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Interrogating Impact:
A Critical Analysis of Donor Support for Projects
supporting Women in Afghanistan

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Dedication

تقدیم به مادرم, زنی که به من زنانگی و زندگی آموخت!

Acknowledgments

I would like to commend the high level of resilience, dedication, and strength Afghan women have demonstrated in more than a decade to fight extremism and stay committed to their rights and country.

I thank Louis Bickford for his time and inspiration from the beginning of my MA degree program at Columbia University. This thesis would not be possible if I did not have his regular meetings, feedback, encouragement, and enthusiasm on the topic. His extensive experience in this field has become immense an asset to the topic.

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Abstract

Billions of Dollars Allocated to Women's Projects in Afghanistan:
Why Their Impact Has Been Limited?

Women have remained at the forefront of development after the Taliban regime in Afghanistan due to the involvement of international donors, such as UN agencies, independent organizations, and government aid in order to stabilize the country and promote a more prosperous society. Gender equality and female empowerment emerged in different initiatives or programs both at the policy level and in practice. Now, more than a decade has passed, and Afghan women still struggle to have basic rights in most provinces. With billions of dollars dedicated to women-related programs, Afghan women still question the efficiency of these programs, and question the real impact of these initiatives. Hence, this research aims to provide answers to the question, "In spite of massive international aid for women in Afghanistan, how has the situation of women not improved as much as expected, yet the same policies and mechanisms are maintained?" When considering Afghanistan's struggle in an ongoing conflict, a qualitative research method is used to answer the research question. I have interviewed current donor employees, researchers, and NGO partners who have implemented projects that advance and support the rights, health, and lives of women to examine the theoretical framework of neoliberalism in development, the structure of NGOs in developing countries, and the lack of accountability toward beneficiaries. The data from these interviews demonstrate women-related projects' implementation that did not meet its goals and remained insufficient based on project designs, current policies in place, and less attention toward female empowerment in the country. This research concludes that policies are hard to be changed, but donors continue designing and implementing their programs without any need assessments and taking credits for recent achievements of Afghan women.

Keywords: Women's rights, lack of accountability, development aid, duplication among donors in Afghanistan

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Definitions

These definitions illustrate terms and words being used in the research as it was used in the documents or books related to Afghanistan. These references are helpful before reading the paper that can reduce misunderstanding, conceptions, and generalization.

INGOs: International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs) in this paper refer to organizations or entities that create and implement independently designed programs/initiatives for women in Afghanistan. Although they have received funding from UN agencies and other governments, they are in charge of implementation, practices, and outcomes.

IOs: International Organizations (IOs) in this paper refer to either non-governmental or sometimes corporates who are implementing projects related to women that both award and receive grants.

NGOs: Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in this paper refer to local partners who are registered in the Ministry of Economy of Afghanistan. NGOs can implement grants from donors, government programs, and corporates. These NGOs are obligated to report back to the Ministry after the project ends.

Donor-Driven: The term donor-driven refer to NGOs with policies that are shaped by funder expectations. Their implementation is also controlled by the donor who have initially awarded the project. These organizations depend on donor aid to implement programs and focus on donor satisfaction.

Projects: In this paper, projects refer to programs and grants that are related to women's rights in capacity building, leadership, health, education, and etc. Some of them are also called programs, with sub-sections of small grants; both (projects and programs) are used interchangeably.

Donors: Any institution that works for women in Afghanistan are generally called donors because the budget is usually provided by an outside government, corporate, or organizations. Donors such as USAID, UN agencies, or DFID are coming together and allocate specific budgets to fund projects helping women for Afghanistan.

UN Agencies: Agencies such UN Women, UNDP, UNH, UNFPA, or WHO are working with different governmental ministries and local partners in different thematic areas to help women.

Grants: Grants in this paper refer to the off-budget usually granted by a donor but implemented by an NGO in distanced provinces.

Introduction

This thesis examines a puzzle. Over the last decade, billions of dollars in aid have been spent in Afghanistan to improve women's lives, and yet, by many measures, there has been very limited improvement. Although there have been some positive changes for women, these have been arguably less than might be expected, given the massive levels of international support. This paper delves into the possible explanations for this puzzle and provides some tentative lessons for policymakers, donors, and others who might be interested in developing more effective programming for international support for women, both in Afghanistan and elsewhere.

Neither the international community nor Afghan women would expect rapid and complete change in women's situations both in urban or rural areas. However, with the amount of money invested in the country, the welfare of women remains a very significant ongoing concern. Different arguments and discussions exist claiming that Afghanistan is an exceptional case. What is not an exception is the way in which International Organizations (IO), International Non-Government Organizations (INGOs), and other entities managed to create their theories of change and argue that these genuinely contribute to Afghanistan's broader goals of development, gender equality, and women empowerment. Many questions have been raised and discussed for program implementation processes and those programs that are designed by organizations, such as UN Women, creation of Ministry of Women's Affairs of Afghanistan, PROMOTE project by USAID, and others.

Throughout the years within the Afghan community and the international initiatives who donated programs for women, the impact of these initiatives are raising challenges and concerns now. Therefore, this paper aims to ask: Why, in spite of massive international aid for women in Afghanistan, has the situation of violence against women, the role of law, and women in

leadership not improved, yet unsuccessful policies and mechanisms of international donors remained the same? This broad question will be channeled through sub-questions: How do donors establish funding priorities? What do donors look for in the design of a women-related project? What criteria is used to evaluate funding proposal submissions? What monitoring, evaluation, and other accountability mechanisms are required during and after a project's implementation to measure and ensure maximum impact? And why are there discrepancies between the expectations and deliverables of women-related projects implemented since 2003? I argue that lack of accountability toward women with weak mechanisms and policies during project implementation prevents gender equality in Afghanistan. As donors maintain their approaches that are reportedly not successful, it will create greater challenges for Afghan women to overcome.

This paper first unpacks how funds were allocated to Afghanistan and how it was distributed to understand the complexity of such a dilemma. Furthermore, it assesses the theoretical framework of development, focusing on feminist scholarship and those who are arguing against neoliberal approaches for a faster and better outcome through the humanitarian aid. It further elaborates on the concept of partner-donor relationships and lack of accountability between the two. Finally, this paper will examine these concepts through qualitative research conducted in Afghanistan. Data based in open-ended interviews in this paper will help answer the research questions in-depth, highlighting the weak mechanisms of donors, lack of accountability from both donors and local partners, and insufficient funding for women's rights in the country. There will not be specific case studies of different programs due to programs details and access to accurate information. Donors such as USAID, UN agencies or other international charity organizations are not willing to share their program details. Instead, the

paper gives concrete examples of different programs that are funded by donation aid and laws that are established based on the UN and other entities' pressure. These examples are inserted when an interviewee gave reference to the program. Through these examples, the paper will highlight and describe the complexity of an ecosystem that is hard to describe without any consensus.

Achievements and Setbacks for Women

The international community has invested billions of dollars towards the development of women's rights, thematically: leadership, capacity building, advocacy, and empowerment. They required both government and non-government entities to mainstream gender equality in their policies and mechanisms. Some women, mostly those who reside in the capital and big cities, have experienced degrees of change; similarly, Afghanistan has passed many laws and regulations benefiting women for the past ten years or more, but Afghanistan has been ranked by various international groups as the "worst place to be a woman"[1] or, more recently, the worst after Yemen and Syria.[2] Economic, educational, geographical, and cultural factors–including but certainly not limited to conservative religious doctrines, ethnic tensions, and conflict–are impediments to the improvement of Afghan women's lives. The international intervention (to rescue women from an oppressive government) led to what women in Afghanistan experience now. Over fifteen years, just one program, the World Bank's Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund (ARTF), has received more than $10 billion[3] from different agencies and governments.

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[1] "The World's Worst Places to Be a Woman," *Amnesty International USA*, June 17, 2011, https://www.amnestyusa.org/the-worlds-worst-places-to-be-a-woman/.

[2] "And the Worst Country to Be a Woman Is...," *USA Today*, March 13, 2018, https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/world/2018/03/08/worst-country-woman/406182002/.

[3] "Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund: The World Bank Needs to Improve How It Monitors Implementation, Share Information, and Determines the Impact of Donor Contribution" (SIGAR, April 2018), https://www.sigar.mil/pdf/audits/SIGAR-18-42-AR.pdf.

Unfortunately, in its April 2018 report[4], the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan

Reconstruction (SIGAR), which monitors U.S. spending in Afghanistan, cited misuse of ARTF

funds due to a lack of transparency, monitoring, and accounting of its funding.

      Furthermore, the Ministry of Economy of Afghanistan, on its most recent budget reports

in 2016, concluded that the amount of money spent directly or indirectly are beneficial to the

people of Afghanistan.[5] *Figure 1* demonstrates the amount of money spent by international

organizations, the Afghan government, and local partners, in a year.[6] The amount spent by

donors are greater than what the government spent. However, donors have mostly granted the

budget to local partners. Donor administrative costs are excluded from the same amount. The

amount of funding entering the country is divided in two categories: on-budget and off-budget.

Off-budget is spent directly by the funders, but on-budget is spent by the government. Based on

the IOs' and INGOs' country offices' reports to the Ministry of Economy, most of the money

including administrative costs are controlled by the donors. Independent programs for women's

empowerment and equality was the catalyst resulting in the establishment of many NGOs.

Afghanistan witnessed an increase in NGO registration since 2000. In 2000, there were 53

international and 103 domestic NGOs.[7] According to the Ministry of Economy (MoEC), the total

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[4] "Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund: The World Bank Needs to Improve How It Monitors Implementation, Share Information, and Determines the Impact of Donor Contribution."

[5] *2016 NGOs Annual Activities Report*. Publication no. 1. Directorate of Non-profit Organizations, Ministry Economy of Afghanistan. Kabul: MoEC, 2016. 1-88.

[6] Ibid.16.

[7] David, F. Mitchell. "NGO Presence and Activity in Afghanistan, 2000 – 2014: A Provincial Level Dataset." Stability International Journal of Security & Development. Retrieved From: https://www.stabilityjournal.org/articles/10.5334/sta.497/

number of NGOs in 2016 was 2,070: including 1,702 national and 212 international.[8] In addition, 303 national and 11 international organizations were inactive according to the MoEC report.[9] More NGOs started closing after the US withdrew from Afghanistan in 2014. US withdrawal also caused donors to reduce their funding and the government could not assist these NGOs.[10] Some also remained inactive in the country and hoped to receive grants in the future. These inactive organizations are those who cannot receive grants versus the bigger organizations receiving grants double the usual amount. As of 2017, there are also 2,700 associations that encompass "communities, unions, councils, assemblies and organizations."[11] Grant distribution among these NGOs are based on their backgrounds and previews programs implemented in the same thematic area. NGOs who are more in the provinces have less access to the donors' offices and struggle to receive funding.

Total Amount: $851.59 Million

International Donors: $644.79 Million

Government: $206.78 Million

Figure 1 One Year Budget

[8] *2016 NGOs Annual Activities Report*. Publication no. 1. Directorate of Non-profit Organizations, Ministry Economy of Afghanistan. Kabul: MoEC, 2016. 1-88.

[9] Ministry of Economy of Afghanistan.

[10] Arghandiwal, Miriam. *As Foreign Aid Dries Up, Afghan NGOs Fight to Survive*. Report. Reuters. July 5, 2012. Accessed Sept 7, 2018. https://www.reuters.com/article/us-afghanistan-aid-tokyo/as-foreign-aid-dries-up-afghan-ngos-fight-to-survive-idUSBRE8640G720120705

[11] "Civic Freedom Monitor: Afghanistan" (The International Center for non-for-Profit Law, September 2013), http://www.icnl.org/research/monitor/afghanistan.html.

