

Working Paper Series

**FROM SUBJECTS TO CITIZENS:  
Local Participation  
in the  
National Solidarity  
Programme**

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This working paper was prepared by an independent consultant with no previous involvement in the activities evaluated. The views and opinions expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect the views of AREU.

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## Definitions

<b>Participation</b>	“Participation is a process through which stakeholders influence, and share control over development initiatives and the decisions and resources which affect them.” <sup>1</sup>
<b>Livelihoods</b>	“...refers to the sum of ways and means by which individuals, households, and communities make and sustain a living over time, using a combination of social, economic, cultural and environmental resources.” <sup>2</sup>
<b>Jerib</b>	Approximately one-fifth of a hectare (2000 square metres)
<b>Family</b>	For the purpose of the present study, the following definition of “family” - evolved by NSP for the purpose of the programme - is adopted. A family is defined as a nuclear family consisting of a man, his wife (or wives) and unmarried children, or a widow(er) and her/his unmarried children. <sup>3</sup>
<b>Household</b>	In the present study, the concept of “household” is understood as either a nuclear family or an extended family, which may include several generations, interrelated through patrilineal descent and with common interests in the management of shared assets and family honour (house, land, animal flocks, or other assets). <sup>4</sup>

This definition requires some comment, as it is wider than more narrow definitions currently used by some researchers, according to which a household is defined as “*persons eating from the same pot*.”<sup>5</sup> Thus it reflects the attempts of the research team to capture the fluidity and complexity of Afghan concepts in relation to different social arrangements and situational contexts. For example, a typical extended household would consist of several related nuclear families and could comprise a male household head and his wife or wives, their unmarried children, as well as their married sons with wives or co-wives together with their unmarried offspring. Notwithstanding the shared interests that the members of such a household might hold in shared assets such as land or the household compound itself, the household would comprise multiple cooking places, and the groups “eating together from the same pot” could in practice consist of the different nuclear families, or of different co-wives and their children cooking and eating separately, all depending on their specific personal relationships.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The World Bank. “Environmentally Sustainable Development.” *The World Bank Participation Sourcebook*. Washington, D.C.: World Bank. 1996; 3.

<sup>2</sup> Pain, A. and Lautze, S. *Addressing Livelihoods in Afghanistan*. Kabul: AREU. 2002; 1.

<sup>3</sup> NSP Operational Manual, 20 March 2004; 8.

<sup>4</sup> See for example Boesen, I. W. “Conflicts of Solidarity in Pakhtun Women’s Lives.” In: Utas, B. (ed.): *Women in Islamic Societies. Social Attitudes and Historical Perspectives*. (Scandinavian Institute of Asian Studies; now Nordisk Institut for Asiensforskning (NIAS)). London: Curzon Press. 1983; and Christensen, A. “Agnates, Affines and Allies: Patterns of Marriage among Pakhtun in Kunar.” In: *FOLK*, (Danish Ethnographic Association) 1982: 24.

<sup>5</sup> Hunte, P. A. *Some Notes on the Livelihoods of the Urban Poor in Kabul, Afghanistan*. Kabul: AREU. 2004.

<sup>6</sup> Boesen, I. W. “Women, Honour, and Love. Some Aspects of the Pashtun Woman’s Life in Eastern Afghanistan.” In: *FOLK*, (Danish Ethnographic Association). 1980: 21-22. The practical use of terms referring to house and household, especially with regard to shared ownership of assets or shared residential locality may also vary according to different ethnic groups in Afghanistan. Thus the concept of *manteqa*, which refers either to shared residential locality (meaning “area” or “place” as well as lineage groups) plays an important role as common point of identification among the Dari-speaking Hazara in Central Afghanistan. In this context, the research team found that the concept of *votandari* - belonging to the same homeland -

# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Overview

More than two decades of conflict and civil war, displacement and social disruption have caused massive destruction and depletion of Afghanistan's infrastructure, sources of livelihoods, housing, and agricultural resources. This destruction also disrupted the pre-war social and political institutions and infrastructure, including educational and health services. Among the interventions of emergency relief and reconstruction assistance aimed at rebuilding this infrastructure, the large-scale rural reconstruction and development National Solidarity Programme (NSP) (in Dari: *Hambastagi-e-Melli*; Pashto: *Milli Paiwastoon*) plays a central role. The NSP began in mid-2003, led by the Transitional Islamic Government of Afghanistan (TISA) with initial support from the World Bank/International Development Association. The objective of the project is to lay the foundations for strengthening community-level governance, and to support community-managed sub-projects that improve rural communities' access to social and productive infrastructure and services.

The NSP represents novel ideas in Afghan development planning. While a number of small-scale community driven development projects have been implemented by non-governmental organisations (NGOs) since the early 1990s, the NSP has vastly expanded the scale of such activities at the national level. In addition, the NSP has for the first time in Afghanistan established an operational partnership between NGOs and the government. This partnership is intended to enable the government to further develop the NSP as a national programme, while drawing on the strength and experience of the NGOs for implementation. The NSP also heralds a historical change of the interrelations between the central government and local communities, particularly with regard to the role of women in local decision-making - the topic of the present study.

NSP offers an inclusive learning process of democracy through its participatory approach to local-level development. This approach includes the establishment of democratic and representative Community Development Committees (CDCs) at the village level. Members of the CDCs are elected through universal suffrage - based on the principle of one adult person one vote - and on gender and social equality and inclusion with regard to civic participation. Although these principles of rights to civic participation to all, including women, were granted by the 1964 Constitution the concept is new in relation to traditional values and norms regarding gender relations in rural Afghan society, which in most places do not allow women to participate in formal decision-making outside the family. The NSP concept of community participation for CDCs thus challenges some of the most central Afghan norms, namely gender relations and local-level power structures. In this light, the promotion of social and economic development in the framework of democratic local-level governance is obviously a daunting task, particularly with regard to the participation of women. At the same time, the NSP offers an important experience for communities to learn about democracy building in Afghanistan.

NSP appears to go against many customs, traditions and power relations in Afghan society and history. Although the programme is an attempt to introduce democracy "from above," it aims to foster local-level participation and partnership in a democratic process which is firmly anchored in local communities. Thus, NSP offers a unique opportunity to study local-level participation, not only in rural reconstruction and development, but also in democratic elections in Afghanistan. This is occurring at a point in history when

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appears to be meaningful also with reference to households or groups of households related through either kinship or shared locality (see the discussion of community clusters in relation to NSP elections, section 6).

Afghanistan's post-conflict transitional government is preparing for the first national elections in more than three decades.

This study examines the election processes in relation to the election of CDCs in selected communities, with particular focus on gender relations and women's participation; the community perspectives on elections and voting in relation to local concepts of politics and power; and the awareness and expectations of communities with regard to the purpose and outcomes of the elections. This also includes the perceptions of the role of CDCs, the use of block grants, and community contributions, and the understanding of the role of the government in relation to NSP.

## 1.2 Study Methodology

Field research for this study was carried out in cooperation with four Facilitating Partners (FPs) in a sample of six different districts in three provinces, namely, Kabul, Baghlan, and Jawzjan. The districts were Qarabagh District in Kabul Province, where the Sanayee Development Foundation (SDF) is the FP; Dahna-e-Ghori and Andarab Districts in Baghlan Province with the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN); Aqcha and Faizabad Districts in Jawzjan Province with GOAL (Ireland), and finally, a limited supplementary study in Khwaja-de-Koh District in Jawzjan Province with Actionaid. The total number of communities visited was 30. The fieldwork took place over 29 days between early March and mid-April 2004.

