

Case Studies Series

**GENDER ROLES
IN AGRICULTURE**
Case studies of five villages
in northern Afghanistan

Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit

By Jo Grace



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The Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU) is an independent research organisation that conducts and facilitates action-oriented research and learning that informs and influences policy and practice. AREU also actively promotes a culture of research and learning by strengthening analytical capacity in Afghanistan and by creating opportunities for analysis, thought and debate. Fundamental to AREU's vision is that its work should improve Afghan lives. AREU was established by the assistance community working in Afghanistan and has a board of directors with representation from donors, UN and multilateral organisation agencies and non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

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I. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this report is to contribute to a greater understanding of the roles women and men play in the different stages of agriculture as well as other production and income-generating activities. Little research exists on gender roles within Afghanistan and the focus of much research and most programming is still the “household.” This focus often obscures intra-household gender relations and roles – crucial factors in determining access to, and control over, livelihood opportunities. As a result, not enough is known of the extent to which different men and women are able to access different livelihood opportunities, or the extent to which programmes may impact on women and men differently. A better understanding would assist programme targeting and could be used not only in programme design but also in monitoring and evaluation.

Understanding gender roles involves looking beyond differences in activities between men and women to also looking at differences in activities between different women and between different men, as mediated by factors such as age, wealth and marital status. This study looks at what different women and men are doing and what effect this has on their livelihood options. It also looks at whether these roles change over time, in order to gain a greater understanding of how flexible gender roles can be, what factors can influence their change, and how this room for manoeuvre may be used to improve access to livelihood opportunities. Whilst housework and childcare are recognised as extremely important they are not looked at here in great detail, as the focus is on production and income-generating activities.

The research for this study took place in five villages in two provinces of Afghanistan and was one of three interconnected studies conducted simultaneously in the same villages. The other two studies are “Wheat Seed and Agriculture Programming in Afghanistan: Its Potential to Impact on Livelihoods”¹ and “Understanding Village Institutions: Case Studies on Water Management from Faryab and Saripul.”² The term “livelihoods” is used in this paper to denote the capabilities and assets of individuals and households, and the strategies they use to secure a living, that may then build, maintain or deplete these assets and capabilities. In this report, as in the companion studies, the term “household” is used to denote the smallest family unit, although the communities in these areas used the local language work for “household” to mean the extended family or larger compound family grouping.

The next section of this report outlines the methods used in the study and looks at the limitations of this research, discussing issues useful for those interested in carrying out research on gender issues, particularly in Afghanistan. Section III provides background information on the villages studied and Section IV presents the village findings. The final section summarises the key findings and offers recommendations for possible interventions related to these findings.

¹ Coke, A. *Wheat Seed and Agriculture Programming in Afghanistan: Its Potential to Impact on Livelihoods*. Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit: Kabul. 2004.

² Pain, A. *Understanding Village Institutions: Case Studies of Water Management from Faryab and Saripul*. Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit: Kabul. 2004.

II. METHODS AND LIMITATIONS

A. Methods

The research was conducted over a two and a half week period, around two days per village. Semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions were carried out with different groups of women and men in five villages. The interviews were open-ended but were based on a set of key questions (see Box 1). The research teams were made up of AREU and staff from Coordination for Humanitarian Assistance and Ecumenical Office/Christian Aid (CHA/EOCA) in Daulatabad and German Agro Action (GAA) in Sayyad, together with hired translators.

The villages chosen were those in which the AREU livelihoods monitoring research project³ is being carried out with two of the partner non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

Box 1: Key Questions

- What roles do men and women play in each stage of agriculture?
- How have these roles changed over the past 23 years?
- How are the roles men and women play in agriculture affected by age, marital status, wealth, ethnicity, and tradition?
- Do the roles which men and women play affect their bargaining power within and outside the household?
- Are gender roles in agriculture different depending on whose land the work takes place on and on which terms; i.e., owned, sharecropped, mortgaged, farm labour?

Three villages in Daulatabad District, Faryab Province, were visited, along with three villages in Sayyad District in Saripul Province. However, due to conflicting work commitment and the start of Ramazan halfway through the research in Sayyad, only Villages One and Three were studied in-depth in this area and included in this report. In the three Daulatabad villages, women and men from different wealth groups (as defined, mostly by village *shuras* [councils] during the livelihoods monitoring), were interviewed to allow for comparison of people's activities from different socio-economic backgrounds. Women were interviewed by women and men were interviewed by men.

As no English speaking translators could be found in Saripul, two women who spoke Uzbek (the main language spoken in the two villages in Saripul) were trained via a translator to conduct the interviews. This necessitated a daily de-briefing with the women to discuss the information they had been given and to decide what should be discussed in the interviews the following day. As these two women had not been involved in the livelihoods monitoring project (whereas the Daulatabad teams contained a woman and man who had been involved in livelihoods monitoring research in the villages), organising women and men into wealth groups determined during the monitoring was not possible and there was no time for another wealth ranking. Interviews were thus conducted with women from different households based on wealth, ownership of land and whether a widow lived in the household. The interviews with men were separated into interviews with male landowners, sharecroppers and daily wage labourers.

³ The AREU livelihoods monitoring research project works with partner NGOs to carry out cohort tracking in different parts of Afghanistan. The aim is twofold, to improve the monitoring and evaluation capacity of partner NGOs and to improve understanding of the ways in which people are building their livelihoods.

While the involvement of some women in agriculture was very limited, some were heavily involved in income-generating activities such as carpet weaving. As a result, a decision was made to also explore production and income-generating activities aside from agriculture. This was felt necessary to develop an understanding of why and how people are, or are not, involved in agriculture.

At the end of the two days in each village a brief presentation was given back to the *shura* to both validate and explain the research findings.