Based on the same report, *Figure 2* shows the number of projects implemented either by international or national organizations that were reported to the Ministry.[12] It shows an increase in funding, and both the international actors and Afghanistan are claiming more achievements. These projects are implemented in six thematic areas. 555 projects are implemented in the Health sector with 1,159 projects in Social Immunity, 51 projects in Infrastructure, 238 projects in Good Governance, 388 projects in Education, and 174 projects in Agriculture and Livestock.[13]
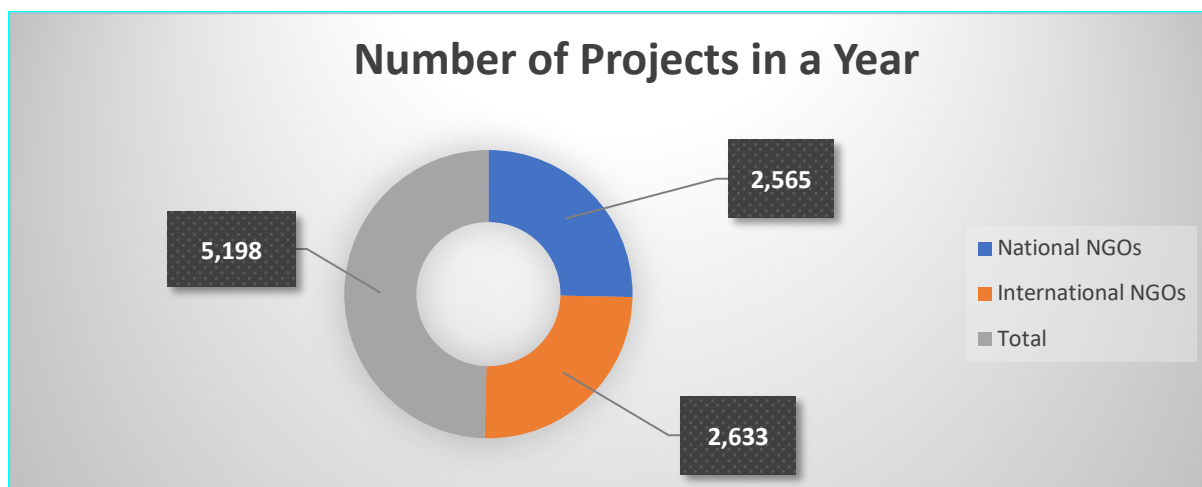
Figure 2 Total Number of projects implemented

There is not enough data on the number of women related projects in different provinces. Based on the data presented in the government report, the assumption is that there has been an increase in the amount of spend within a year. It also shows an increase in local partners' access to more projects compared to the year before, as the report mentioned. One interpretation could be that dividing the number of projects by the total budget; enough money is spent in a year. The report has shown enough details on sector-related projects, but it does not show specific details on the
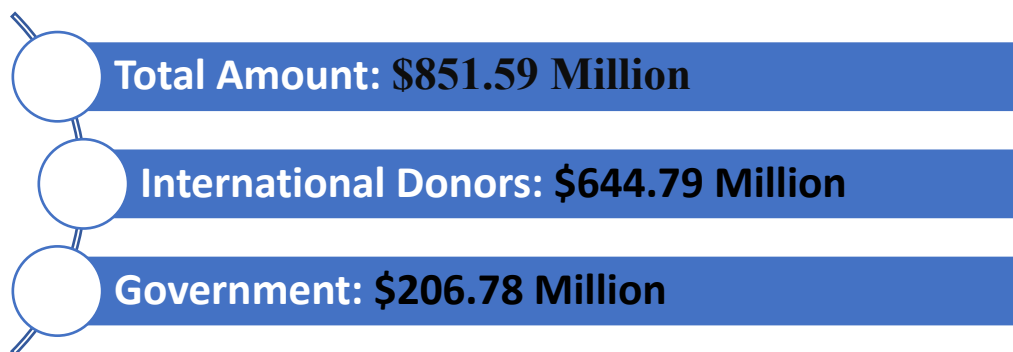
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[12] *2016 NGOs Annual Activities Report*. Publication no. 1. Directorate of Non-profit Organizations, Ministry Economy of Afghanistan. Kabul: MoEC, 2016.15.

[13] Kabul has experienced the highest number of projects being implemented. Ministry of Economy of Afghanistan, 17.

money distributed among partners. If this model has been practiced in the same way in past years, it indicates that the government has been lacking in monitoring these projects and making sure that corruption does not influence female initiatives.

Further achievements for women are in-laws and policies. According to the 2004 constitution, women and men have equal rights before the law. These laws and regulations became one of the most progressive steps for women's rights in the country after creating a State that is both democratic and Islamic. Under international pressure, the Ministry of Women's Affairs (MoWA) became an entity for women. Having a 27% quota for women in the country's parliament,[14] Afghanistan also ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). These new mechanisms allowed gender mainstreaming on the governmental level.[15]

Moreover, based on its commitment to CEDAW, MoWA developed Afghanistan National Development Strategy (ANDS) in 2008 for women's empowerment.[16] Besides, the National Action Plan for the Women of Afghanistan (NAPWA) (as a compliment/ endorsement to ANDS) became an important document made possible by MoWA. NAPWA expires in 2018, and other mechanisms are being discussed to replace it.[17] The president of Afghanistan also signed the Elimination of Violence against Women Law (EVAW) in 2009. Additionally, Afghanistan's commitment to a human rights regime allowed the country to focus on women's

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[14] Sarah Pugh and Saeed Parto, "Women in the Government: Needing More Than Numbers," Research Report (Kabul Afghanistan: Afghanistan Public Policy Research Organization, November 2017), 9, www.appro.org.af.

[15] Pugh and Parto, 9.

[16] Ahmad Shaheer Anil, Melike Karlidag, and Saeed Parto, "Implementation of the National Action Plan for Women in Afghanistan" (Afghanistan Public Policy Research Organization, March 2014), http://appro.org.af/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/214589487-NAPWA-Assessment-March-15-2014.pdf.

[17] Anil, Karlidag, and Parto.

rights in the peace process. For instance, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) became the critical entity pushing for women in the peace process. For the advancement of the United Nation's Resolution 1325 – Women Peace and Security's National Action Plan (NAP 1325) was designed to be implemented.[18] Unfortunately, based on many studies,[19] these laws remained on paper with limited progress at the local level.

There is a struggle between policies and practices. The purpose of these mechanisms was to emphasize "gender mainstreaming as a crosscutting theme in all government activities and policies," according to Afghanistan's Public Policy Research Organization (APPRO).[20] APPRO's report concluded that women are 28.7% of parliamentarians in both houses, 32% of teachers in the education sector, 24.2% in the public sector, 21.9% of civil servants, 11.2% of judges, and 1.8% of police officers.[21] One may argue that these numbers are showing a vast improvement compared to what Afghanistan had before the Taliban or during the civil war. It is a valid and easy argument to make in the international community. I debate and challenge such an argument, noting that these numbers are greatly commercialized in a way that attracts donor interest in the country and continues their work while knowing that the amount of waste is higher than what the country has achieved. Meanwhile, Afghanistan did not have access to technology or reporting mechanisms to measure the status women status in the country in the past years, nor the government has had a robust mechanism for measuring the struggle women go through daily. Recently, anti-harassment regulation was passed because the Ministry of Women's Affairs

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[18] Pugh and Parto, "Women in the Government: Needing More Than Numbers."

[19] APPRO has done many researches added in this paper, in addition, go to the data analysis to read more about how these laws have failed through the years.

[20] APPRO conducted NAPWA's assessment to find out its impact in the country, Anil, Karlidag, and Parto, 7.

[21] The data in this report is included from Central Statistical Office (CSO) Pugh and Parto, "Women in the Government: Needing More Than Numbers," 9.

noticed that women struggle in the workplace. These numbers showing achievements in the
education system, the number of girls in school, or percentage of women in the police sector
exist and have been championed in the past five years; however, the quality of these positions
and opportunities are still questionable.[22] In leadership, women are not usually the decision
makers but are used symbolically as deputies in an office with less authority to make important
decisions. Similarly, women in other sectors are celebrated. However, their participation in
different sectors is problematic. For instance, women in the police are facing harassment, while
educational opportunities for girls or jobs for female teachers in rural areas are rare.

It is also tough for donors to know the communities that their respective charities serve.
Needs assessment has not taken place in the country, neither by the government nor by donors.
Not knowing beneficiaries and their needs, it is rough to solely celebrate these numbers without
understanding the quality of work and sustainability of different programs. Reports and
assessments are coming out highlighting the lack of accountability within different programs and
projects related to women. For instance, SIGAR's reports on USAID projects are helpful to
understand how different programs are insufficient that also hardly meet their initial goals.[23] A
confidential report came out recently on Canada's $ 5.6M girls' education program with

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[22] Parto, Saeed. And Pugh, Sarah. Due to the space limitation, see APPRO's report from three provinces in Women
in Government that focused on women's positions in the government offices: http://appro.org.af/publication/women-
in-government-needing-more-than-numbers/

[23] For more SIGAR reports on USAID projects in Afghanistan, please read SIGAR's publications on different
projects in the past/current years. Available reports: https://www.sigar.mil/allreports/index.aspx?SSR=5

negligible results.[24] Activists have put pressure on Canada's government for better monitoring and evaluation of its programs for women in the country.[25]

Two Steps Forward, One Step Back

The literature review is split into two parts. The first set is transactional literature focused on the problem framed by the Western world through a neoliberal concept of service delivery for quicker outcomes, producing feminist NGOs and country offices of IOs and INGOs that award projects, produce new platforms, and report signs of progresses. The second set is organizational, and accountability literature focused on NGOs on the ground that is born based on donor expectations, such as South American NGOs. These works also illustrate the relationship between donors and NGOs with weak mechanisms practiced, lack of accountability among the partners and donors, and their impact on the beneficiaries.

Scholars such as Jane Jaquette, Makau Mutua, Glen W. Wright and Sonia E. Alvarez are arguing neoliberal approach within aid agencies, that emphasizes on developing policies for third world countries that are not getting to the roots of problems in the developing countries. These authors illustrate a gap between theory and practice that has created an ecosystem which is hard to manage or understand. For instance, Jaquette, a feminist scholar and author of "Women/Gender and Development: The Growing Gap between Theory and Practice," argues that after developing the terms "Women in Development" (WID) and "Gender in Development" (GID) in the past decades, liberal egalitarian US feminists hoped that the US Agency for

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[24] Dean, Beeby. "Report slams $ 5.6M Canadian program for Afghan women." August 28, 2018. https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/afghanistan-women-canada-global-affairs-banerjee-1.4800495

[25] It will also be helpful to read Canada's evaluation report on its programs between 2004-2005 and 2012-2013. Report online: http://www.international.gc.ca/gac-amc/publications/evaluation/2015/dev_eval_afghanistan01.aspx?lang=eng

International Development (USAID) could take the approach further.[26] Feminist theories

remained popular among practitioners in adapting new strategies and policies. While this

approach received many backlashes later, Jaquette further argues that both WID and GID faced a

challenge of neoliberalism and "demand for a structural or transformative change."[27] USAID and

United Nations (UN) reinforced their commitments after the Mexico Conference of 1975

produced the Program of Action.[28] Member states adopting such a metaphor expected

modernization friendly to women's achievement. In contrast, since Cold War, Jaquette writes,

"multilateral and bilateral aid agencies did not challenge capitalism, it is hardly surprising given

that western foreign assistance programs were designed in part to counter the appeal of

communism to the underdeveloped countries of the movements of the 1960s."[29] In the 1980s,

with postmodernism and in some cases post-colonialism, feminists in the south started

challenging the fact that women in the global south were seen as "helpless victims of

patriarchy."[30]

      With the dichotomy between the North and South and more NGOs to take these feminist

mandates, Sonia Alvarez similarly argues that NGO-ization is more often mixed with the donor-

driven approach in this field.[31] She writes, "NGO-ization entailed national and global

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[26] Jane S. Jaquette, "Women/Gender and Development: The Growing Gap Between Theory and Practice," *Studies in Comparative International Development* 52, no. 2 (June 2017): 42, https://doi.org/10.1007/s12116-017-9248-8.

[27] Jaquette, "Women/Gender and Development."

