



**SUBMISSION TO THE INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT
COMMITTEE'S FOLLOW-UP EVIDENCE SESSION ON AFGHANISTAN
DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES**

WOMANKIND Worldwide

WOMANKIND Worldwide, founded in 1989, is a UK charity dedicated to working internationally to raise the status of women. We work with 60 partner organisations in over 20 countries.

Our Afghanistan programme began in 2001 with the aim of integrating gender issues at the outset of national reconstruction efforts and advocating for the rights of Afghan women together with local women's organisations. Since 2003, we have been providing technical and financial assistance to three Afghan women's groups. One of them is a network of 86 member NGOs and other civil society organisations. The core of our work with them focuses on the promotion of women's civil and political participation through civic education programmes with women and young girls.

This submission draws on the knowledge and experience we have acquired through partnering Afghan organisations and others working on and in Afghanistan, including the UK Working Group on Women, Peace & Security. This submission is a follow-up to our original Memorandum submitted to the International Development Committee Inquiry into Afghanistan: The Transition from humanitarian relief to reconstruction, October 2002.

1. Women and Development in Afghanistan

1.1 The present context of under-development and economic hardship continues to present an opportunity for women in Afghanistan to redefine their roles in their own terms, while contributing to the rehabilitation of the nation. In order to do so women must be at the heart of development efforts in Afghanistan. The gender equality enshrined in the Afghanistan Constitution can only be realised in practice if the practical obstacles to women's participation in all aspects of Afghan society are addressed. Furthermore, the realisation of gender equality and women's empowerment is an essential pre-requisite to achieving lasting peace and sustainable development in Afghanistan.

1.2 The fact that an unprecedented number of women were elected to parliament in the recent parliamentary and provincial council elections on the 18th of September must be celebrated. The fact that these women achieved this, in spite of intimidation and threats and

in many cases won more votes than their male counterparts and would not have needed the quota of reserved seats for them, is even more heartening.

1.3 However, our partners continue to highlight the deteriorating security situation, which is very often manifested in disturbing acts of violence against women.¹ Such acts stand in the way of women playing their role in the development of their country and impinge on the ability of non-governmental organisations to carry out their duties.

2. SECURITY & VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

2.1 One of the main obstacles to women's participation in the reconstruction and development process and one of the severest threats to women's rights are widespread forms of Violence against Women (VAW) in Afghanistan. Women are the first to suffer under a deteriorating security situation, they are also the first to be adversely affected by a weakened state structure/rule of law and a culture of impunity which prevails in large parts of the country.

2.2 From our experience and that of our partners, gender-based violence against women constitutes the most serious impediment to the participation of Afghan women in public life, and to their participation in the economic sphere, as well as the obvious damage to their physical and mental health. Forced and early marriages are the primary sources of this violence. The law-enforcement and judicial systems of Afghanistan offer no special protection to women affected by violence, moreover a culture of impunity seems to exist with regard to such violence.

3. SECURITY & NGO ACTIVITY

3.1 Insecurity is also preventing the ability of NGOs in Afghanistan to access those most in need. The recent targeting of aid workers is a cause for concern to civil society in Afghanistan. One of our partners recently had to close down one of its' education centres in Paktia province because of threats received against them for collaborating with the government and warnings to the local community not to send girls to the centre.

3.2 Afghans are also increasingly concerned that foreign forces both military and private security companies are behaving with impunity. This combined with what is seen as ignorance and disrespect for cultural norms is aiding both anti-foreigner and anti-government sentiment.

3.3 Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) is widely recognised as fundamental to the establishment of security but is taking a long time to take effect. Doubts as to the sustainability of reintegration efforts so far are increasing. Successful reintegration of the demobilised requires long term and sustainable employment alternatives. It also requires the full and effective implementation of the provisions of Security Council Resolution 1325, which *"encourages all those involved in the planning for disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration to consider the different needs of female and male ex-combatants and to take into account the needs of their dependents"*.

4. DEVELOPMENT EFFORTS

4.1 Women's status varies greatly throughout Afghanistan. The benefits of the post-Taliban reconstruction, so far, seem to have accrued disproportionately to educated, urban Afghan

¹ In April 2005 a woman was killed in Badakshan province, allegedly by family members for committing adultery. In a separate incident three women were found raped and murdered in Baghlan province. According to Amnesty International, although the exact motive for their murders remain unknown, a note discovered close to the bodies, allegedly linked the killings to their association with non-governmental organisations.

women. The majority of women living in the outer provinces continue to face challenges of illiteracy, lack of access to healthcare and economic opportunities and violations of basic human rights.

4.2 Specific groups of women remain particularly vulnerable and largely outside the reach of most development support, such as the disabled, the widowed and the elderly, who face multiple disadvantages. Other issues relate to tackling drug addiction among women and girls who are involved in the production of opium and therefore particularly vulnerable to drug dependency; tackling the severe mental health crisis among women; ensuring the education of women and girls; establishing justice and redress for abused and exploited women; and generating employment opportunities for women.

Recommendations

We would like to draw the Committee's attention to the specific recommendation in our previous submission to this Committee's enquiry in October 2002 that

"Donors should report on the impact of spending on promoting gender equality and meeting women's human rights, and that DFID should prepare and publish a breakdown of DFID's contribution to donor programmes in Afghanistan, with clear indicators as to the impact that this spending is having on promoting the rights of women and girls and the achievement of gender equality "

1. Gender should be fully integrated into the development process in Afghanistan and the UK Government needs to continue to monitor and report on the impact of spending on promoting gender inequality and promoting women's human rights.
2. Underpinning all development efforts, and those specifically to increase gender equality must be a coordinated strategy to increase the security and safety of women in their homes and communities.
3. Afghanistan has ratified the International Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) without any reservations. The provisions of CEDAW and other ratified human rights treaties must now be fully integrated into national legislation. Women's issues should be properly addressed within the framework of the national constitution and the Penal Code.
4. According to the UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women, the Afghan Government is urged to "exercise due diligence to prevent, investigate and, in accordance with national legislation, punish acts of violence against women, whether those acts are perpetrated by the State or by private persons".

The international donor community needs to continue efforts to support the Afghan Government in fulfilling its responsibility to end violence against women. The proposed National Action Plan to tackle violence against women must be integrated into the forthcoming National Development Strategy for Afghanistan.

5. In particular the Afghan government needs urgently to ensure, that customary and religious practices which abuse women's human rights are prohibited and where they occur swift action is taken.
6. Women affected by violence need to be able to access safely appropriate remedies. This means not only ensuring appropriate laws are in place but that the police and judiciary receive appropriate and comprehensive training.

8. Building the capacity of Afghan civil society should remain a priority for development assistance if the process of development in Afghanistan is ultimately to be led by Afghans themselves. The capacity building of women and women's organisations should be a priority for international development assistance.

9. Development activities need to spread their focus outside of the cities and into the provinces. This can only happen if there is greater security for women and for NGOs working with women. UN SC Resolution 1325 on Women Peace & Security, particularly stresses "the important role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts and in peace-building, and the importance of their equal participation and full involvement in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security" These and other principles contained within UNSCR 1325 should be fully taken into account by the UK as it prepares to take on the responsibility of leading ISAF forces in Afghanistan in May 2006 and in its establishment of a Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) in the Southern province of Helmand.

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