B. Limitations

Translation

Due to insufficient language skills of the international team members, translators were needed. In Daulatabad three translators who could speak some English were found, however, their English was not sufficient and led to some confusion over questions and answers. It was very difficult to find women who could speak all the different languages spoken in the three villages visited: Pashto in Village One, Daulatabad, Turkmen in Village Two, Daulatabad and Uzbek in Village Three, Daulatabad. The research team was fortunate to also have a woman on the team who spoke all three languages. However, this woman spoke little English, which led to a complicated three-way translation of questions and answers, which obviously makes reliability of the information received more difficult to assess. Consistent answers in relation to men and women's activities were, however, largely given by different groups of people.

Time

The time spent in each village was limited and gaining understanding of certain aspects of gender roles and relations, such as decision-making, was therefore very difficult. To obtain an understanding of decision-making would necessitate spending a much longer time in a village, as greater trust would need to be built up.

Spending a longer period of time in a village would have allowed the researchers to make more observations about what women and men are doing in different activities, rather than only gaining information from interviews. In the future, it would be useful to observe who is working in the fields at different times of the year, for example, and who is doing which activity, as this may be different from the information given.

Partly due to time constraints, the research team was unable to gain an understanding of how households living in the same compound interact. Do they pool labour and income, for example? This information is very important for getting a fuller understanding of women and men's roles.

Sensitivities of Discussing "Women"

Interviewing men about women's activities in the village proved quite difficult. Men were very uncomfortable answering questions about women, which meant it was not possible to ask more in-depth questions.

Discussing "young" women with men, which when translated through a Dari or Pashto speaker refers to unmarried women, is highly culturally inappropriate and thus getting information on what young women are doing proved particularly difficult.

III. THE VILLAGES

Five villages were visited for this study, three in Daulatabad and two in Sayyad. The table below provides some background information on each of the villages.

Table 1: Summary Information on Research Villages

VILLAGE NAME	DISTRICT AND PROVINCE	ETHNICITY	POPULATION SIZE	LANDLESSNESS	MAIN CROPS GROWN
Village One, Daulatabad	Daulatabad, Faryab	Pashtun	~ 2050 households	70% of households	Wheat, sesame, melon and watermelon
Village Two, Daulatabad	Daulatabad, Faryab	Turkmen	~ 1,000 households	80% of households	Wheat, sesame, melon and watermelon
Village Three, Daulatabad	Daulatabad, Faryab	Mainly Uzbek as well as some people of Arab and Uzbek origin	~ 600 households	40% of households	Wheat, sesame, melon and watermelon
Village Three, Sayyad	Sayyad, Saripul	Uzbek	~ 1000 households	30% of households	Wheat, sesame, flax, melon, watermelon, and poplars
Village One, Sayyad	Sayyad, Saripul	Uzbek	~ 170 households	Very few	Wheat, sesame, flax, melon, watermelon, and poplars

IV. FINDINGS

A. Cropping and Horticultural Activities in Landowning Households

Land Ownership

It is worth beginning by noting that when this report mentions “households” owning land, what is largely referred to are men in those households owning land. Women in the villages studied are rarely considered to jointly own the land and few females inherit land from their parents in practice, though under Shari’a law they have property rights. Thus, whilst unmarried and married women may have access to the produce from the land for consumption, they rarely own this very valuable asset. Where this appears to differ, however, is when a woman is widowed. It appears that in all of the villages studied landed widows do have certain rights over the land. Several widows involved in the study were sharecropping out⁴ their land, mostly to male relatives, and receiving what appeared to be the correct share of the crop. It does not appear that these women have full rights of ownership, however, as they are not permitted to sell the land, as it will be passed onto their sons or male relatives. Much further investigation is needed to find out what rights women do have over land and what these rights mean for them.

The ability to “own” or at least manage land may also be linked to marriage systems. Most of the married women in the villages were born in those same villages. They had been married to men who were born in the same village, often members of the same natal kin. This endogamous marriage system may make it easier for women to hold onto land, as even if they return to their natal home following widowhood, they will still be residing in the same village. By contrast, in areas where exogamous marriage is practiced, in countries such as India (for the most part), it is often more difficult for women to maintain some control over the land and even less likely that they will inherit from their parents, as they will move away upon marriage.⁵

Gender Roles

As would be expected, all villages contained both landed and landless families. The proportions of each differed from village to village but in general there were more landless than landed families (see Table 1 in earlier pages).

Those with more land than can be cultivated by family labour alone, or those involved in other activities, sharecrop out all or part of their land. While this was similar for all villages, one difference both within and between the villages was the share of the crop those working on the land of others received. This shall be discussed further under the section on sharecropping.

The majority of landowning males still work on the land, at least at harvest time. Men can be involved in all agricultural activities, whilst women from landowning households, widely considered to be wealthier households, appear to have much less activity on land. This differs from village to village, however, based on age, assets owned and other activities being undertaken within the household.

⁴ Sharecropping out refers to giving land one owns to a farmer to work for a share of the crop. Sharecropping in refers to working on another’s land as a farmer for a share of the crop.

⁵ Agarwal, B. *A Field of One’s Own: Gender and Land Rights in South Asia*. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge. 1994.

The richer women of Daulatabad Village One said that only poor women work on the land and that women are generally not allowed to work on the land “because of culture.” This tended to be the case in the other Daulatabad villages also, though elderly women in these two villages worked in their own household’s orchards, guarding the fruit from birds and animals and picking the fruit when ready. Reasons for the age differentiation of tasks in Daulatabad Village Two and Daulatabad Village Three shall be discussed in greater detail in the section on carpet weaving. In Village Three, however, other male and female household members also go to the orchards in the spring.