[28] Jane S. Jaquette, "Women/Gender and Development: The Growing Gap Between Theory and Practice," *Studies in Comparative International Development* 52, no. 2 (June 2017): 42, https://doi.org/10.1007/s12116-017-9248-8.

[29] Ibid.

[30] Ibid.

[31] Sonia E Alvarez, "Beyond NGO-ization?: Reflections from Latin America," *Development* 52, no. 2 (June 2009): 175, https://doi.org/10.1057/dev.2009.23.

neoliberalism's active promotion and official sanctioning of particular organizational forms and practices among feminist organizations and other sectors of civil society."[32] Alvarez recognized three trends that potentially helps in the creation, and functionality of these NGOs. Through history, States looked at these NGOs as experts in feminism, instead of looking at them as citizens/groups fighting for women's rights. Besides, neoliberal states viewed these NGOs as forces for gender policy matters and assumed that these NGOs served societal constituencies. They may or may not have had the capacity to do so; these NGOs found legitimate ground within the State. Finally, while these NGOs became a force for gender equality, most programs were implemented by offices that sometimes jeopardized the fact that NGOs could not monitor policies or advocate for change.[33]

On the other hand, Mutua, in his early writing "Savages, Victims, and Saviors: The metaphor of Human Rights," explains the "human rights corpus," and argues that UN agencies, INGOs, and other actors constructed the discourse as "black-and-white construction that pits good against evil."[34] This argument is tied back with Jaquette's argument about feminists framing the issue in third world countries. Mutua believes that the reality between the State as a the main actor versus the culture of that State in a third world country is very complex. He further elaborates his point by saying that "it is not the state per se that is barbaric but the cultural foundation of the state."[35] He refers to how western countries understood third world cultures and norms. His second metaphor depicts the relationship between the victims and the protectors.

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[32] Alvarez, 175.

[33] Alvarez, 177.

[34] For Mutua's argument and his in-depth analysis of these three concept see: Makau Mutua, "Savages, Victims, and Saviors: The Metaphor of Human Rights," *Harvard International Law Journal* 42, no. 1 (Winter 2001): 201–45.

[35] Mutua.

To him, third world countries play the role of victims and Western countries of protectors. In his terms, victims are the most vulnerable figures who do not have power but the innocence that is negated either by the State or the existing culture of that State.[36] The "safeguard" in his argument is different INGOs, UN entities, and others that use their skills and approaches to "save" the victims. Lastly, to Mutua, the savior is more of a European concept that has remained to "protect" "from the tyrannies of the State, tradition, and culture."[37] These metaphors easily formed the distinction between the Western and the rest of the world. These metaphors and racial hierarchies affect the human rights sphere. Third world countries adjusted themselves by accepting newer agendas. These agendas could be perpetuated by local NGOs that oppose any violations either by their own culture or the State. These NGOs are fighting for a better society; however, Mutua argues that these NGOs are imported based on Western values.[38] This practice to save the "others" by INGOs allows cultures to be stigmatized; in addition, it allows humanitarian aid to flow while it may or may not have a more significant impact. INGOs are shaping the conversation in order to protect human rights through advocacy and reporting mechanisms.[39] Again, to him, it is reasonable to make a parallel between colonialism and the creation of human rights as an ideal platform for progress and changes.[40] It is a very particular script the Third World is asked to follow based on Mutua's argument.[41]

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[36] Mutua, 2.

[37] Mutua, 2.

[38] Mutua, 8.

[39] Mutua, 12.

[40] Mutua, 19.

[41] Mutua, 23.

As soon as these NGOs are shaped, other authors such as Glen Wright calls it corporatization of NGOs. Wright argues in the article "NGOs and Western Hegemony: Causes for Concern and Ideas for Change" that when NGOs become bureaucratic and act like machines, it runs in the hand of an elite group that leads to a business.[42] Since these elite groups are difficult to overturn or question the accountability and transparency of their approaches and how they are aiming to help the people, they fail and distance themselves from the beneficiaries. Wright is not against the fact that these elite groups have the skill to run an organization, but to Wright, this system privatizes the charity work that needs to happen. Due to accessibility and limited relations, NGOs remain in the hand of a few groups that decrease the impact of projects but instead such group become fatter and more substantial.

Moreover, these previous authors have not focused on the way these country offices play a crucial role between the beneficiaries and Head Quarters (HQ). They instead looked at the policy level, laying out the way the ecosystem works from a neoliberal point of view. In most countries the relationship between IOs, INGOs, HQs is a challenge that would reduce impact, and Country Offices function as the most trusted entities to award, implement and report back on achievements and accomplishments. Many practices in South American and African countries later being practiced in countries such as Iraq and Afghanistan. Susanna Campbell, in her recent book "*Global Governance and Local Peace: Accountability and Performance in International Peacebuilding,*" researched in Burundi,[43] Most of her arguments

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[42] Glen W. Wright, "NGOs and Western Hegemony: Causes for Concern and Ideas for Change," *Development in Practice* 22, no. 1 (February 2012): 128, https://doi.org/10.1080/09614524.2012.634230.

[43] Susanna P Campbell, *Global Governance and Local Peace: Accountability and Performance in International Peacebuilding*, 2018, http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&scope=site&db=nlebk&db=nlabk&AN=1761471.

are relevant to the current ways donors have shaped their policies for Afghan women. It is

relevant in two ways. One: Afghanistan started its peace process with the Taliban, in more

focused on women's inclusion. Two: peacebuilding is not possible without the inclusion of

women. Afghanistan committed to UNSCR 1325. Her argument, and understanding the

complications within country offices who are analyzing, reporting, and awarding projects, is a

step closer to the complexity of this research. In her book, she argues that international actors are

more accountable toward their HQ or international actors, but less accountable to the

beneficiaries and people who need the most help. She further argues that the "variation in

country office's peacebuilding performance results, in part, from informal local accountability

arrangements made by individuals country-office. For country offices to achieve local-level

change, they have to delegate authority to a representative group of local stakeholders who hold

the country office accountable for achieving its local aims."[44] In her argument, IO and INGOs

are failing due to the country office not being open to local actors' feedbacks; it is structured in a

way that the country office does not rely on the local's performance but maintain their top-down

approach.[45]

She claims that standards for implementing projects within IO and INGOs are "based on

the assumption that if one develops a project description with the right analysis, the right

strategy, the right project aims, and the right measurement indicators and anticipate the right

risks, that project will achieve its desired outcomes."[46] The country office matters due to its

functionality on the country level. Campbell argues that these offices are the operational unit that

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[44] Campbell, 4.

[45] Campbell, 5.

[46] Campbell, 8.

carries the objectives of the HQ whether it fails or succeeds. She explains further, saying that these offices are responsible for understanding the local context and provide crucial information in order to develop better strategies.[47] Each country dedicates a specific budget to spend in different countries. The responsibility of these country offices is to spend that amount allocated. Avoiding local feedback, designing projects based on the HQ interest without local assessment leads to failure of projects.

Furthermore, these authors agree on the fact that the lack of accountability of donors decreases the prioritization of beneficiaries. While country offices function independently within a country, NGOs that ultimately play a role in the donors' community have their structures that are explained in the following section. These structures and office management with higher capacity are shaped by the donors' expectation which generates an extra layer that lowers the impact of projects on the beneficiaries.

<div align="center">

Organizational Theory and Accountably Structure

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Accountability structures within donors and partners are different. The Literature on organizations and accountability structures are divided. For instance, organizational theory mainly focuses on the ways in which an organization functions. Accountability structure, on the other hand, is a sub-section within organizational theory that looks at both the NGOs and donors' accountability mechanisms and policies. Eric Werker, Faisal Ahmed, Karen Rauh, Emma Mawdsley and David Lewis are theorizing the way in which organizations are functioning. These authors are not focusing on the accountability structure within organizations although they are interconnected. Other authors in the accountability structure are complimenting the

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[47] Campbell, 12.

organizational theory in understanding how organizations are functioning and highlights the importance of both NGOs and donors accountability for a better impact in development.

First, authors such as Eric Werker and Faisal Ahmed define NGOs a "group of players who are active in the efforts of international development and increasing the welfare of poor people in developing countries. NGOs work both independently, and alongside bilateral aid agencies from developed countries, private sectors infrastructure operates, self-help associations, and local governments."[48] Based on their definition, organizations are idealized as bringing good without putting political or profitable means in place.[49] Furthermore, other authors argued in the previous chapter that NGOs involved in development is not a new concept: NGOs spread liberal values. The bulk of funds flow "through NGOs remains focused on basic humanitarian assistance and development"[50] according to Werker and Ahmed. The growth of organization through history would not be the result of economic growth; however, they believe that it is the interaction between "secular trends, ideas, and technology."[51]

Other authors like Karen Rauh and Emma Mawdsley,[52] in the article "Foreign Donors, and Organizational Processes: Passive NGO Recipients or Strategic Actors," argue that organizational theory and organizational culture produce an intense relationship between the donor and partner in the world of development, which may or may not benefit the beneficiaries. According to these authors, theory traditionally focused on firms, schools, and hospitals. It

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[48] Eric Werker and Faisal Ahmed, "What Do Nongovernmental Organziations Do," *Journal of Economic Perspective* 22, no. 2 (Spring 2008): 73–92.

[49] Werker and Ahmed, 74.

[50] Werker and Ahmed, 76.

[51] Werker and Ahmed, 81.

[52] Karen Rauh, Emma Mawdsley, et al, and David Lewis, et al.

somehow has not been applied to the NGO-donors relationship.[53] In any organization, specific

procedures and mechanisms are required to achieve goals. These procedures are claimed to be

the foundation for the increase of accountability, transparency and a security factor for the

misappropriation of funds. The relationship between donors and implementing partners remains

vital in the case of reporting mechanisms. On the one hand, it creates a landscape of

accountability and transparency. On the other hand, Rauh argues that the increase of paper-based

analytical tools rewarding organizations who produce the best documentation impacts other

organizations that lack these skills but bring a positive change.[54]

Further, the organizational culture within organization theory refers to "shared values and

practices which evolved within organizations."[55] Organizational culture has not been around for

a very long time, and it influenced societal cultures by individuals who have worked within an

organization. Culture plays a vital role in understanding the way procedures are developed and

how shared visions are carried out successfully.[56] Four styles in such culture are identified by

authors such as Lewis, *et al*. Self-employed individuals and those who are working for

themselves. "Task culture" is the second style mainly based on people within the organization

focused on different tasks; maintaining the same goal. "Role culture" is mainly defined as roles

that are set within the organization, mostly in a hierarchical structure. Finally, in a specific set-up

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[53] Karen Rauh, "NGOs, Foreign Donors, and Organizational Processes: Passive NGO Recipients or Strategic Actors," *McGill Sociological Review* 1 (January 2010): 29–45.

[54] Rauh.

[55] David Lewis et al., "Practice, Power and Meaning: Frameworks for Studying Organizational Culture in Multi-Agency Rural Development Projects," *Journal of International Development* 15, no. 5 (July 2003): 541–57, https://doi.org/10.1002/jid.1004.

[56] Lewis et al., 529.

in which an organization has a leader, and others follow,[57] both donors and NGOs' expectations affect beneficiaries.

Second, within this structure, accountability mechanisms are crucial to development projects. In the accountability literature, authors like Poonam Smith-Sreen and Lisa Jorden[58] argue that accountability structure is a foundation for the donor/implementer relationship. The definition of accountability was initially used for money a government was to spend responsibly. Smith-Sreen defines the traditional kind of accountability actors such as "project managers [who] are familiar, deal with financial accounting."[59] In contrast, within the government, public accountability means the public money spent by the government. Within NGOs and for donors, the same measurement plays a role.[60]

Similarly, although donors have not focused on the ratio of accountability as a cause of corruption, authors such as Lisa Jordan argue that accountability in NGOs always requires that they should be held accountable for specific actions and circumstances.[61] Accountability by itself is a relationship between one group toward others, or certain groups toward one entity, according to Jordan and Tuijl.[62] Within these defined NGOs, these authors write, "accountability defines a relationship between an organization and a set of stakeholders and assumes that being responsive

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[57] Lewis et al., "Practice, Power and Meaning."

