

Women and transition in Afghanistan

“I am scared for my family. If the violence comes back to our village, where will they go? I don’t have room for them here. We don’t have room for the people who live here now. But where will they go?”

Kabul resident & CARE beneficiary, displaced from Nangahar Province (July 2012)

As the security situation worsens in Afghanistan, precious gains made by women and girls over the past decade in claiming their rights and access to services such as health and education are in jeopardy. High levels of gender-based violence continue, including forced early marriage and domestic abuse, and almost complete impunity for crimes against women and girls. The withdrawal of international forces, handover of security responsibilities to Afghan forces, and manoeuvring of power-holders ahead of presidential elections in 2014 generate further uncertainty. Aid agency staff and the communities we work with fear that increasing and new forms of conflict and instability will emerge. In this context, CARE International makes the following recommendations:



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1. Strengthen quality controls on aid for statebuilding

Donors are committed to increasing funding through the Afghan government. For this to be effective, clear benchmarks should be established to inform decisions to shift aid ‘on-budget’. These should monitor state capacity and accountability at central and, most importantly, sub-national levels. Information on women and girls’ access to services in a safe, effective and accountable fashion should inform the design and monitoring of these benchmarks.

2. Reprioritise humanitarian action to conflict-affected communities

As violent conflict worsens, funding for humanitarian assistance and protection should increase. Redoubled efforts are necessary to overcome the divide between Afghan NGOs with long-standing experience in service delivery in rural areas and the Kabul-based humanitarian funding and coordination processes. Ensuring that women play a core role in humanitarian assessments and aid delivery will be essential to adequately meeting women’s needs. Steps are also required to better protect the rights of displaced women and girls, especially to safeguard against forced evictions and premature return to unsafe areas.

3. Implement a robust mutual accountability framework

The international community and Afghan government are due to negotiate a ‘mutual accountability framework’ and a ‘new deal for peacebuilding and statebuilding’. For the framework to be effective, it should include robust monitoring and accountability mechanisms, and involve the meaningful participation of civil society, including at sub-national levels. Women should be involved in defining its content and monitoring its implementation. Indicators on gender, including violence against women and participation in governance, should become part of the framework.

4. Ensure governance reforms protect gains in women’s participation

Women in Afghanistan have made impressive gains in decision-making on household, development and community affairs at the village level. These risk being lost. In particular, proposals to reform and strengthen provincial and district governance involve engagement with tribal structures and political compromises that pose challenges for women’s rights and participation. Provisions should be put in place to mitigate against risks for women’s involvement in new governance structures and processes.

Aid and Statebuilding: Implications for accountability and access to services on the ground

“Before transition, all NGOs could work with peace of mind and security and they did have access to all their beneficiaries. But, after transition, all of us have lost this peace of mind and have fear about our activities and safety. I have been threatened on the phone and someone said that you can’t work in this district. I had gender awareness raising trainings in that district with religious people which I can’t do any more. I have to amend my projects and activities and have not same access to beneficiaries as before.”

Female Afghan NGO worker (November 2011)¹

“Women’s organisations should be included in designing, monitoring and evaluating indicators that measure the impact of transition on women. Transition decisions should be based, in part, on results of this monitoring.”

Afghan Women’s Network position paper, May 2012

The Tokyo conference on Afghanistan represents a critical juncture for the country’s future. Decisions made by donors on aid policy at Tokyo and beyond will determine whether gains for women and girls in Afghanistan, such as extending their access to health and education services, are consolidated or undermined. A failure to secure clear commitments on aid quantity and quality, notably in terms of how to best ensure aid effectiveness in relation to the Government of Afghanistan’s national priority programmes, could undermine progress and further hamper transition efforts.

Commitments on aid quantity should be **balanced with a shift in approach to ensure aid quality**. In particular, Tokyo and subsequent donor aid policy should be informed by a reality check on the 2010 Kabul commitments to bring 50 per cent of aid on-budget in an expedited fashion. The draft Afghan government paper ahead of Tokyo, ‘Supporting Self Reliance in Afghanistan’, acknowledges the need for more realistic timelines in the shift to on-budget aid, including guarantees on programme quality and accountability. However, it then calls for 50 per cent of aid to come on-budget by end of 2012, stating that these issues will be resolved in an ‘aid management policy’ which is yet to be circulated.