In the Saripul villages there appeared to be less difference between women from different socio-economic backgrounds in terms of the work they do on land. Women from all backgrounds appear to be involved in working on land, mostly on melon fields. However, because different wealth groups were not compared in Saripul, it is more difficult to know if there were differences or not.

Some women in Sayyad and all of the Daulatabad villages are working on their own household’s vegetable plots. It must be noted, however, that not all villages had vegetable plots, orchards or vineyards due in large part to lack of water. This demonstrates that it is not always possible to directly compare what women and men are doing from village to village, as activities partly depend on the assets owned in each village.

Some women from landowning households are also involved in agricultural activities inside the house, though to differing extents. For example, in Daulatabad Village One and Sayyad Village One, some women help clean and prepare the seed, and some in Daulatabad Village One help move the wheat for storage and separate the wheat from the husk in preparation for making flour. In Daulatabad Village Two, some women dry tomatoes inside the house, some dry melon and some make jam from watermelon for the winter as well as dry grapes with the men. Women are also preparing the meals for male household members working on the land. The majority of widows who own land appear to sharecrop it out, largely to male relatives, and do not work on it themselves.

Where women from landowning households are involved in agriculture, it is limited to certain activities. There are, however, exceptions and in one family in Sayyad Village One where there were no sons, the wife was involved in many stages of agriculture (from sewing to harvesting to processing). Involvement in agriculture may therefore partly depend on whether the household can afford to hire in labour and how strongly social stigmas around women and men’s involvement in certain activities are, as well as how strongly individuals or households adhere to them.

Women from households who were sharecropping in tend to work more with the men in their households on land; however, as will be discussed further in the section on sharecropping, which types of women are involved differs both within as well as between villages.

The sale of agricultural (or any other) produce is mostly the domain of men. No women, except for elderly widows (usually those who have no male children), travel to the bazaar to sell or buy goods. This means that it may be more difficult for women to make decisions over how money is spent.

Within some richer households women appeared to look after the money, although men are the ones who spend the money, as women travelling to the bazaar is seen

as culturally unacceptable. Decisions relating to what is bought may be made by both men and women. The fact that women look after the money could mean that these women are able to save small amounts of money for times of emergency, as has been shown to be the case in other countries.⁶

In general, it appears that the richer the household, the less the women work on land and there appears to be a stigma attached to women working on land, as it denotes that the family is poor. This stigma needs to be taken into consideration if programmes seek to involve women more in agriculture, as although there may be economic benefits there may also be social costs involved.

It is possible that women are working on the land more than was admitted, as the public comments given are often what women should be doing, in terms of the socio-cultural norms, and not necessarily what they are doing. Additionally, whether women view small vegetable plots within the compound as agriculture, given that this is mostly for household consumption, is unclear. This activity was not mentioned until asked about. This demonstrates the need to both observe what is going on as well as to ask about all possible types of agricultural activities.

B. Sharecropping

In all of the villages there are households with a member or members sharecropping on another person's land, though to differing degrees.⁷ The number of landlords who sharecrop out land in each village may be associated with the size of land holdings in the village as well as the average household size and composition, especially the number of males old enough to work on the land.

Most of the sharecroppers interviewed said they were landless, though some also had small amounts of land from which sufficient production to last the year could not be obtained. In a couple of cases men were said to sharecrop out their land for others to work on and simultaneously sharecrop another person's land. The reason for this was that they lacked the draught power and tools necessary to work their own land, tools not necessary to sharecrop in, as the landlord can often supply them.

Though women work with male household members in some aspects of sharecropping, all of the sharecroppers themselves appear to be male. Farming experience and expertise is needed to gain work as a sharecropper, experience and expertise that women do not gain due to the restricted agricultural activities they perform. Those men without this experience tend to work more as farm and non-farm labour.

Different men were working based on different terms according to 1) who supplies inputs such as seed and oxen, 2) whether the landowner needs the farmer to supply these, and 3) the financial situation of the household. In the former case, those sharecroppers who are able to provide oxen or other draught power such as horses, as well as seed, receive a greater share of the crop.⁸ Conversely, those who can only supply labour receive a smaller share. Other terms exist where the sharecropper lives with the landlord and receives food and clothing as well as an even smaller share than those not living with the landlord. In Daulatabad Village

⁶ See, for example, Rutherford, S. *The Poor and Their Money*. Oxford University Press: New Delhi. 2000 and Lacoste, J.P. *Savings Strategies for Poor Women in Zimbabwe: A Socio-Economic Perspective*. Paper presented at conference on Livelihoods, Savings and Debt, Wageningen, Netherlands. 2001.

⁷ Coke, op cit.

Three, there was also a system in place for the very poor whereby an advance of 16 *seers* (112 kg) of wheat was given at the beginning of the agricultural year, and then a lesser share than those without an advance received was given at harvest time.

While the general rule of the more inputs the sharecropper puts in, the more he receives, holds true for all villages, the share of crops received seems to be village and farmer specific. The villagers stated that these terms have existed for many years and take many years to change. Nevertheless, some alterations could be seen and some terms have changed from the previous year. People from all five villages spoke of a shortage of labour due to other work opportunities for men outside the village, many young men still working in Iran and the current desire by some to move away from sharecropping. As a result of this, sharecropping terms and wages appear to be moving in the favour of both sharecroppers as well as farm labourers.

The desire by some to move out of sharecropping is due to several reasons. First, the price of wheat this year is said to be low. Combined with this is the fact that, due to the shortage of labour inside the villages, wages for daily labour are increasing. Higher wages outside the villages are also acting as a pull factor. Lastly, others who had received larger shares before the drought when they had owned oxen do not want to work for smaller shares now that they have no oxen.