[58] Smith Sreen and Lisa Jordan.

[59] Poonam Smith-Sreen, "Accountability in Development Organizations," *Sage Publication Inc.*, 1995.

[60] Smith-Sreen.

[61] Jordan, Lisa, and Tuijl, Peter Van. "NGO, Accountability, Politics, Principles & Innovation."
    EARTHSCAN. London and USA. 2006.

[62] Lisa Jordan and Tujil Peter Van, *NGO, Accountability, Politics, Principles & Innovation.* (Earthscan, 2006).

to those stakeholders will be beneficial to the NGO and its mandate."[63] Furthermore, accountability mechanisms for NGOs also refer to organizations that are held responsible externally, these authors argued,[64] which help to establish better vision, mission, and goals. While international funding becomes larger, the discussion of accountability within NGOs and between academics rises.[65] These authors argue that NGOs usually demand the accountability of a State; on the other hand, it recently became a demand that they not only show they have focused on the State or a business but also on the functionality of an NGO that is demanding to "represent the poor and marginalized"[66] groups, according to Dorothea and Schmitz.

Categories of accountability are crucial to Smith-Sreen. One, financial accountability, which is how the fund is received and used by the implementer. According to Smith-Sreen, "when accountability of an NGO is evaluated only through its financial management the purpose for which the funds are distributed may get displaced. Although accounting for funds is integral to overall organization accountability, it should not be either the sole or the major criterion."[67] Two: project outcomes are critical. When the funding is increased for NGOs as they become the implemented partners, the outcome of each project is also crucial to the development efforts. Three: social accountability, when the organization is representing a community, such that the NGO should be accountable while using and representing certain groups.

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[63] Jordan and Peter Van.

[64] Baur Dorothea and P. Hand Schmitz, "Corporations and NGOs: When Accountability Leads to Co-Optation," *Journal of Business Ethics*, no. 1 (2012): 9–21.

[65] Dorothea and Schmitz, 14.

[66] Dorothea and Schmitz, "Corporations and NGOs: When Accountability Leads to Co-Optation."

[67] Smith-Sreen, "Accountability in Development Organizations."

For project efficiency, and better impact, face-to-face interaction is the best approach between donors and partners helping to enhance upward and downward accountability mechanisms based on Campbell's argument.[68] There is a hierarchical accountability mechanism within IO, INGOs and other independent donors. To Campbell, it is a formal setting where it allows the country office to upward accountability. Upward accountability is accounting to those on top, "generally the country's office principles are located outside of the country in which it operates, and often have limited knowledge of the local contexts that the country office encounters."[69] It also becomes a routine that, to her, raises a challenge for the office active in a specific country. Regarding feedback, it does not allow the country office to decrease the gap between what their HQ aims for and their outcomes. On the one hand, it allows for reporting easier; on the other hand, it does not allow for more focus on beneficiaries. In this relationship, there are rare cases in which development discourses tend to stay silent about the subject that could initially show corruption and other issues of unprofessionalism.[70] Usually, NGOs are assessed based on their activities. Smith-Sreen argues that the success of NGOs is not assessed by "the process it has utilized, but by the total benefits accrued by its members."[71] Such processes adopted by the implementing NGO are means of achieving outcomes. On the other hand, Smith-Sreen claims that, in recent years, participation has lost its meaning because NGOs mainly focus on showing the donor organizations stronger basis for receiving funding. Smith-

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[68] Emma Mawdsley, Janet G. Tawnsend, and Gina Proter, "Turst, Accountibility, and Face-to-Face Interaction in North - South NGO Relations," *Development in Practice* 15, no. 1 (February 2005): 7782, https://doi.org/10.1080/096145052000321623.

[69] Campbell, *Global Governance and Local Peace*, 19.

[70] Mawdsley, Tawnsend, and Proter, "Turst, Accountibility, and Face-to-Face Interaction in North - South NGO Relations," 77.

[71] Smith-Sreen, "Accountability in Development Organizations," 13.

Sreen writes, "understanding these local organizations seeking funds for their efforts tend to emphasize their commitment to women's development and the participatory processes adopted by them."[72]

Usually, projects designed by donors are what practitioners have practiced in the past years. This approach has caused backlashes some argue that donor-driven approach may not work the same in every developing country. Paolo de Renzio argues that this model is wrong. "Foreign aid focuses on the wrong things," he writes, "too often, aid-financed projects and programs are decided and designed based on donor priorities and on models drawn on either some past successful experience of the donor country or on some abstract notion of recognized international best practice without much attention to local needs and priorities or to the context in which they are meant to work and achieve impact."[73] Also, aid supported by other countries undermines governance and institutional buildings. This direct funding spent by the government favors domestic complexities which may in one way weaken the government. We have many examples in recent conflict countries like Afghanistan and Iraq that rely on donor aid. Donor aid is designed in a way that allows States to become sustainable or not depended upon foreign aid.

Accountability mechanisms play crucial roles for a transparent change. Renzio states that there is tension between those who fund and those who receive the funds. On the one hand, accountability allows better impact; on the other hand, according to Renzio, "donors have often relied on fragmented and uncoordinated projects with a parallel management system that allow them to keep close control over how money is spent."[74] Within the concept of the donor-partner

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[72] Smith-Sreen, "Accountability in Development Organizations."

[73] Paolo de Renzio, "Accountability Delemmas in Foreign Aid" (odi.org, 2016), 5.

[74] Renzio, "Working Paper."

relationship, women's organizations and funding dedicated to women's projects are essential in considering why developing countries are much weaker and less educated than developed countries. Lack of education and poverty resulting in a secure system of patriarchy in which most donors try to work on women's empowerment, women's leadership, and women's capacity building. Implementers in the field usually argue that developmental approaches are not successful if women do not become part of the movement. Based on these arguments, it is challenging to see the changes occurring on the ground versus what IOs and INGOs are claiming to bring change to these women. Therefore, the rest of this paper will examine these theories and mechanisms created and practiced in Afghanistan while these policies were not successful in other countries.

<div align="center">**Assessment, Examination, and Findings**</div>

The data in this research is both primary and secondary. Qualitative research is used to explain how IOs, INGOs, and other donor agencies have been operating in Afghanistan through different project designs and initiatives as a complement to the government's programs. Participants in this research have varied backgrounds and expertise. For instance, I conducted interviews with individuals/professionals who worked with local NGOs and donor communities such as UN Women, USAID, and other independent INGOs. Additionally, I interviewed researchers and women activists in order to vary my data, reduce biases and enable more transparent outcomes.

This research was conducted in two phases. The first phase was during my winter trip to Afghanistan. The goal of that trip was to understand and narrow down my research topic. It also allowed a smoother transition to the second phase through specific questions and methods that were approved by the university. The second phase of this research was

conducted with semi-structured interviews for more than a month in Afghanistan between May-July, 2018. In addition to the interviews, most of the secondary data was recommended by researchers and practitioners in the field. Some of the documents are in the Persian language (I used my best Persian skills to read and add relevent data to elaborate my points.) If there were direct translations, I added the quote in the footnotes with the Persian alphabet, so that it is more transparent.

There were many challenges in the field. First, Afghanistan is still in conflict. Assessing and collecting data was dangerous. The proposal was not initially approved by Columbia University's Human Resource Protection Office (HRPO) and the IRB. Risk management was a struggle between the researcher and the HRPO. Final approval of the research proposal had limitations that allowed the research to take place only in Kabul with no access to other provinces. On the other hand, all the donors' country offices are in Kabul, which made it easier to conduct interviews. Furthermore, recruiting participants to become part of the research was not easy. For instance, donors such as USAID were not interested in participating and did not allow its employees to be interviewed. Some donors that gave interviews requested to remain anonymous or their data is used for background information only. Researchers on the ground had a clear understanding of issues related to donor aid distribution, the work process, and donors' work style in different areas due to foreign-made mechanisms and procedures. Interviewees in this research are assessed and selected based on their expertise and experience. Their age, gender, and other identities were not crucial in answering the research questions.

Based on interviews with individuals in Kabul, the following sections will demonstrate what it means to make policy that helps women in Afghanistan, how projects have failed, and what the specific obstacles that reduced the impact of donors aid in the grassroots are.

The Failure of Laws/Policies for Women in Afghanistan

Among many other obstacles women face in Afghanistan, violence against women is still rising. Donors and the government have worked to create shelters, Elimination of Violence against Women (EVAW) courts in the districts, and train police officers in registering cases and helping those who face different kinds of violence. It is due to the increase of violence cases across the provinces, and the international community's pressure to prioritize ending violence against women. Overall, policies and mechanisms followed based on international conventions or resolutions. Research shows that national law still struggles to help decrease violence cases. In the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) report of 2017, it was concluded that 4,340 cases of violence against women were registered at the provincial level.[75] These are not the total number of cases as many remain unreported. This report shows an increase in violence against women in the country by 11.3% compared to the previous year .[76] Most of the cases reported are physical, extrajudicial killing, sexual, verbal, economic, and other forms of violence. Violence against women in Afghanistan is a danger to the social and cultural improvement of local communities. With EVAW law and district courts to deal with these cases, there is still a long way to go. It shows that women's security in the domestic and in the public sphere is in danger.

Additionally, many NGOs and donors facilitated many projects to empower women and build the capacity of professionals dealing with violence cases in court or police stations. That mechanism failed due to many cases not being registered or instead referred to the local elders or traditional councils. Violence against women has been embedded in Afghan culture for many

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[75] "Summary of the Report on Violence against Women," Activity Report (Kabul Afghanistan: Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, 2017).

[76] "Summary of the Report on Violence against Women."

years. However, after the Taliban regime, access to media allowed violence against women cases to receive public attention and many have tried to work around it while law at the local level is not in its best practice. For instance, United Nations Assistance Mission for Afghanistan (UNAMA) published a report in 2011 that looked at local districts to assess the effectiveness of the national law, especially EVAW which was celebrated for many years as a progressive step in the country's history.[77] After the Taliban regime, UNAMA consistently supported women, and its four priority areas focused on women's rights and combating violence against women. UNAMA also releases periodic reports on violence against women in the country. In its 2011 report, from legal cases in 22 provinces with higher concern in the implementation of EVAW law by police officers, judges, and prosecutors, more cases were registered compared to its previous report. That is positive, the report said.[78] However, the amount of reporting incidences in the whole year (4,010) explains that the number of cases resolved by the courts remains very low in 16 provinces.[79] Based on such statistics in all cases, legal procedures were not followed. Instead, the police and prosecutors referred these cases to community councils (*jirgas* or *shuras*). On the other hand, this practice "often undermined implementation of the EVAW law and reinforced harmful practices,"[80] according to this report. Not that these policies are only weak or impractical in the local level, EVAW law does not include specific articles on complaint

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[77] "Still a Long Way to GO: Implementation of the Law on Elimination of Violence against Women in Afghanistan," United Nation Report (Kabul Afghanistan: United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, December 2012).

[78] "Still a Long Way to GO: Implementation of the Law on Elimination of Violence against Women in Afghanistan," 13.

[79] "Still a Long Way to GO: Implementation of the Law on Elimination of Violence against Women in Afghanistan," 14.

[80] "Still a Long Way to GO: Implementation of the Law on Elimination of Violence against Women in Afghanistan," 15.

procedures. For example, the State cannot take action if the family members or the woman herself will not file a complaint. Instead, women are pressured to withdraw their cases to respect family honor, which does not allow the government to investigate further.[81]

Afghanistan, with its weak government and mechanisms for gender equality and human rights, falls short of its obligation to the CEDAW Committee and other ratified human rights conventions. The government has been using security as an obstacle for development or stability. Instead, the government has tried to advocate for women's rights in different conferences such as the October 5-6, 2016 Brussels' conference on Afghanistan. It encountered 75 countries and 26 international organizations.[82] Among all, the amount of achievement presented in this conference, Afghanistan presented its challenges and specific areas that needed more focus. For instance, among other challenges, women's rights remain a priority, knowing that the international donors would not support the government if women's rights were not on its top list. One of the challenges highlighted was family rights. In many cases, inheritance, dowry, alimony, and divorce remain challenges for women in the domestic sphere. Further, these challenges also include physical violence and in increase of women's mortality rate.[83] While donors tried to provide shelter for those who are leaving their houses or remain homeless, these shelters add another layer of disrespect to women who return to their communities. Also, the government has created Family Response Units (FRUs) within the National Police that are not well understood in the community. APPRO, in its research, demonstrated that violence against women has increased

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[81] "Still a Long Way to GO: Implementation of the Law on Elimination of Violence against Women in Afghanistan," 22.