CARE International believes that shifts towards **on-budget aid through the government should be sequenced on the basis of demonstrated progress against sector-specific benchmarks in state capacity and accountability at central and, most importantly, sub-national levels**. A pragmatic dialogue is required between government, donors and NGOs on how this can be achieved in each sector. Civil society and NGOs can play roles in sustaining and expanding service delivery at the same time as building government capacity and supporting monitoring and accountability efforts. Information on women’s and girls’ access to services in a safe, effective and accountable fashion should inform the design and monitoring of these benchmarks. Women’s organisations and coalitions, such as the Afghan Women’s Network, should be involved in the monitoring process.



PHOTO: HOWARD MOLETT



PHOTO: KATE HOLT

CASE STUDY: EDUCATION

The risks of an expedited push by donors towards on-budget aid can be illustrated by CARE International's recent experience in the education sector.

Last year, major donors pushed for a speedy hand-over of education funding from NGOs to the Afghan Ministry of Education. At that time, CARE International led a consortia that was delivering a major community-based education programme, including in provinces affected by high levels of violence such as Helmand and Kandahar. Funding for the programme was cut with only two months' notice.

While we secured other funding to continue supporting more than 1,000 classes, more than 600 classes were handed to the Afghan government. Of these, about one third of the classes subsequently closed. An additional third were relocated. As a consequence, most of the girls were unable to continue their education as parents feared their

children would have to travel too far to school. The final third of the government-managed classes were also affected, as new external teachers were brought in and parents were uncomfortable with girls being taught by strangers.

Previous research by CARE International and the World Bank also found that schools associated with central government face an increased risk of being targeted by armed opposition groups.²

Our programme has worked with the Ministry of Education at headquarters and sub-national level to develop community-based education policy and staff capacity to enable effective delivery of aid, including in conflict-affected regions. We remain committed to building the capacity of local and national institutions to deliver education services, but in a way that is managed and sequenced to ensure aid effectiveness and accountability.

Neglect of humanitarian assistance and protection for women and girls

“My aunt was affected by recent floods. She lost her house. But, because she was a woman, no one came to ask her what her needs were. There were no women there [in the assessment team] to ask her about her needs. So they only asked the men in the village. A strange man can’t ask a woman something in our village. He can’t even see her.”

Seasonal migrant worker, Mazar-e-Sharif

Most analysts predict that transition will result in increasing violence, political fragmentation and a retraction of central government reach across large parts of the country.³ This is likely to result in ever-increasing numbers of displaced people. Women and girls are especially vulnerable in this context. In the first four months of this year, UNHCR reports that there are already close to 100,000 displaced people. It is therefore concerning that, at the time of writing this paper, the 2012 Consolidated Appeal Process (CAP) is only 30 per cent funded. Whatever scenario unfolds in the country, it is imperative that humanitarian assistance, protection and preparedness efforts are adequately supported.

This should be addressed through a strong **political and financial commitment to humanitarian assistance by donors**, alongside any commitments to development funding made at the Tokyo conference. Commitment to Afghan security and statebuilding efforts should be matched by commensurate support for humanitarian

programmes that reach communities affected by the conflict. Both national and international aid and wider governance policies should also result in **prioritised steps to address current gaps in protection for displaced peoples**, such as their access to identity cards and basic services, action to prevent forced evictions, and a clear statement that refoulement internally or from neighbouring countries will not take place.⁴ Proposals from UNHCR and neighbouring countries on refugee return must prioritise addressing these protection concerns to avoid worsening the vulnerability of displaced women and girls.

A further gap to be closed, long highlighted by the humanitarian community and now more urgent than ever, is the absence of national humanitarian organisations in the humanitarian funding and coordination mechanisms in Afghanistan. There are many Afghan NGOs with access to areas which international, and some mainstream national, NGOs are unable to enter – many of which will soon be undergoing transition. And yet, for reasons of distance from Kabul, language, or other capacity issues, these groups are not recognised as viable partners by many humanitarian donors, nor are they represented in the CAP. Redoubled efforts are needed to link them into humanitarian coordination and funding mechanisms and ensure sufficient capacity is built for international donors to include them in their roster of implementing partners. Training and certification centres, modules or mentoring forums are all models which have been proposed and merit attention and support.