Several men, for a combination of the above reasons, especially in the villages in Daulatabad, reported being dissatisfied with the returns from sharecropping. These men voiced a desire to work as farm labour during the next harvest and to seek other labour both inside and outside the village for the rest of the year. While this may not be a long-term trend and may change if next year's wheat price is higher, it does have implications for agricultural programmes.⁹ This move towards farm and non-farm labour comes despite the lower social status usually accorded to these types of work. So it would appear that perceived economic returns can become more important than status in some cases.

What this current trend may mean in terms of gender roles and relations is unclear. If men are away from the village more it could mean that women take on more responsibility both inside and outside the house. For example, in contrast to the majority of the women spoken to, one woman who was living alone with her children had control over the family budget. Her husband was living in the house of a landlord whose land he was sharecropping and she said she had control over the budget because "she had to." This may not always be the case, however, as shall be discussed in the section on non-farm labour. It is also possible that a continued and possibly increasing labour shortage inside the villages could mean that women's labour is brought into agriculture to a larger extent – a trend that has been evident in many other parts of the world.

Some sharecroppers are involved in daily labour as well as sharecropping. In one interview in Sayyad, two sharecroppers spoke of how their share of the crops were not enough to last the year partly due to debt that had accumulated during the drought, which they are now repaying.

Female members of households in which men are engaged in sharecropping, who in general appear to be considered poorer than landowning households, also work in

⁸ Ibid. More details on sharecropping terms are available in Coke's paper.

⁹ Coke, *op cit.*

agriculture with these men, though only at certain times of the year and only on particular activities. Interestingly, the types of agricultural activities women are involved in tend to be very similar between the villages in Daulatabad and Sayyad. The main activity women are involved in is going to the melon fields for three months prior to the watermelon and melon harvest each year. Here they stay on the land with male members of the household, weed the melon fields and protect them from birds, animals and thieves by watching over them. There does, however, appear to be a difference in terms of the age of the women involved from village to village due to the activities other household members are involved in (explained further in Section E). Very few women work on wheat fields and there appears to be a gendering of crops, with melon being more of a female crop. In some cases the research team was told that women work on melon fields, as they are closer to the home in comparison with wheat fields. This was not always the case, however, and needs to be further explored and understood.

C. Livestock

In all three villages in Daulatabad, households with livestock migrate for three months in the spring to Dasht-e-Laili for pasture. Both women and men migrate but there were some differences between the three villages in the age of the women who go. In Daulatabad Villages Two and Three, where women are heavily involved in carpet weaving, it is often the older women who migrate with the men to the pasture site. This enables the younger women to stay home and weave carpets, as they are more able to work longer hours in carpet weaving.

Women are responsible for making the tent-like structures that form the household's shelter during the time spent on the pasture. At the pasture site men watch over the animals, shear wool and cut the skins from karakul sheep¹⁰ (if they own them), while women salt the karakul skins for drying and are largely responsible for making dairy produce such as *krut* (dried yoghurt balls), milk and butter. Some women also later use the wool from the sheep for filling cushions and pillows. The dairy produce is sometimes sold to others in the village upon return, if sufficient produce is made.

Inside a household's compound in the village, women often take care of livestock such as sheep, feeding and watering them. It appears that few women are considered to own livestock. In all villages some women did own chickens and some were selling the eggs to other women inside the village. However, while this activity is useful for women in that it can be done inside the "acceptable" workspace of the compound, is good for household nutrition, may have some social benefits with regards to forming networks with other women and generates some income, the level of income is very small in comparison to livestock, and chickens are very prone to disease. There does not appear to be any extension or veterinary services to women rearing chicken in these villages. The lack of income generated from the sale of eggs may explain why mostly women and not men own chickens.

D. Farm Labour

Many households in all five villages had members who were involved in farm labour (i.e., working on another person's land in exchange for payment in cash or in-kind), some throughout the year and some only at harvest time. Many farm labourers do

¹⁰ Karakul sheep are a type of sheep from which the skin is taken either from unborn lambs or from the adult sheep. The skin is used to make various items such as the famous Afghan karakul skin hats and is highly valued.

such work as they cannot become sharecroppers, either due to lack of experience or because they cannot afford to do sharecropping and wait one year for the crop or, as already mentioned, because the returns from farm labour are greater.

Very few people are involved in farm labour only. Instead people do farm labour at certain times of the year and non-farm labour at other times (see Box 2).

Some elderly women, and in particular elderly widows from landless households, appear to be working on melon fields during the spring as farm labour in return for one-seventh of the crop. This appeared to be the case in all of the villages. Some elderly women from landless households were also working in the orchards of others, guarding and picking the fruits. One woman in Sayyad was also working in the vegetable plot of another household, in return for potatoes and tomatoes. She made sauce from the tomatoes, which was then sold to buy rice and beans.

Box 2: Examples of Farm and Non-farm Labour

Daulatabad Village Two

One man interviewed in Daulatabad Village Two went from job to job and place to place all year round, especially during spring when there is little work to be found inside the village. He, together with nine others, travelled to Sheberghan and harvested wheat for one month. They each received 100 *seers* of wheat, together with three meals. An arrangement was also made with the landlord that the men's share of the wheat would be transported free of charge to Daulatabad.

After this he again worked on another landlord's harvest in Sheberghan, but this time for a daily wage of 150 Afs (US\$3) per day together with three meals. Following the end of this work he travelled to Kunduz to see what work was available there. He found some construction labour for three days and received 200 Afs (US\$4) and one meal per day, but commented that he had preferred the lower wage of 150 Afs (US\$3) with three meals included. The next place he worked was in Daulatabad for 100 Afs (US\$2) per day together with 150 kg wheat after ten days. He then went to gather wild mushrooms, which he sold for 500 Afs (US\$10) for 5 kg. At other times of year he found work inside the village doing construction work for between 80-100 Afs (US\$1.75 - \$2) per day.