[82] Tairah Firdous et al., "Instability, Conflict, and Fundamental Rights: Lesson Learned from Afghanistan Rights Monitor," Project Report (Kabul Afghanistan: Afghanistan Public Policy Research Organization, September 2017), 5, www.appro.org.af.

[83] Firdous et al., 17.

due to men's unemployment,[84] instability, poverty, and traditional practices with a weak role of law.

APPRO has been doing constant research in order to assess progress in the country and the government's obligations to international conventions, national programs, and mechanisms. In its 2017 report on "Women in Government: Needing More Than Numbers," shows that women's rights has not been improved in many provinces. The research is from Kabul, Balkh, and Herat provinces. The study concluded that although the number of women seeming in the national and provincial government increased, the quality of their participation is still a question. It also concluded that in these three provinces, not only are there fewer women but these women have lower positions compare to men.[85] Furthermore, in all three provinces, women are not confident about their participation as an opportunity to their daily lives, but they "argued that women are mostly not involved in decision-making processes, and that, at present, their participation is symbolic."[86] This research shows how women's participation in cities is not moving forward but creates backlash and damage to women's reputation in the communities.

Furthermore, APPRO implemented two projects under "Citizens for NAP 1325" which was funded by Oxfam Afghanistan, and "NAP 1325 Monitor" which was funded by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA). These two projects looked at NAP 1325 at the national level while donors started funding this action plan concerning women, peace and security.[87] APPRO, in this report, underlines the importance of past mistakes that put

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[84] Firdous et al., 17.

[85] Pugh and Parto, "Women in the Government: Needing More Than Numbers," 11.

[86] Pugh and Parto, 13.

[87] Laura Cesaretti, "Afghanistan's NAP 1325 (2015 - 2018): A Critical Assessment," Assessment Report (Kabul Afghanistan: Afghanistan Public Policy Research Organization, May 2018), 6, http://appro.org.af/publication/afghanistans-nap-1325-2015-2018-a-critical-assessment/.

women's rights in the country at risk. The report is concerned with "unsustainable or ill-conceived programming and advocacy [that] could have severe adverse consequences for the situation of women, men, boys and girls, and gender relations in general."[88] Steering Committee, Technical Working Group, Advisory Group, Women Peace and Security Working Group are the specific bodies of NAP 1325 implementation. Both the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Finance are the key management actors in the implementation process. Based on APPRO's assessment at the local level, there has not been any mechanisms or M&E procedures to evaluate the impact of NAP 1325. The reporting process does not specifically include 39 indicators that already included in NAP 1325. However, the report says, "the risk of under-reporting failure to perform and thus of the reports having no utility regarding lessons learned or taking corrective action."[89] Although the Ministry of Finance determines the budget for implementing NAP 1325 in Afghanistan, it receives many budget requests that are not justified.[90] The same organization made another assessment of NAP 1325 in its third monitoring cycle. Women's awareness across the country on NAP 1325 is not very high. The research examined 12 provinces with 29 districts in NAP 1325 impact.[91] *Figure 3* is based on APPRO research and shows women's awareness of NAP 1325 in different provinces. Compare to the previous assessment; it shows that there is somehow an increase in select provinces, such as Nangarhar and Khost provinces, where they have some information about this document.[92] Between Samangan, Laghman, Khost and Herat

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[88] Cesaretti, 7.

[89] Cesaretti, 19.

[90] Cesaretti, 21.

[91] Dana Holland, Hasan Raha, and Saadat Saadat, "NAP 1325 Monitor, Monitoring Cycle 3: September - December 2017," Project Report (Kabul Afghanistan: Afghanistan Public Policy Research Organization, March 2018).

[92] Holland, Raha, and Saadat, 8.

provinces, Herat has better security than the three other provinces. Khost has experienced the most conflict, but Laghman remains undeveloped.

On the one hand, this chart is essential in understanding the imbalanced awareness programs for NAP 1325 across the country. On the other hand, raising awareness is not an immediate solution for the action plan's objectives. The peace process became symbolic while conflict has been continued.
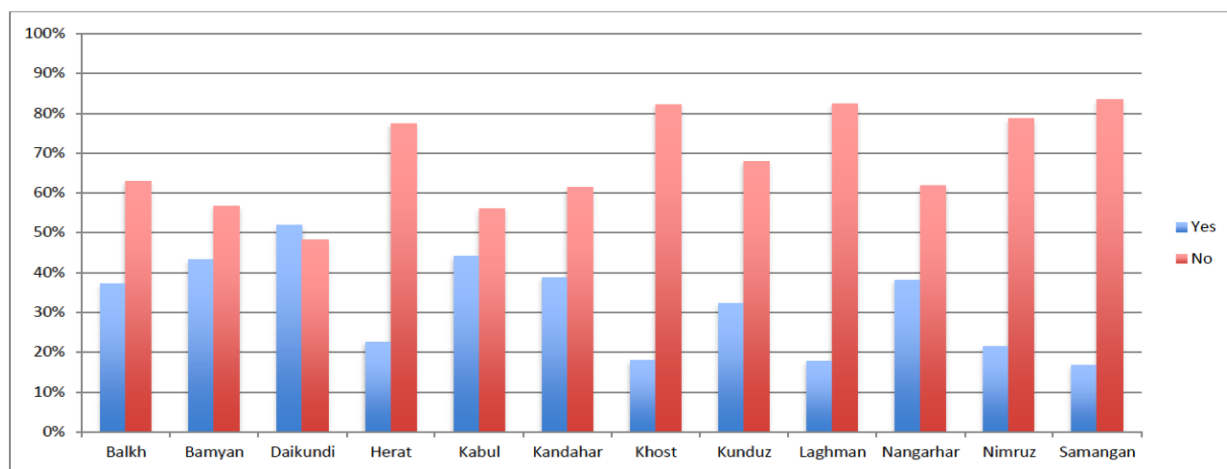

Figure 3, Women Awareness on NAP 1325, the chart from APPRO's report[93]

The researches makes a strong point about the role of law and how laws are not active at the local level. However, research in Afghanistan has not focused on donors' project design, M&E mechanisms or donors-partner relationship. Most researches and international actor assume that culture and customary laws are causing programs to fail. Organizations such as APPRO and AREU are receiving projects to conduct these reports. They are still experiencing their policies to be donors-driven. Second, research organizations may not be able to receive a project that shows the insufficiencies of a donor in the country because the organization will not receive more funding and no one wants to destroy its reputation. These NGOs are also convinced

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[93] Holland, Raha, and Saadat, "NAP 1325 Monitor, Monitoring Cucle 3: September - December 2017."

that the better capacity an NGO has, the larger projects they receive. Better capacity means an NGO can produce better policies that are aligned with donors' expectations and management skills.

1. Tangible changes to women's rights after the Taliban Regime, facilitated by donors

At the beginning of this research, I highlighted areas of progress women achieved in Afghanistan and also showed how these changes are used in many conferences, and meetings to advocate for further assistance. While having these achievements, which are still fragile and may collapse if donors' aid discontinued, NGOs that have been rich by now still narrate the story of these years as a positive period. I do not argue that these positive conversations should not be encouraged, but these conversations may not change the original narrative in the country that influences policies in the wrong direction. According to the data, whether or not the changes coming in the country are satisfying, is based on how much was allocated; whether or not the international community played a role, most of the interviewees I spoke to agreed that laws related to women such as EVAW law, anti-harassment regulation, and other mechanisms are an achievement and that both the Afghan people and the international donors expected these reward. Women's achievement could be divided in two ways, a UN Women employee argued. One, on paper concerning laws and regulations, there is a considerable change compared to what Afghanistan had during the Taliban regime. Within these "progressive" laws, the interviewee argued that there is still discrimination against women that is justified by the legal system. Second, the implementation of these laws is a challenge for both the donor community and the government of Afghanistan. Consider marriage and divorce: "While men and women have equal rights to marriage, and they have some equal responsibilities before, after, and during the

marriage; unfortunately in our civil code or civil law [it] is derived from Sharia principles."[94]

Therefore, it does not allow women to file a divorce case against her husband. Alternatively,

"women cannot divorce unless she is released or divorced by the man."[95]

Other interviewees such as Zaki Daryabi who is a journalist sees women in the economy

as an achievement. He believes that these achievements are unavoidable in that women in the

economic sector of Afghanistan is well noticed. Daryabi gives examples of universities

particularly focused on women, women's TV (Zan TV), and many newspapers and radio stations

that are led by women. These achievements so far are amazing. To him, these accomplishments

allow women access to resources and money. Comparing the number of achievements with the

money spent, Daryabi disagrees. He believes that in the amount of money spent compared to

what Afghan women received, there is not enough progress.[96] For instance, regarding EVAW

law in the country, he believes that "EVAW law passed and was aimed to be implemented in 34

provinces of Afghanistan still faces challenges."[97]

Another interviewee (whose name will remain anonymous) challenged the ways in which

donors have allocated their budgets. She assumed that the budget was mostly spent on

infrastructure or creating a government, that women in government just became a large

conversation in the past 4-5 years and did not exist before.[98] Yalda Royan, a women's rights

activist who has experience within donors, government, and NGOs argued that changes in the

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[94] Holland, Raha, and Saadat, 8.

[95] Research interview. Face to Face. Kabul. June 23, 2018

[96] Zaki Daryabi, Research Interview, Face to Face, May 26, 2018.

[97] Daryabi's code in Persian:"قانون منع خشونت تصویب شد و قرار شد در ۳۴ ولایت افغانستان تطبیق شود اما هنوز دچار مشکل است"

[98] Research interview. Face to Face. Kabul. June 23, 2018

cities are significant. She agreed with other interviewees on laws being reformed.[99] Royan's

current position as Deputy Chief of Party in Promote-Musharikat allowed her to talk about her

experience in this project showing the direction of Promote project funded by USAID.

Promote project as a five-year program for women in the country is an example of a

program solely designed for women. Promoting Gender Equity in National Priority Programs

(USAID-PROMOTE) launched in 2013, implementation started in 2015 and ends in 2020.

Although I could not ask questions about this project due to its on-going status, I think it is

legitimately important to discuss how USAID designed the project and the backlash it has

received globally. SIGAR which oversees USAID activities in Afghanistan shared concerns. In

communication with USAID, SIGAR exchanged some letters in both 2015 and 2016. In March

2015, John F. Sopko wrote to USAID requesting information related to the project. He wrote, "I

am concerned that some very basic programmatic issues remain unresolved and that the Afghan

women engaged in the program may be left without any tangible benefit upon compellation."[100]

Later in April 2015, USAID responded to the letter, criticizing SIGAR for not having adequate

information. In that, it also responded to the evaluation mechanism in which USAID rejected the

fact that the implementation has not started and there were no documents to provide.[101] SIGAR

also criticized USAID for selected partners implementing the project; however, USAID wrote:

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[99] Yalda Royan, Research Interview, Face to Face, June 1, 2918.

[100] Get more details on his concerns in. SIGAR, "Inquiry Letter," Letter, March 27, 2015, https://www.sigar.mil/pdf/special%20projects/SIGAR-15-44-SP.pdf.

[101] To read the in-depth responses to SIGAR's questions, please open the letter and read each responses to the asked questions. USAID, "Response to SIGAR Letter," Formal Letter, April 10, 2015, 2, https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/April-10-2015-USAID-Response-to-SIGAR-Letter.pdf.