Innovations in humanitarian assessment and response are still necessary in Afghanistan, particularly with regards to ensuring that women’s needs are met. CARE International has developed models over the years to work with local communities to ensure women’s to access assistance, including training women from different provinces on humanitarian assessments, and building comfort levels with their families to enable rapid deployment to affected areas when disaster strikes. Models such as these could be scaled up. Additionally, donors and authorities could ensure that at least one woman is brought into each local office of the Afghan National Disaster Management Authority (ANDMA). Support for this could be provided by NGOs that have proven experience in working with local communities on women’s access to assistance and their involvement in aid delivery.



PHOTO: HOWARD MOULLET

Mutual Accountability: Implications for gender and women's participation

“We had asked more than 100 women in our region if they had been consulted on transition and the answer was ‘no’. Instead, on the day of the transition ceremony, we were invited as always to be present and show that women are there.”

Women activist in Herat (November 2011)⁵

The concept of ‘mutual accountability’ implies that effective aid requires clear commitments on both sides of the aid relationship: donor and recipient governments. Civil society groups have advocated that, for mutual accountability to be effective, it needs to be grounded in a wider accountability at country level. Aid should support strengthened state-citizen relations through transparent, accountable and participatory approaches to the design, implementation and monitoring of both aid and wider development and governance efforts.

A mutual accountability framework (MAF) between the international community and the Afghan government is on the agenda for the Tokyo conference. Recent international deliberations on accountability in Afghanistan have focused overwhelmingly on resolving the Bank of Kabul scandal. Much emphasis has been placed on the Afghan government meeting IMF benchmarks to resolve the scandal, in particular related to asset recovery and prosecutions. The proposed benchmarks on accountability in the Afghan government’s draft ‘Supporting Self Reliance in Afghanistan’ paper also remain at a macro level. These issues are undeniably important. However, they are not enough. Specific accountability measures are required at a sector level if aid is to be effective.

The development of a MAF in Afghanistan is also linked to a process to pilot a ‘new deal for peacebuilding and statebuilding’ in Afghanistan. The concept of a ‘new deal’ was agreed at the Busan high level forum on aid effectiveness in December 2011, and Afghanistan is one of its pilot countries. It has been pitched by its advocates as a fresh approach to peacebuilding and statebuilding, drawing on past experience of what worked and did not work in support to countries affected by conflict. At the heart of the concept is the notion of the international community and national governments in conflict countries negotiating a ‘compact’ in which both sides spell out commitments towards consolidating peace spanning political, security and aid issues. While the content of each ‘New Deal’ will



PHOTO: JACK HILLS

be negotiated on context-specific basis, they are to be informed by a set of five peacebuilding and statebuilding goals:

- **legitimate politics** – foster inclusive political settlements and conflict resolution
- **security** – establish and strengthen people’s security
- **justice** – address injustices and increase people’s access to justice
- **economic foundations** – generate employment and improve livelihoods
- **revenues and services** – manage revenue and build capacity for accountable and fair service delivery.

CARE International has undertaken research on predecessors to the ‘new deal’ and ‘compact’ in Burundi and Sierra Leone. On the basis of those experiences, we believe that such a framework could be helpful, but only if certain criteria are met. For example, in Burundi, it was only through advocacy by women’s civil society networks

that women's access to justice became included in funding associated with the framework. Likewise in Afghanistan, the effectiveness of the mutual accountability framework and 'compact' for women and girls will depend on their meaningful participation. A related and important unresolved question is how the MAF and 'new deal' will build on the existing 'Joint Coordination and Monitoring Board' (JCMB), which was established for dialogue between the Afghan government, donors, UN and civil society in relation to the previous 'Afghan Compact', which was signed in 2006.⁶ A study by a research institute argued in 2009 that *"parties do not use the Compact sufficiently to justify decisions, actions and results, and no sanctions are applied."*⁷

The MAF and 'new deal' for Afghanistan need to embody substantive commitments to tackle impunity, reform

governance and reinvigorate conflict resolution and reconciliation efforts at local, national and regional levels. The difficult, but necessary, steps from both the Afghan government and the international community to address these issues should be clearly articulated in its framework. It must also be backed with effective monitoring mechanisms and serious accountability measures in response to inaction or failure to implement what is agreed. Such 'peace conditionality' would need to be targeted in a careful way to avoid innocent Afghan populations paying the price for failings by elites. Women should be consulted on the content of the MAF and 'new deal', as well as monitoring their implementation. Furthermore, indicators on gender, including violence against women, women's access to basic services and participation in governance, should become part of the framework.