Daulatabad Village Three

Daulatabad Village Three is upstream to the other villages visited in Daulatabad and has more water available. As a result of this, non-farm activities such as brick-making are possible. One man interviewed is making bricks to order as well as carrying out construction work on other people's houses and canal cleaning. He only has one son and his wife was busy with housework as there was no one else to help her, so she was unable to weave carpets. During the brick-making period he saves some of the income to use in winter when this work is not possible.

Sayyad Village Three

In Sayyad, one man explained the combination of farm and non-farm labour he was involved in. Inside the village he carried out work such as bringing water, protecting wheat and melon fields and weeding for three months in summer. He also grazed people's livestock for money and milk. After the agricultural work is finished he works on other types of day labour. People know he does this kind of work and approach him. In November he goes to Sheberghan and Mazar for day labour until spring and receives 150 Afs (US\$3) compared to 70-100 Afs (US\$1.60 - \$2) in the village. He had been a sharecropper before the drought but these opportunities are now fewer as landlords are cultivating their own land. He also lost his oxen during the drought.

E. Non-farm Labour

As mentioned above, many of those involved in farm labour are also involved in non-farm labour. This refers to both men and women. Non-farm labour is carried out both inside and outside the village at different times of the year. For example, during the winter many men leave their villages in search of work not available inside the village. There are also pull factors taking men away from the village in terms of the higher wages (sometimes double) that can be earned elsewhere.

As was briefly discussed earlier, the impact this increased daily labour has on gender roles and gender relations is unknown. Where women were asked if they took on other work when men were away they replied that they did not and that other male relatives will typically carry out the “male” tasks. Also those men travelling for daily labour seemed to come back every ten or 15 days and bring with them anything the women needed. We were told in Sayyad Village One by one daily labourer that if the women needed to buy something while the men were away they could go to the shops inside the village but not to the main bazaar.

Young men from all of the villages are still working in Iran and the remittances they send back to the village appear to be an important source of income for many households. However, in all of the villages there was a desire for this type of migration to end. It had already lessened significantly with the greater work opportunities now available within Afghanistan. In Daulatabad Village One, the CHA road-building project as well as a good harvest (in terms of amount of production) was cited as reasons keeping men near the village.

Taking all the villages together, women’s activities in non-farm labour are largely gilim (flat weave carpet) weaving, carpet weaving, sewing and tailoring. These activities differ from village to village. In Daulatabad Village One, for example, women from all wealth groups are gilim weaving. Among Pashtun women, carpet weaving has not been a traditional activity. All of the women interviewed said they sold the gilims when they were in need of some money. The majority of women in the two villages in Sayyad had gilim weaving skills but they were unable to weave as they had lost all of the materials (e.g., looms) since the drought.

In Daulatabad Villages Two and Three, women are heavily involved in carpet weaving. In Daulatabad Village Two, girls begin carpet weaving from as young as eleven. The majority of women from all wealth groups in both villages weave carpets as an income-generating activity, making a different type of felted rug - a *namad* - for their own use. There may be some difference, however, between wealth groups in the number of hours women work in carpet weaving, with richer women working less hours than poorer women.

Women said they currently weave carpets more than before the drought as increased poverty during the drought made families more dependent on income from carpet weaving. For some landless households carpet weaving is the main source of income.

Women in Daulatabad Village Three said they had always weaved carpets, but they were weaving more now than in the past. They cited the Taliban as one reason for this, as when Taliban soldiers came to the village they were not allowed to work on the land, and livestock as well as land were taken. The impact of the Taliban, combined with the drought, meant that carpet weaving was all the more

necessary, and demonstrates that external factors that affect the household economy can also affect gender roles and possibly gender relations.

It is unclear whether this increased level of carpet weaving will continue in the future. For some poor households indebtedness to traders will mean that women have to continue to weave to pay off debts owed. For example, some poor households have received advance payments from men in the local bazaar who work for the carpet traders in Andkhoy on commission. Advances of between US\$50 and \$100, depending on the size of the carpet, are given to tide the households over until the carpet is sold. On the other hand, when the *shura* in this village was asked if they thought women would always weave carpets, one man said that if households did not need the women to weave carpets they would no longer weave due to the physical difficulties of the work.

Despite the economic contribution these women are making to the household through weaving, it remains unclear whether this increase in carpet weaving benefits these women. It may be that benefits to the household, and not individual benefits, are people's main concern. This is not known and many questions remain. Has the increased economic contribution increased the decision-making power of these women, for instance? If women's decision-making power has increased would they want to stop carpet weaving? It is also unclear as to whether this makes the opportunity costs of sending girls to school higher for some households. These questions need much greater investigation.

Twenty-five years ago a lot of livestock was owned in both of these villages and many women used the wool from their households' own sheep for making carpets. However, due to the lack of livestock and the increased links carpet traders made with women during the Taliban, the terms of trade have changed. The majority of women now receive the raw materials from traders for whom they weave the carpets in exchange for around half the sale price. Some women thought that the time when they could produce their own raw materials was preferable. Other, richer, women felt that carpet weaving was better now, because they did not have to take a lot of time to wash the wool, dye and make the thread. Different women therefore value different benefits. For poorer women, the time when they had been able to earn more was better, while for richer women the less time the whole process now involves takes precedence. Some women also mentioned that they also now receive incentives of clothes and food to produce good carpets.

Carpet weaving is still a very lengthy and physically difficult process, however, taking on average one year for one person to make a nine-metre carpet, or six to seven months with two weavers. The amount of time taken will obviously differ depending on the style and quality of the carpet. Some women have reportedly started eating opium because it helps to lessen pain and enables them to stay awake. Whether this is a new phenomenon is, however, questionable.