"SIGAR failed to recognize or acknowledge the importance of Afghan firms and organizations in the Promote consortium."[102]

A year later when implementation started, SIGAR closely monitored the project and contacted USAID again. In 2016, Sopko in the letter wrote, "I am concerned that a large portion of the funding USAID has committed to Promote may go mostly to U.S. contractors, rather than spent to benefit Afghan women directly. My concerns are shared by Afghan women themselves."[103] SIGAR had sent a group of investigators in 2016 to determine the challenges that Afghan women face. Per assessment, Promote is not helping Afghan women.[104] Their full report has not been released. Royan believes that SIGAR's report is essential to the project. The outcome of SIGAR's investigation can stop the project if the outcome shows a greater failure. It also shows a more significant challenge between USAID's mechanisms and SIGAR that has a greater responsibility holding USAID accountable, controlling the waste, and reporting back to the Congress. Communication between USAID and SIGAR also shows the misconception of Afghan women, and how bigger gaps are produced that will damage communities and making fighting for rights harder. The follow chart describes contractors who currently implement Promote.

Total Budget: 400+ million dollars ($200 million dollars from the US and raise more than $200 million from other donors)[105]

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[102] USAID, 15.

[103] "SIGAR-15-44-SP-IL- with Agency Response," Inquiry Letter, December 2016, 9, https://www.sigar.mil/pdf/special%20projects/SIGAR%2017-16-SP_Promote%20IL%20with%20Agency%20Response%20(003)_Redacted.pdf.

[104] "SIGAR-15-44-SP-IL- with Agency Response."

[105] "SIGAR-15-44-SP-IL- with Agency Response," Inquiry Letter, December 2016, https://www.sigar.mil/pdf/special%20projects/SIGAR%2017-16 SP_Promote%20IL%20with%20Agency%20Response%20(003)_Redacted.pdf.

Partners and Pillars

Chemonics International	DAI	Tetra Tech, Inc.	Asia Foundation	Musharikat
Women in Government: ($38 million)[106]	Women in the Economy: ($72 million)[107]	Women's Leadership Development: ($42 million)[108]	Scholarships: ($22 million)[109]	Advocacy: $22.5 million[110]
Goals: "Women in Government project **builds the capacity of women aged 18-30 through internship programs,** to ensure they have the necessary skills, experience, and knowledge to successfully become a next generation of Afghan political, business, and	**Goals:** "Achieving the objectives of Afghanistan's Transformation Decade by empowering educated Afghan women from across the country to gain the skills, voices, and resources to contribute to economic growth, to reduce poverty levels, and to influence workplace policies in response to the needs of women in the economy."[112]	**Goals:** "The Women's Leadership Development program will enable Afghanistan's most talented **young women to become future leaders in government**, business, and civil society. Over five years, 25,000 women with exceptional leadership potential and commitment to positive social change will be recruited and	**Goals:** "Provides scholarship opportunities for young Afghan women **to access quality education and training,** which will enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of the Afghan government by upgrading the skills and qualifications of female civil servants."[114]	**Goals:** "The Musharikat is designed to build a cadre of more than **5,000 activists and 300 Civil Society Organizations (CSOs)** from all 34 provinces to more **effectively advocate for and advance women's equality and empowerment**

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[106] "PROMOTE: Women in Government," Project Report (Kabul Afghanistan: USAID, August 2017), https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1871/Women_in_Government_WIG.pdf.

[107] "PROMOTE: Women in the Economy," Project Report (Kabul Afghanistan: USAID, October 2016), https://www.usaid.gov/news-information/fact-sheets/usaid-promotes-afghan-womens-leadership-economy-awle.

[108] "PROMOTE Women's Leadership Development," Project Report (Kabul Afghanistan: USAID, November 2016), https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1871/PROMOTE%20-%20Women's%20Leadership%20Development%20%28WLD%29.pdf.

[109] "PROMOTE-Scholarships," Project Report (Kabul Afghanistan, February 2017), https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1871/PROMOTE_-_Scholarships.pdf.

[110] "PROMOTE-Musharikat," Project Report (Kabul Afghanistan: USAID, November 2017), https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1871/PROMOTE_-_Musharikat.pdf.
[112] "PROMOTE: Women in the Economy."

[114] "PROMOTE-Scholarships."

civil society leaders.”[111]		enrolled in the program.”[113]		in Afghanistan.”[115]

Contractors in this chart are criticized by SIGAR, but USAID has not directly mentioned them on its website. All partners are required to report back to the Gender Office of USAID. USAID has its policy to publish reports and communicate if further information is needed. Similarly, this chart shows a duplication. The goals mentioned in each section is not very clear, and it is difficult to understand the end goals. Royan, who has a clear understanding of the project, believes that given how this project is designed, it cannot help Afghan women in five years. There is a small part that focuses on women in the government that may help since it aimed to train a total of 3000 girls who would be ready for job opportunities in government offices. In reality, three years have passed and this section only trained a total of 150, who have hardly been hired in the government offices.[116] She sees a greater issue within the project design. Instead, if at least ten factories were made, they could help women in the long run, she argued. That change could be more acceptable.[117]

Others also argued that women's rights have not changed in the country. Sayed Muzaffar Shah, the Country Director of CCC in Afghanistan said, "fundamentally things have not changed. It is because the mentality of the people has not changed, the life of women in domestic

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[111] "PROMOTE: Women in Government."

[113] "PROMOTE Women's Leadership Development."

[115] "PROMOTE-Musharikat."

[116] Royan, Research Interview.

[117] Royan.

level has not changed."[118] He believes that change is made possible by technology, not donors' aid. Women started having access to technology, social media, and TVs. Due to globalization and women fighting in other countries, Afghanistan is influenced. As a result, Afghanistan started seeing more women working in offices. In contrast, although these women's entrance into the workforce was an achievement, Ehsan Qaane, a researcher in Afghanistan Analyst Network, believes that the work environment for women and the number of harassment and sexual assault cases are concerning. [119]To Qaane, many other examples and the struggle women go through in the country does not fulfill the expected outcome.

Among these interviewees and others whose arguments are used in the background, there is a fundamental confusion between donors, researchers, activists, and implementers. Some interviewees from the donor community were not aware of how donors approached women's rights. This confusion also led to researchers being vague in suggesting alternatives. For instance, initially, women were hopeful when projects such as Promote launched. However, it continued the same mechanisms that other agencies practiced in the past years. All members agreed that it is challenging to change the way projects are implemented, yet women's rights remain a struggle for both the international donors and local activists. The government of Afghanistan has initiated many programs and is supported by the international community, the legitimacy of their argument is worsened if women's suffering in the country remains unchangeable.

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[118] Syed Muzaffer Shah, Research Interview, Face to Face, June 14, 2018.

[119] Ehsan Qaane, Research Interview, Face to Face, June 2, 2018.

2. Is the donors' aid sufficient or lacking?

Duplication among donors is one of the reasons donors' aid is lacking, most of the interviewees argued. Donors such as UN agencies and USAID projects implement similar thematic areas that show less coordination among donors that choose a limited target area. On the one hand, it created a blurred approach among practitioners; on the other hand, it affected the impact of projects being implemented. An interviewee (whose name will remain anonymous) argued that there are concepts within UN Women under different names and themes; however, other donors used the same themes to work in the country.[120] In other agencies such as USAID, the interviewee believes that USAID does not give projects to national partners; instead, they are giving to those that are US based implementers. Within that approach, there are many duplications. So far, there has not been a coordination mechanism that would help both donors and partners lead their projects differently. Duplications could be the results of different actors aimed to contributed something in the country right after the Taliban regime. This goal and interest allowed donors a long time to establish a coordination mechanism. Instead, donors aimed for short-term results.[121] If the amount were spent on a long-term and sustainable projects, the change would have been different.

Another interviewee who worked as an and currently works with UN Habitat (UNH), gave an example of a project in Jalalbad city of Nangarhar province that is distanced from the capital. She referenced to skills training projects that were popular among donors earlier. The UNH in Kandahar province implemented a project in 2005. This project provided machines, training, and materials that would enable these women to learn and produce sellable products.

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[120] Anonymous, Interview.

[121] Anonymus.

These products were assumed to provide some cash to these women.[122] The assumption was that women learned embroidery in their childhood, which could be used as a base to strengthen their skills for an income. When the training was finished, the machines were given to the trainees. [123] Similar projects were implemented in other parts of Afghanistan. The World Food Programme reported in September 2012 about a project that taught 100 women the same skills that the UNH implemented in Kandahar province. This project aimed to teach women new skills while giving them enough food during training. The report started with "giving Afghan women the chance to learn marketable skills is one way to help Afghanistan on the road to peace and stability, as well as food security."[124] The project lasted 6-7 months and helped these women in Kabul. The report also included two success stories of women participants. In the report, two women showed a greater interest in learning new skills so that they could earn some cash for their families. Farida a 38-year-old woman whose husband is a drug addict, was responsible for taking care of her family, the report states.[125] She said in the report, "I hope that if I learn to sew well, I can make good money making dresses for people."[126] These success stories are a normal trend being seen on donors websites. It also shows the participant's satisfaction with the project. On the other hand, without a follow-up, or knowing how they used these skills to earn money, in reality, is what Mirzad struggles to understand. For instance, in Jalalabad, Mirzad argued that such project

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[122] "Tailoring and Hand Pump Project (Kandahar)," UN, unhabitat.org, November 8, 2005, http://www.fukuoka.unhabitat.org/projects/voices/afghanistan/detail02_en.html.

[123] "Tailoring and Hand Pump Project (Kandahar)."

[124] Assadullah Azhari, "Stitching A Future For Afghan Women," Organization, wfp.org, Sptember 2012, https://www.wfp.org/stories/stitching-future-afghan-women.

[125] Azhari.

[126] Azhari.

failed. It was due to no follow up after the project was finished. She goes further, "if you go to any house or camp of IDPs, there are conducted training of tailoring or embroideries, the problem with that is all the house in Jalalabad got a tailoring machine. However, you hardly find a tailor. The trainings were only three to six months. You cannot train a tailor to be a tailor in three months."[127] She believed that learning the skills of tailoring requires more resources and longer planning for them to have a better outcome. In later years, women could produce their goods and could not make any money except receiving a tailoring machine.

Mirzad further argued that the amount of money lacks because all the project designs are result-based instead of impact-based. By that, donors "want to know how many women got trained, how many women participated in the advocacy training or other short period trainings. But no one goes back and check if that training had an impact."[128] She includes her experiences working in Afghanistan for many years, for different donors and NGOs. In that, she sees duplication among donors. For instance, occasional trainings and projects are duplicated and repeatedly used the same participants over and over. She further argues that projects funded by USAID, and the World Bank similar faces are shown in the trainings and conferences. It is because the contacts are not changing. The relationship between the donors and partners remains through years. The contact list within the implemented partner remains unchanged. Donors maintain their relationship with the partner without any questions because trusting or building a new NGO is harder in a situation where all are suffering from corruption, instability, and favoritism. Initially, it was difficult for women to understand the concept that was introduced to them. Expectations of donors looking for stable and well-managed partners are also high. Faster

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[127] Mehri Mirzad, Research Interview, Face to Face, June 7, 2018.

[128] Mirzad.

approaches with less impact are an issue Afghan women face now. Women's rights remained a door for income and NGOs use a business approach to gain more money with less focus on women's lives.

3. Designing Projects for Afghanistan, failure or not adequate?

Projects are designed in various ways. Some of them are on the need basis, others are designed outside the country, almost all the interviewees agreed. Most of these projects are donor-driven as Sayed Muzaffar Shah argues. "Donors are coming with an assessment, most of the time their assessments are on assumptions. [So] they do not do based on the grounds reality, [nor based on] proper assessment in Afghanistan knowing how much money they want to spend."[129] Instead, it is based on how much money is designated to Afghan women. All respondents of this research argued that it is one of the reasons donors had less impact in the country. With less impact, this is not an effective approach, they argued. This approach also allows the NGOs to change their visions and missions based on what specific projects one should look. Calling for a proposal usually has a gender indicator, Muzaffar Shah says that the term "gender is just symbolic."[130]

A need assessment is not a requirement to award a project or select the right partner. When I spoke with Afghans currently working with international agencies, in holding very high paid positions, they still do not have access to project designs or awarding process. They told me that they do not know how a partner is selected or based on what evidence a project is designed. Anosha Ejlasi, who has been working within donor community, claimed that although she works

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[129] Muzaffer Shah, Research Interview.