PHOTO: HOWARD MOLETTE

Governance Reform: Implications for community-based aid and women's rights

“NSP allows men and women to decide together ... It is the first time that women's opinions have been asked about a project in the village ... I have been back from Iran since the nineties but no organisation has ever given women a role in shuras before NSP came along.”

Woman from Daikundi, cited in evaluation of the National Solidarity Programme⁸

Struggles over governance lie at the heart of the conflict in Afghanistan.⁹ The reform of governance has been a long-term challenge in the country, but has garnered increasing attention in the context of transition. One of the main debates on governance reform has been the potential to devolve power and financing to the sub-national level, in particular provincial and district level. Whatever shape these reforms take, there will be manifold implications for women's rights in general and women's ability to participate in community and national decision-making that affects their lives.

Over the past decade, CARE International and other civil society groups have made considerable progress in involving women in community affairs at the local level, such as through village community development councils (CDCs) supported by programmes like the National Solidarity Programme (NSP). The NSP has enabled women to participate in decision-making on how project funds are spent and thus opened up the space for women's participation in governance at community level. Agencies have experimented in clustering the CDCs and linking them to district level governance, and have developed concrete insights into what makes local governance structures sustainable. Yet, so far, NGOs have not been consulted on the implications of changes at district and provincial level for these efforts at community level. The key challenge is to ensure those gains are not lost in transition and that mistakes are not repeated.

One concern is that some of the proposed models for sub-national governance reform raise potential challenges in terms of enabling women's participation or protection of their rights. In a context riven by conflict and patriarchal norms regarding women's roles in the community, then support for women's participation in governance at any level is inevitably difficult. However the models proposed for sub-national governance reform may raise further challenges for such efforts. They also have knock-on

consequences for efforts to involve women at lower levels, such as at village level, or in livelihoods, education or other development efforts.

Recent proposals from bilateral and multilateral donors centre on strengthening the political decision-making, budgetary authority and planning capability of provincial and district government structures. The proposed reforms are often described as an attempt to decentralise power from Kabul to the provinces and so help address some of the grievances underlying the conflict. The model proposed for these reformed structures involves increased reliance on existing tribal structures. This in part draws on experience in Helmand with the Independent Directorate for Local Government (IDLG) and Afghanistan Social Outreach Programme (ASOP). Donors have expressed an interest in aid policy following the reforms and funding being channelled to the new structures. This raises complex questions regarding how human rights guarantees in the Afghan constitution, including women's rights, and women's participation in decision-making could become affected and potentially compromised through such reforms and the associated aid funding.

Furthermore, Afghanistan faces a worsening civil conflict. New sub-national governance structures are unlikely to escape those conflict dynamics. Participants in those structures may be vulnerable to targeting by groups opposed to the process. Women politicians at national and sub-national levels already report a lack of support for their security, as they are not always able to draw on the same informal or tribal security provision as other power-holders, and national security institutions are weak.

For these reasons, governance reforms and associated aid funding should:

- Be framed in ways to ensure that women have a meaningful voice in new sub-national governance structures and processes, with provisions put in place to mitigate against risks and threats faced by women who participate.
- Ensure that gender and women's participation are included and monitored in what is funded through reformed sub-national governance structures.
- Connect in effective and sensitive ways with existing governance efforts at the community level, in particular towards not undermining the precious gains and safe spaces for women's participation at that level.

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PHOTO: HOWARD MOLLETT

Background on CARE International in Afghanistan

CARE International has been present in Afghanistan since 1961, with a 10 year period of non-operation during the Soviet occupation. CARE was fully operational during the civil war and Taliban regime, providing humanitarian support and basic services to vulnerable Afghans across the country including in sensitive areas of education and economic development.

In recent years, programmes of CARE Afghanistan have reached more than 1.5 million people. The organisation is recognised in Afghanistan as a leader in community-based education, particularly for girls, and support to maternal and newborn health. We also provide food and livelihoods assistance for thousands of war widows and their families. Many take part in vocational training, livestock rearing, micro-finance programmes, and advocacy on rights issues, including inheritance and property issues and gender-based violence.

CARE has also provided shelter for refugees returning from Pakistan and Iran.

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