. The learning and evaluation work is designed to:

1. Build the culture of M&E in government and civil society, especially those directly implementing women’s economic empowerment programmes;
2. Institutionalize collaboration and partnership;
3. Emphasize evidence-based policy-making;
4. Encourage peer-to-peer learning and adapting to change; and
5. Enhance international/global open data knowledge sharing with other women, experts and jurisdictions.

## **Communications**

Communications and awareness-raising are key activities of the Women’s Economic Empowerment NPP. Communications efforts will help to create an enabling environment at the local level for activities under this programme to operate. Further, awareness-raising can help to create demand and mobilise communities. Change in attitudes toward women in the public sphere will be crucial to the success of the WEE-NPP. Men – including influential men in the community – remain the gatekeepers of women’s movements in Afghanistan and therefore must be included in the communications strategy to help promote the work of WEE-NPP. Awareness raising campaigns should especially target the public at-large with a view to eliminating negative stereotypes towards working women.

As per the mandate of the Ministry of Women’s Affairs and its provincial departments, communications and awareness-raising will be aligned with the Ministry’s existing communications strategy. MoWAs communications work, particularly as it is implemented at the provincial level by DoWAs, will build awareness and acceptance of key concepts highlighted in this programme, as well as build an environment where implementation of key activities will be more feasible. Particularly, DoWAs will work to reach Islamic scholars and religious leaders through awareness raising activities.

## Financing the NPP

The WEE-NPP follows the Public Financial Reform roadmap that the government is using to restructure its approach to public spending. Each year the WEE-NPP participants plan their annual spending requirements. Their initial estimate will include four additional years’ worth of operations and maintenance costs. Each year an additional year is added, with adjustments made based on the performance of the year that was just completed.

This model of financing is significantly different from more familiar models of project support, which require the upfront calculations of all expected costs that can then be locked into a project account. By making the WEE-NPP align with the PFM roadmap, not only does the program conform to sustainable budget management, but the new system also allows for a more adaptive and learning-focused approach.

National Priority Programmes differ from standard development projects in that they are built around how the government spends the money that it has in its budget, rather than more traditional approach of designing independent projects with beginnings, mid-terms, and endpoints. In theory, the WEE-NPP will continue for as long as the Government of Afghanistan continues to assign budgets to its activities. Each implementing Ministry, in coordination with the Ministry of Finance and other relevant institutions, will prepare or update operations manuals and budgets for their respective activities.

## Conclusion and Next Steps

This NPP design could not have been completed without the high-level of cooperation across the participating ministries. Consultations held by government and civil society in the nine regional workshops formed the backbone of the NPP design. These partnerships will be continued and expanded: the WEE-NPP is intended to be a living document that is refined as more lessons and improved approaches to women’s economic empowerment can be identified, analysed, and documented.