[130] Muzaffer Shah.

as a senior gender specialist for the UNH, she still does not know how projects are designed or how partners are selected.[131]

The way projects are designed for Afghanistan is limited to certain areas, the data shows. It is difficult for donors to determine where to award a project. The security situation remains a problem in awarding projects in the conflict zones. For instance, UN Women usually does not award projects in the conflict provinces. On the one hand, it raises the question of exclusion and inclusion of certain groups and ethnic minorities; on the other hand, the impact from the donors' perspective remains within an elite group in provinces with better security. UN Women already had projects with CEDAW and UNSCR that failed to be implanted in 34 provinces, but instead, are implemented in 24 provinces. They do have a legitimate reason to not but their employee at risk due to security conditions. Other donors are more critical, at least of individuals within the donor community. A representative from UNH argued that donors do not pay attention to the geographical aspect of projects but instead focus on the result reports.[132] Employees working in IOs and INGOs have health insurance, and they should not be put in the risky provinces since that costs them more.[133] As discussed before, projects such as Promote and skill trainings are not doing in the country. Neither the interviewees nor I know why the same designs are continued while knowing that these short trainings are not bringing sustainable change to Afghan women.

4. Lack of coordination among donors and partners

Corruption, lawmakers, government officials, and specific elite groups that demand donors funding still challenge both the beneficiaries and partners. Similarly, neither donors nor

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[131] Anosha Ejlasi, Research Interview, Face to Face, June 7, 2018.

[132] Mirzad, Research Interview.

[133] Royan, Research Interview.

partners are aware of what women need and while also having no coordination before, during, or after project implementation.

Country offices, as Campbell argued before, are the main intermediaries between HQs and beneficiaries. Country offices plan the year ahead of time to know where they should choose their projects and how. UN Women, for instance, designs its projects every four years and consults with government partners and civil society, an interviewee said.[134] The respondent from this entity clarifies that four years concepts are not enough.[135] UN Women also develops its yearly work plan and implement its projects based on what the work plan requires. The interviewee says, "to be honest, we try and have tried to be as relevant to Afghanistan as possible, but I can see there are still shortcomings."[136] UN Women also tries to align its projects with government priorities such as the Women's Economic Empowerment agenda of the government, Citizen Charters, or National Solidarity Program. The reason UN Women uses this method is to reduce a parallel structure with the government. According to the interviewee, "We are here to support, not compete,"[137] After Afghanistan's government developed its Afghanistan National Peace and Development Framework (ANPDF) beginning 2017 through, UN agencies came together to develop One UN for Afghanistan that has six thematic areas, coordinate their works and work toward selected thematic areas together. This mechanism only helps UN agencies in the country, not other individual donors. The platform focuses on six areas such as, "norms, food-security, nutrition, and livelihood, health, return and reintegration, and the rule of

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[134] Research interview. Face to Face. Kabul. June 23, 2018

[135] Ibid.

[136] Ibid.

[137] Ibid.

law."[138] These six thematic areas are trying to go hand-in-hand with ANPDF which would be a single coordinating structure in Afghanistan.[139] ANPDF is a roadmap for the government of Afghanistan that mainly focuses on "peace, security, and ending poverty and achieving self-reliance."[140] On the one hand, this document allows the government to work more strategically; on the other hand, it allows the UN to work more coherently for the benefit of both the UN mission and the people of Afghanistan.

There has not been enough evidence to show such platform existed before. UN agencies were under attack in past years for its insufficient work in Afghanistan, particularly UN Women. This program is hoped to show a new agenda that creates better coordination among donors and choosing the most essential thematic areas helping people. Transparency and accountability are important mechanisms in this document. The Ministry of Finance has donors aid database showing the aid coordination team on how the new approach works. Nonetheless, it is still not clear if it will be more transparent since the culture of corruption and waste has been embedded in the government for many years. When I worked in the Ministry of Women's Affairs as a Donors Coordination Officer, I noticed that there are parallel and duplication projects among donors. For instance, UNDP was implementing almost the same project as Asia Foundation. Asia Foundation's project, that was funded by USAID, was working on the agency's capacity building and developing its five years strategic plan. On the other hand, UNDP started working on the agency's capacity building. Donors are advocating their agendas and competing to

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[138] "One UN for Afghanistan" (United nation, March 27, 2018), 10, https://www.af.one.un.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/4.-One-UN-for-Afghanistan-03042018.pdf.

[139] "One UN for Afghanistan."

[140] "One UN for Afghanistan."

implement the most important project. Lack of coordination and duplication are hurting the beneficiaries.

5. Weak monitoring and evaluation (M&E) mechanisms

Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) among the donor community and the NGOs is a question of who should be responsible for what they produced and failed on the project implementation process. Both donors and partners have M&E mechanisms. These mechanisms are usually used to monitor and evaluate a project. NGOs are expected to have a specific policy for their M&E procedures, and when the project is awarded, the M&E section is a function between the partner's M&E and the donor that has a separate unite. For instance, in UNH Ejlasi does not know what mechanisms are used in the M&E unite. During the interview in Kabul, she said: "I cannot give you the right answer on the procedures on how they collect their data."[141] When I spoke to a DFID representative who almost had the same position, the interviewee was aware of all its mechanisms and different standards. It shows that Afghans working within donors are not involved as much as the foreigners who are employed in the country offices. All interviewees agreed that M&E procedures within donors are weak. For instance, a UN Women representative argued that it is difficult to have a proper M&E procedure for many reasons. Projects being implemented in the conflict zones are difficult to monitor. The interviewee said, "if we cannot travel, we hire a third-party monitoring. We let them go and do the monitoring, [or] sometimes we use some NGOs who are present in those areas." In order to know if a partner is transparent, the donor tries to conduct more research on the partners' background and previous projects implemented. Although UN Women hired the third party to monitor the project, it awarded a project in a far distanced province. The total of a 100 women was trained in this

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[141] Ejlasi, Research Interview.

project based on the report received; however "we called those people,"[142] to see if the number of trainees was accurate. There were only 50 women involved in the training. The partner was asked to train the extra 50 women or return the funding. It is one of those examples were M&E fails. The data shows that most of the donors accept the report without doing a real assessment and monitor during the project.

Moreover, Mirzad says that the mechanisms exist on the paper that at least has three to four phases. The government has the responsibility to monitor projects, the implementing partner has an obligation to submit a M&E report, and the donor itself should have its procedure. However, according to Mirzad, "in this process, what is lacking is that we take this process so lightly."[143] She argues that monitoring and evaluation are two different processes. Monitoring should be used before the problem occurs, whereas evaluation is to see the impact after the project is done. She further explains, "what happens [is] that they usually check the last phase which is the evaluation part. They [forget] the monitoring phase. It is with the government, with the partners, and the donors.[144] According to this explanation, if monitoring is not taking place during implementation, it will be tough to analyze the quality of a project, and whether or not it was executed the best way possible.

As soon as the contract is signed between the donor and partner, nothing can be changed during implementation. Syed Muzaffer Shah believes that the proposal agreement is an essential document for both the donor and partner. "But in most cases, the donors are not concerned about how clean and transparent is a project. [if] there is corruption in the project," especially in

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[142] Research interview. Face to Face. Kabul. June 23, 2018

[143] Mirzad, Research Interview.

[144] Mirzad.

USAID projects, they contract with an external M&E (third party) company to evaluate.

However, these companies are using a "checking the box" strategy. When the report returns to

the donor and "if they see that the project has met all the requirements that [have] been put in the

technical proposal than the project is fine."[145] He goes further explaining: what is lacking in this

procedure is that, one: evaluators do not asses "the impact of a project, [or even] the longer

impact of a project." Two: they do not asses the corruption in the project.[146] Wafaey[147] further

explains:

> "M&E system is weak especially in the projects implemented in the far distanced areas
> even if the security is not a concern. In the insecure areas, M&E is zero. Getting projects
> in unsecured areas are a tactic for corruption which is not getting implemented. They just
> give [an] unreal report. It became a culture on how to get a project and create a report that
> satisfies the donor and the money remains to the implementers."[148]

How donors are accountable to their governments is different than how donors are responsible

for their beneficiaries. Donor and partner make the argument that it is the technical proposal that

decide the level of M&E and the impact of a project. If the donor receives everything on-time,

especially the project report, it is good enough and they have fulfilled their obligations. Not only

do the donors have weak mechanisms to evaluate their projects, but the Ministry of Economy

also does not have a steady hand in NGOs functionality in the country. In such, there is not a

concrete or robust instrument that would allow the government to oversee projects

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[145] Muzaffer Shah, Research Interview.

[146] Muzaffer Shah.

[147] Hassan Wafaey, Research Interview, Face to Face, June 24, 2018.

[148] Wafaey's comment in Persian that is translated by the researcher in the text. " خصوص در .است ضعیف نظارت سستم
برای را پروژه‌ها که است فساد راه‌های از یکی .است صفر نظارت ناامن جاهای در و .باشد امن که این ولو باشند دورتر جاهای در که پروژه‌هایی
.می‌دهند واقعی غیر گزارش یک فقط .نمی‌کنند تطبیق اصلا و می‌گیرند امن نام مناطق"

implementation. If one existed, Muzaffer Shah argues, it could help reduce waste. He said, "any open window of control in Afghanistan can create more corruption."[149] What he meant is that the system got so complex that it cannot easily be understood or solutions cannot be proposed.

6. Projects for women failed, or practitioners are satisfied?

Almost all of the respondents believed that most of the projects failed in the country. This argument is not only represented in this research, and there are others that claim the same failure of donor projects for women in Afghanistan. Certain factors cause projects to fail. The data regarding good and failed projects explains that most projects were not successful. However, what the data does not show is the assessment of how the project failed or what the character of a failed project is. Interviewees argued the failure of a project stems from the project design and to how a partner is selected. If the project is not designed well based on the needs assessment, it is very difficult to see the impact. That is a failure.

Some of the donors could not answer the question of how many projects failed and why. For instance, Ejlasi said during the interview that she does not have enough information and cannot assume anything. On the other hand, UN Women argued that there "have been projects that did not have as good impact as the amount worth. It is hard to name. I think there are quite a few."[150] Another interviewee said, "I think there are so many projects that they have money and they are under the pressure of their HQs, to spend as much money as can to be spent on this thematic area. For formality, they ask for some questioners, and they ask for some forms to be [completed]. These forms are filed [in a room] with [an] air conditioner."[151] The room with AC

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[149] Hassan Wafaey, Research Interview, Face to Face, June 24, 2018.
[150] Anonymous, Interview.

[151] Research interview. Face to Face. Kabul. June 23, 2018

here refers to the evaluation of training that most of the time is not real. The M&E officer in UNH argued that "there are so many projects that failed."[152] She gives the example of projects being copied from India and Indonesia replicated in Afghanistan. For instance, Community Banking is a community process in which people get together and the purpose is to multiple money to help others. They use that money to buy a cow or sheep or even rice. "I think the implementation started in Afghanistan in 2002, but it failed badly."[153] Further, when I asked the interviewee to name some failed projects, Royan gave an example of a project in the Takhar province. Musharikat, where Royan is working, awarded a training based project. The donor noticed that the report coming back shows one picture for three days of training. Such practice means that the training was conducted on only one day but reported in three days. The signatures of participants did not match, Royan said. Out of 150 participants, 25 were correct, the remaining did not match. When Royan and her team followed up with the "participants," most of them did not know about the training. Royan stopped the project.[154] There are many reasons why the project failed. A project can fail dramatically and become hard to recover. In contrast, an NGO sometimes cannot pay a donor back or conduct better training using its budget. Data shows that M&E mechanisms are weak and the government does not have the capacity to overlook all of the projects. It is a loss to the beneficiaries and the failure of donors who are arguing and demanding their projects solutions.