It is mostly women who weave the carpets, while men from outside as well as inside the village are involved in the trading of carpets. Some young men who had spent some time in Pakistan and had learned carpet weaving were also involved in weaving. It was also mentioned that in a few cases, amongst those who migrated to Pakistan, men did the housework and women weaved carpets, again showing that gender roles can alter based on economic reasoning.

The number and age of females in a household affects which women do which activities. For example, in a household with only one woman, that woman may

have to weave carpets as well as do housework, often weaving late at night by oil lamp. Being the sole female in a house may even mean she is unable to weave altogether (as seen in Box 3). By comparison, where a family has several female members of different ages, the older women will often carry out the housework tasks, look after the children and spin the wool to free up the labour of the most productive women – those young enough to weave for long periods of time. Older women are involved in some carpet weaving, but can only do this for short periods of time, due to both poor eyesight and body pain. The ability to generate income from carpet weaving will therefore depend on the age and size composition of the household.

Similarly, the number of women in a compound, if labour is pooled between related households, may also affect the above. For instance, in some compounds women from different households may help one another with activities such as washing and cooking, leaving more time for income-generating activities. It is important to remember, though, that the pooling of labour (and income) between households within a compound differs from compound to compound and village to village.

Carpet weaving also has a seasonal dimension. Some women are less able to weave carpets in winter due to the cold, as they often have no room warm enough to weave in, while other women may not be able to weave as much during spring if they have agricultural tasks to do. One woman, however, said that during the spring when her family goes to their orchard she takes her loom there and continues to weave.

Depending on the wealth of the household, some women can use the income from carpet weaving to buy items for themselves. One woman from a richer household gave the money from the carpet she weaved during the day to her husband for household expenses and kept the money from the smaller carpet she weaved at night. She used this money to buy herself jewellery and clothes. Another woman from a poorer household complained that women often weave carpets day and night “but do not even get given new clothes.” The poorer households often said that all income is spent only on necessary daily items such as food and so there are few decisions to be made with regards to how money is spent.

Not all women have carpet weaving skills. This is a particular problem for widows who have little alternative income-generating options. Women without these skills work in other activities such as sewing and embroidery or in the houses of others in activities such as cleaning. Other elderly widows, however, are involved in trading of cloth, embroidery and/or jewellery, through buying goods in other villages or at the bazaar and selling them back to women in the village (see Box 3). A few widows in each of the five villages appear to be involved in this type of work, though more so in Daulatabad. This may be associated with the closer proximity of the villages we visited in Daulatabad to the bazaar, as compared to those in Saripul. These women could have huge importance for programmes aimed at improving women’s income-generating possibilities and by working through them could possibly enable other women to have more control over their income. This control could give them more bargaining power within the household. This is an assumption, however, which needs testing.

The non-farm labour that women in the Sayyad villages are currently involved in, in terms of income generation, is sewing, tailoring and hat-making. The women appear to be working on a very small scale and individual basis without links to any

markets. Women mostly tailor and sew for others in the village, whereas hats are mostly sold outside the village. Men take the hats to the bazaar to sell and many then buy goods requested by their wives with the proceeds. One man, however, said he does not give his wife all of the money. He keeps half and buys more hat-making materials with the other half. This is not to say that women have no decision-making power over how their income is used. For example, when asked what happens if men bring the wrong items back to the women, a group of men in Sayyad Village One replied with much laughter that “then there is much fighting.” So it appears that women do exercise some decision-making power despite not being able to go to the bazaar themselves. There are doubtless many other ways in which women exercise power and these too need to be better understood.

Different women are involved in different activities within the realm of “handicrafts” (sewing, embroidery, hat-making). One thing these activities all have in common is that the economic returns for most women are very minimal, as they cannot devote much time to these activities due to other time-consuming activities such as housework and agricultural work, nor do the goods and services themselves generate a high income. Tailoring makes between 5 and 60 Afs (just a little over US\$1) per item, whilst hats, which take around 10 days to make (most likely in between other activities) are sold for between 10-100 Afs (US\$0.20 - \$2).

Box 3: A Businesswoman in Daulatabad Village Two

One widow we met is buying material from a trader in a nearby village and selling it to the women of Daulatabad Village Two. She had no carpet weaving skills like most of the other women in the villages due to household circumstances when she was a child. Born into a landless household, the youngest of four sisters who were all married young, and with a brother who was deaf and dumb, she had worked outside the house as a child grazing other people’s animals. Her brother had not been able to take the animals for grazing and her sisters were married. As a result she never learned the skills of carpet weaving from which she could have earned income.

She now makes a living partly from selling this material for which she receives 10 Afs per item (roughly US\$0.20) and partly from charity given to her by the village. She travels by donkey to a neighbouring village and buys material from a trader whom she says is sympathetic to her situation. Her daughter now knows carpet weaving and her son-in-law who lives with them works as farm labour on wheat fields. Her eldest son, who is 14, started work as a farm labourer this year.

This woman was able to begin selling material through the help of another woman involved in this work. Her business began when a woman involved in this same type of work saw her crying and asked what was wrong. It was after she heard her story that she taught her about the business. Married at 17 to a 55-year-old man, she had been widowed 17 years later (seven years ago). By the time the other woman met her she had been a widow for two years and was despairing over ways to make income. With four children (six others died) she was determined not to beg.

It may also be the case that women from richer households who spend less time outside the house are able to produce more items as well as have access to the machinery (sewing/tailoring machines, etc.) necessary. What we do not know, however, is how these activities affect women’s self-esteem and whether these skills earn them respect with other women and men. The men we interviewed do not appear to highly value these activities and see them as very minor activities. These activities do not appear to improve women’s bargaining power within the household. It appears that there needs to be a change in the way women’s activities are viewed and valued.