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[152] Research interview. Face to Face. Kabul. June 23, 2018

[153] Mirzad, Research Interview.

[154] Royan, Research Interview.

Explanation and analysis

The paper initially assumed that there had not been enough progress on women's rights in Afghanistan. It was also assumed that embedded corruption within local partners is an obstacle for women related programs' impact. However, the paper found it less true. Through this research I recognized that laws exist, policies are formed and reforms to laws are in progress. However, the problem is the implementation gap between laws and practices. Furthermore, the research also shows that there has been a disagreement between donors and partners. Both donors' and partners' reaction to the research showed confusion among them. Most interviewees responded with uncertainty that women's rights is going in the right direction, but the research found is less promising.

The government of Afghanistan, since its initial establishment, produced many laws, regulations, specific policies and mechanisms to protect women and make sure that women have equal rights before the law in the country. The government has also worked to facilitate more women in the government and leadership levels so that it symbolizes their commitment to the international world. Most of these mechanisms have not been fulfilled; for instance, NAPWA was designed for 10 years, but its impact within the ministries is not what was expected. In many conferences and international gatherings to advocate for further funding, the government showed its achievements and made sure that women do not lose what they have gained. It is unfortunate that women's rights and the amount of achievement is still fragile, not sustainable. Interviewees were hopeful about the future, but they were hesitant about the sustainability of these outcomes.

Furthermore, donors in the country also seem lost. Although some authors argued that country offices are a bridge between the HQs and the beneficiaries, these country offices are

still not designed in a way that they can receive local feedback, or replace their theory on changing women's rights in Afghanistan. Country offices in Afghanistan are well equipped with the best-armored cars, and buildings that are safe during an attack. What is missing is that local beneficiaries or even NGOs cannot have access to these offices. There is an elite group of both women and men that have a direct connection with these offices. These women advocates cannot represent what women struggle in the far distanced areas (rural women). As many of the interviewees in the research mentioned, almost similar faces are shown in international conferences, national advocacy meetings, and governmental activities, and it is hard to find new faces. This approach damages minority groups ,who have been doing outstanding work in their communities. Donors recently started coordinating meetings so that they do not create a parallel structure with the government but compliment the government programs. Donors also did not allow the government to interfere in their projects because they were more accountable to their HQs and their governments.

Local NGOs used these opportunities and tried to use women's rights as a tool to gain more money. When I conducted the interviews, they show that there is no corruption assessment within NGOs implementing women related projects, and they also show that NGOs are not accountable for their beneficiaries. In addition, NGOs are donor-driven. Some of the authors previously argued that it has happened in South America when feminist projects started producing more NGOs for gender equality and women's rights. NGOs started competing against each other which did not allow them to coordinate their initiatives better. Most of them would not mention where they received the grants so that the other organization would not have had access to the donor. These NGOs also learned how to produce the best reports that could satisfy the donor. The best reports showing success stories are enough for

Donors, and so that they do not have to leave their offices. NGOs also learned how to avoid monitoring and government assessment. Throughout the years, NGOs learned how to receive government, private, and donors' grants to work in different fields. It became a source of income and I was told that most of these individuals have been using the non-profit funds to establish their private companies.

If this ecosystem continues, this will increase insufficient programs in the future. The government does not have the capacity to monitor or hold donors/NGOs accountable. On the other hand, they also argued that donor funding should not be stopped. Project designs, implementation mechanisms, and more diverse approaches should replace what has been practiced in the past years. They believed that better coordination among donors, government entities, and NGOs are possible only if they conduct an assessment on their previous work, and how they failed throughout the years. Therefore, this will allow them to come up with a coherent planning and more sustainable agenda that can help women in the long run.

Conclusion

Throughout this paper, I have argued that donors and international aid in Afghanistan for women is inefficiently spent. I developed a roadmap that is looking at the theoretical framework of transactional literature that focused on how policies and strategies were developed by the Western empires aiming to change the developing countries. For instance, Makau Mutua's argument demonstrates the ways in which these policies have been practiced in different countries. Mutua has discussed the issue of victimization of developing countries and the Western programs and policies as protectors. Such dynamic also showed in Afghanistan with many women related projects. Other literatures such as Campbell's argument in Burundi is also echoed in Afghanistan. While many programs are designed to have women in the peace process,

donors are not accountable toward their beneficiaries but HQs. The data also reinforced the organizational and accountability literature focused on NGOs and partner relationships. For instance, writers such as Alvarez and Campbell showed examples of South American NGOs and NGOs in Burundi with similar trends in producing more feminist NGOs for women empowerment.

Initially, the research assumed that the vivid corruption within local NGOs, women related projects are not successful enough. However, assessing these theories in Afghanistan, the problem is more complicated than what I have assumed. Data in this research demonstrated the overarching problem within the donor community, the shortcomings of government programs, and local NGOs accountability toward beneficiaries and donor-driven practices. With the complexity and issues within such an ecosystem, my data also showed confusion among practitioners in the country. Donors cannot suggest alternatives and it is hard to receive local feedback, while the government cannot hold donors accountable, and partners start misusing funds allocated for women in the country. Creating more challenges and cultural backlashes against Afghan women is a long process to overcome but allows NGOs, political actors, and parliamentarians to gain more money.

Further research on this could also examine how paradigm of laws and policies established are not practical. Although they are stated on paper, it is hard to follow in practice. More implementation gaps should be reduced; research studies should be conducted in the country, considering laws and policies in place for women. From a donor perspective, Sally Engle Merry's argument on the gap between cosmopolitan awareness of rights and local actors to the families are should be assessed. She mainly argues that it is important to take

human rights approaches in a developing country. And in that, community leaders, local players, and activists are important for "global arenas down and from local arenas up."[155]

Finally, an impact assessment is needed to measure the effectiveness of the implementation process, success or failure of women's rights projects, and follow up methods after the project is completed. More research is also needed to look at "Promote" project and how it has been implemented since 2015. "Promote" project is the most famous program of USAID in the country that was designed for Afghan women and will end in 2020.

Donors:

1. Donors and international aid should be monitored and evaluated by every single project related to women. For instance, there should not be a third party evaluator involved in M&E procedures in USAID projects. Most of USAID projects are monitored by a third party who uses a "checking the box" strategy. USAID relies on the report coming from an evaluator that satisfies USAID's requirement. Weak monitoring and evaluation increase the level of corruption within a project. USAID should also stop contracting its projects to corporates. Practicing a business model in these projects are not responding to the needs of Afghan women. The rights-based approach is needed instead of a fast service delivery approach.

2. USAID, UN agencies, and other international donors should establish a coordination mechanism in order to reduce parallel procedures and policies. A collective effort with a better target area should be discussed with main actors such as the Ministry of Women's Affairs and other national implementers. In the meantime, UNDP should

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[155] Merry, Sally Engle. "Transnational Human Rights and Local Activism: Mapping the Middle." Dialogues *on Human Rights and Legal Pluralism,* 2012, 207-28. Accessed Sept 7, 2018.

not have similar projects with UN Women or USAID. Duplication damages beneficiaries. Women's rights is not a competition in the country but a need to end violence and empower women more sustainably. Women's rights and gender equality cannot be based on a business mindset, there has to be sustainability involved. Therefore, short-term trainings such as "Promote" and UN Women projects that are not sustainable and cannot empower women in the long run.

Government:

1. The government of Afghanistan should work hand-in-hand with local actors in order to practice the role of law. Passing laws favoring women is not enough, nor using women symbolically in the government offices that cannot represent women in all sectors of the society. Women leaders in key positions should understand the fundamental struggle of a woman in the country. Political division within the government damages a strong Afghan Women Minister. Ministry of Women's Affairs should be led by a well-educated and organized individual so that the Ministry can have the capacity to monitor and evaluate women related projects and hold NGOs accountable for their misuse of funding.

2. The Ministry of Economy has to establish a mechanism to evaluate programs that are implemented in different sectors. Receiving project reports are not showing NGOs accountability or transparency, the government is obligated to hold NGOs accountable for their practices and policies. NGOs who have gained more money and individuals becoming rich should be stopped from receiving projects. Women's rights is not a business but a sustainable area of Afghanistan's development.

Local NGOs:

1. NGOs should stop receiving projects for their gains, instead focusing on the beneficiaries. Women's rights should not remain symbolic for both women in the government and human rights defenders. It should be a value, and the gender budget should be more transparent in both government and independent organizations. If NGOs are not accountable toward the government, they should have better mechanisms to be accountable toward their beneficiaries.

2. NGOs should establish a coordination mechanism and work together so that they all can put pressure on the donors for a better project design and better M&E practices. This will help the donors as well as the beneficiaries. NGOs are currently looking at women as a type of business. NGOs privatization is harm to gender equality in the country that also prevents the initiatives from succeeding.

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APENDEX 1.

Interviewees in the Research

- **Interviewee 1**: Anosha Ejlasi is a Senior Gender Advisor at UN Habitat (UNH. She is responding to all questions based on her experience at Women for Afghan Women and her current position in the UNH.

- **Interviewee 2**: Ab-Wadood Pedram is an Executive Director in Human Rights and Eradication Violence Organization (HREVO). He has experience in activism, donor-partners relationship, and many human rights projects.

- **Interviewee 3**: Anonymous (DFID, British Embassy), the participant from the British Embassy requested to remain completely anonymous and the interview was not recorded. The information from this interview will be used as background information.

- **Interviewee 4**: Anonymous (UN Women), a UN Women employee who has enough experience in making a yearly strategy and action plan, is involved in awarding projects, and has a direct connection to local partners.

- **Interviewee 5**: Anonymous (DFID British Embassy), this is the second DFID employee who requested to remain anonymous. The information will be used as background information.

- **Interviewee 6**: Anonymous, this participant remained completely anonymous and requested to neither be recorded, nor have direct quotes in the research. The interviewee responded to questions related to NGOs that implemented women-related projects in different provinces and talked about accountability and corruption within NGOs.

- **Interviewee 7**: Carmela Weber is a former USAID employee in Afghanistan. She worked as a decision maker in awarding projects and overseeing and reporting back to the main office.

- **Interviewee 8**: Hassan Wafaey is a Research Manager in the Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU). His background researching in different fields allows him to answer questions related to M&E procedures, donor awarding processes, follow up, and accountability structures.

- **Interviewee 9**: M.Ehsan Qaane is a researcher who has experience in UN mechanisms and treaties. He is currently working with the Afghanistan Analyst Network. He responded to questions related to M&E, aid distribution, agenda setting, and government laws and regulations.

- **Interviewee 10**: Mobarez Rashedi is Afghanistan's former Minister of Counter Narcotics. He has responded to questions related to government relations with donors and how donor approaches are lacking in the country concerning women's rights.

- **Interviewee 11**: Mehri Mirzad is an M&E specialist currently with UNH who answered questions based on her entrepreneurship background and her experience with Zardozi.

- **Interviewee 12:** Syed Muzaffer Shah is a researcher and the Country Director of Center for Civilians in Conflict (CCC) in Afghanistan. He has experience among both INGOs and local NGOs focused on women's rights. His input in this research comes from his background in anti-corruption research and work with Independent Joint Anti-corruption Monitoring and Evaluation Committee (MEC) of Afghanistan as well as his full understanding of donors expectations in the country. He responded to specific questions related to both NGOs and donor policies, mechanisms, and procedures.

- **Interviewee 13**: Yalda Royan is a Deputy Chief of Party, implementing PROMOT project funded by USAID. She has experience with Asia Foundation, UN Women, and currently with USAID, and she respond to all questions asked.

- **Interviewee 14**: Zaki Daryabi is a journalist who has worked in Afghanistan for many years. He is currently the Editor and Chief of Etilaat Roz (Afghan newspaper). He responded to questions related to M&E and donors-government relations.