For female-headed households without family support networks, improved self-esteem and respect alone are not enough to support a household. As well as changing the way women's activities are viewed, more opportunities for women's involvement in activities that can produce more income are needed, should women need or choose to seek them. Aside from those women who are involved in carpet weaving in two of the villages, others, especially in the two villages in Sayyad District, appear to have few income-generating possibilities that could sustain a family. One young woman interviewed in Sayyad Village was living with her very old husband, who was unable to work, and their four children. With little or no alternative she was travelling to Saripul centre every few days to beg for bread to bring back to feed her family then returning once again to beg for more. Her children were collecting dung to use for fuel inside the house. Another woman in Sayyad Village One was living with her five sons and one daughter. Her husband had disappeared when the Taliban came to the village. One of the children stayed with her all day, as she was ill from constant worry about her husband. She was sewing clothes for others in exchange for wheat, soap and beans while her two oldest sons (aged 14 and 16) are now working in agriculture. One son (aged 14) was working for 5000 Afs (US\$100) per year and the other was working for 150 *seers* of wheat for a year. Therefore the difficulties for women to earn sufficient income, or in other cases to own property such as land, also negatively affect their children's chances for education and a brighter future.

V. CONCLUSIONS

A. Main Findings

Gender Roles in Afghanistan

Gender roles in Afghanistan are shaped by socio-cultural factors such as restricted mobility outside the village for many women, their often restricted ability to work outside the compound – partly brought about by women’s role as the keepers of family honour – as well as the lack of ownership of the majority of productive assets by most women. These factors differ both within and across households depending on several dynamics. These dynamics include age, wealth and type of assets, social stigmas and economic returns attached to particular activities for certain groups of people, as well as household composition in terms of the number, age and sex of people available for different kinds of labour. Ethnicity may also affect gender roles, for example, where traditional activities are associated with ethnicity, such as carpet weaving for Turkmen women or where mobility is affected by ethnicity. Aside from traditional activities, no other differences based on ethnicity were found in this study.

Roles between women appear to depend on several factors: what assets households own, where the activities are carried out, a woman’s stage in the life cycle (i.e., unmarried, married, widowed) and whether particular women are involved in income-generating work, which leads to a further allocation of household labour among other women. In general, there appeared to be more age differentiation in activities among women than men.

Gender roles and relations are often attributed to “culture,” but it must be remembered that “culture” is not static and unchanging. People may wish to hold onto the idea of “culture” as a form of identity, especially after years of turmoil and for many, the experience of living in another country. However, culture can change, sometimes in unexpected ways. For instance, as discussed earlier, it appears that while women’s mobility was more restricted under the Taliban, some women became the main income earners in the family. It has also been shown that economic reasoning can sometimes play a larger role than cultural norms in determining the allocation of labour.

The Need for Gender Aware Programming

Most agricultural programmes do not have an explicit gender equity agenda. However, most do have a food security and increasingly an improving livelihoods agenda. Gender equity should be a focus of both. If it is not then projects and programmes could be failing to improve the food security and livelihoods of at least 50 percent of their target group - women.

At present, most programmes and projects in rural areas focus on agricultural interventions and target the “household” as the beneficiary. This usually translates into working with men, given that they are more visible farmers, own land more than women and given the difficulties involved in working with women.

While some agricultural interventions may have benefited women in the villages studied through increased food production, women’s lack of land ownership, their lesser role on land, as well as their lesser control over the benefits generated, mean that these programmes often do not target women. Furthermore, they do not tackle gender inequity since they do not lead to changes in the social position of

women vis-à-vis men. Landless men may similarly not be greatly assisted by these programmes as power inequalities between the landed and landless may be left firmly in place.

It must be remembered that food security relates not only to production and availability of food but also to ability to access food. For female-headed households, as for poor households in general, the ability to *access* food is often, given the lack of land ownership among the poorest, the key to household level food security. Access to food requires amongst other things income.

It has been shown here that women whose husbands are away or have died and who lack support networks, often face severe problems and poverty due to the lack of income-generating opportunities available to them. It has also been shown here that only supporting women's current income-generating activities may not improve their situation greatly, either in economic or social terms. The economic returns (except for carpet weaving) are very small, often because the women are not linked either to other women or to markets, do not have the business skills and knowledge of markets and pricing, and also because the goods produced do not have a high monetary value. In social terms, some of the activities themselves do not appear to be highly regarded by men or even seen as work in some cases and thus increased involvement in such activities is unlikely to lead to increased decision-making power and well-being.

With regards to food security interventions that focus more on production and availability of food, it must be recognised that many women play a role in this production, as they are involved in different stages of the agricultural process. These roles need to be recognised, especially if women become more involved in agriculture, as may happen if there is a male shift to non-farm and farm labour. Women's activities, perhaps especially in agriculture, are often invisible, partly as many are carried out inside the home or compound and partly as their activities are sometimes not discussed if they go against the socio-cultural norms of what women *should* be doing. More effort is needed to understand what women and men are doing in different places and how these roles both stem from and serve to reinforce gender relations, decision-making and well-being.

It is, therefore, argued here that gender equity should be an aim of all programming. This does not necessarily mean that separate programmes for "women" have to be implemented but that programmes should include and support women through understanding their different needs, interests, roles, opportunities and constraints, as well as those of different men. For this to happen more understanding is needed on the different roles that men and women play, both in terms of activities as well as decision-making.

This study has shown that the livelihoods of households in these five villages are made up of many different types of activities carried out at different times of the year by different household members. To understand livelihoods it is necessary to understand *what* these activities are, *when* they take place (seasonality) and *where* (e.g., inside or outside the compound) they take place in order to begin to understand how new programmes may impact on existing roles. It has also shown that it is not possible to generalise about women's and men's activities within or across villages, as different people are involved in different activities. Blanket policies and programmes relating to gender roles will therefore not be applicable to all. Rural livelihoods are diverse and no one person is involved in only one

activity. Activities should not be seen in isolation from one another, as they form often very complicated pictures of how households are building their livelihoods.

Tackling gender inequity and improving livelihoods opportunities are not separate agendas but are inextricably connected, as they are both concerned with providing people with the opportunities for a decent life.

B. Interventions

Providing women with better income-generating activities that can bring about beneficial change in gender relations, as well as addressing gender inequity, is obviously not an easy undertaking; it is something that will take many years. This report can in no way offer the answers as to how to tackle these problems, as it is based on a small study of gender roles in five villages.

However, based on the findings of this report, the aim of this final section is to stimulate discussion into how the following and other interventions could work in different areas.

Agriculture

It has been shown that in these five villages (as with many others) women have experience of looking after animals as well as making dairy produce from them. The possibility of supporting groups of women to build up stocks of livestock could be explored. Income could then be generated for the women and their households both through income from dairy produce as well as from the sale of animals.

It would first be necessary, however, to investigate what markets exist for this produce and what access people have to those markets. Before this kind of intervention could be introduced it would be necessary to look into several other issues. Would women be interested and would men and women accept these kinds of groups and give their support? If there was resistance to such groups it may be possible to explore kin-based interventions where women from the same kin work together.¹¹ This may be culturally appropriate, as generally speaking it is acceptable for women to visit the homes of those who are part of the same kin. Levels of cooperation and trust between kin may first need to be gauged, however.

It would also be necessary to explore whether there are social stigmas attached to selling dairy produce (as it is “traditionally” made for use in the home rather than for sale) and whether this could be overcome. Technical knowledge on the number of livestock necessary to produce sufficient dairy products to sell would also need to be gained.

Some of the restrictions on women’s mobility could be overcome through the hiring of shepherds to graze the livestock. Elderly widows who have been found to be able to access markets could possibly be approached to sell the produce for the women in the bazaars in return for payment. These widowed women could be crucial for many types of interventions targeting women and could possibly enable other women to have more control over the income generated from their business. It is unlikely that women could go to the pasture site alone, however, and there may therefore be a need to involve male relatives at some level. There should be

¹¹ Personal communication with Dr Janet Seeley, Lecturer at the School of Development Studies, University of East Anglia.

an effort to look at how men can be included (where possible) in promoting gender equity, as this may result in more sustainable interventions.

Supplying women with livestock alone would not be sufficient as a sustainable income-generating effort. Extension services on animal husbandry as well as markets and pricing would also be necessary. Female extension staff would need to be hired and trained and could possibly be found within the village. Extension and veterinary workers are also needed to work with women in their current activities of poultry farming. Chickens are highly prone to disease and expert advice may enable women to make more profit from this work as well as to benefit the household more in terms of increased nutrition from the consumption of eggs.

However, as livestock can be a profitable activity, efforts would need to be taken to prevent it from being overtaken by men. These may include assisting men in activities they are involved in at the same time. This needs to be borne in mind when thinking of activities that women could be involved in that may generate a good income, as there are examples in other contexts where men have taken over activities when they become profitable.¹²

Some women also have experience of working in some of the most profitable areas of agriculture such as melons, orchards and vineyards. The possibility of using common land for women's orchards or vineyards, and again accessing markets through those women able to leave the village, could be explored. This would provide women and their families with extra income and may enable these women to have more decision-making power. Though, as mentioned earlier, the assumption that an increased economic contribution leads to increased decision-making power that translates into increased well-being in this context needs to be tested and further understood.

For this type of project to work, family support as well as a community decision to allow land to be used for this purpose would be necessary, as would the availability of markets. It could also only be tried in areas where sufficient land and water is available and in areas where women were interested. The effects of using extra water for the orchard on downstream villages would also need to be looked at¹³ and extension services would need to be made available.

Investigating women's awareness of their rights to land, what land rights mean at the local level and what mechanisms exist for them to claim such rights is also necessary. Ways to support those women who wish to claim their land rights and utilise the land could then be sought.

Gender Awareness

As discussed earlier, there appears to be a lack of value accorded to the work that many women are currently involved in, as well as a lack of alternative income generation opportunities for women. There also appears to be a need for both increasing these opportunities as well as for increasing the value that some men and women attach to certain women's activities. The possibilities of a gradual sensitisation of men and women to the importance and value of the work that women currently do through male and female NGO workers could be explored. This could be done in villages that NGOs work in over a long period of time. However, what is crucial is that this awareness begins from an early age. This

¹² See Gloekler, A. and Seeley, J. *Gender and AKRSP - Mainstreamed or Sidelined?* Thematic Policy Paper: AKRSP. 2003.

¹³ Pain, op cit.

could be done through the introduction of female and male models who play “positive” roles in their households, communities and country, that are not necessarily typically “female” or “male” activities. These role models could be introduced both in person in the villages, through mobile cinema and the radio, as well as in school books. What is “positive” may, however, be contested by different parties. This would also require girls and boys to be attending school and using school books. In the villages studied here few girls appeared to be going to school and in Sayyad Village One no girls’ school existed.

It must be remembered that this is a highly sensitive subject that may face much resistance. It would need to be approached with great care and carried out gradually. There is a history of resistance to attempts at improving women’s rights and this history must be taken into account.

For this and other initiatives aimed at increasing gender equity to happen, all agency staff involved in design, implementation and monitoring and evaluation need to be more gender aware and gender sensitive. This will take time and resources. However, if gender inequity is to be reduced and livelihoods improved, the time and resources necessary must be made available.

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