The research approach is based on a qualitative and critical anthropological methodology, including observations, semi-structured interviews, and group discussions. The interviews and group discussions were guided by an interview checklist.<sup>7</sup> In addition to the qualitative approach, quantitative methods were applied when useful and relevant, especially with regard to the analysis of electoral records and composition of CDCs. The data collected during the field study have been complemented by data from 18 other districts and provinces, through contributions and experience-sharing on the part of other FPs (ACTED, CARE International, Concern International, Danish Committee for Aid to Afghan Refugees [DACAAR], German Agro Action [GAA], International Rescue Committee [IRC], Ockenden International, Swedish Committee for Afghanistan [SCA], and UN-Habitat).<sup>8</sup> The purpose of this supplementary data collection was to widen the scope and perspective of the study to include data from Pashtun-dominated provinces, where local attitudes towards NSP, as well as to what is perceived as "interference" from Western aid agencies and the Western-backed transitional government in Kabul, are more pronounced. This has helped to correct what could be seen as a bias resulting from field research that was limited to the northern region. This supplementary material is included and discussed in relation to the analysis and findings of the field research.

The total number of interviews and group discussions conducted in the communities was approximately 65. In addition, short and unstructured interviews were carried out with persons participating in the elections that were observed. Observations included seven observations of men's and women's elections (in Qarabagh), as well as two elections for women's development committees in Dahna-e-Ghori and two in Andarab. In addition, the team observed a CDC meeting in a community in Dahna-e-Ghori, whose chairperson was a woman.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> This checklist is included in a separate annex to this paper, bound separately and also found on AREU's web site at [www.areu.org.af](http://www.areu.org.af). Also included in the annexes are selected election case and data.

<sup>8</sup> The provinces include Herat, Farah, Kandahar, Bamyan, Parwan (UN-Habitat), Nimroz (Ockenden Venture), Logar and Khost (IRC), Ghazni and Paktia (CARE), Wardak (SCA), Laghman (DACAAR), Takhar, Kunduz, Badakhshan, Samangan and Faryab (Concern International and ACTED), and Saripul (GAA).

<sup>9</sup> More about this unique situation is described in the box on page 53.

Attempts to conduct semi-structured interviews and group discussions in rural Afghan communities to a wide extent had to be adjusted to the local etiquette and the agendas of the people present. The traditional anthropological approach of living in a local community for a certain length of time that makes it possible to compare what people *do* with what they *say they do* in a critical perspective was not possible in view of the conditions. However, in the communities that were visited, people's openness and eagerness to engage in discussion with the research team to some extent compensated for these limitations. There was remarkable variation and diversity between communities and districts, as well as between different provinces. This included ethnic diversity, variations with regard to environment, and the experience of war and drought. Visiting different communities and districts made it possible to learn about this diversity with regard to people's lives and experience, yet also made it difficult to draw generalisations about attitudes to women's participation.

In addition to interviews and discussions with community members, the research team interviewed staff members of the FPs in the field, and in the district offices. Meetings with staff in the provincial offices, as well as in the main offices in Kabul, were also very valuable due to the generosity of FPs in sharing information about their different approaches.

It was clear from the beginning that it could be difficult to actually observe CDC elections in practice, since the study was launched at a time when the first project phase was already well underway. In most districts, NSP implementation had already been ongoing for about 7-8 months. This meant that the preparatory process before elections (including distribution of information about the project, community mobilisation, mapping of community resources, and registration of voters) had been completed in most villages, as had the elections themselves and the establishment of CDCs. For this reason, the research was mainly based on the community members' perceptions and narratives of their experience of the elections, community mobilisation, and the concept of community collaboration for development. Only in Qarabagh District, Kabul Province was there an opportunity to directly observe CDC elections.



## 2. History of Democratic Participation in Afghanistan

### 2.1. State and Local Participation in the History and Development of Afghanistan: “Democracy from Above”

In Afghanistan there is historically little or no tradition of formalised community participation in political decision-making or development planning, either on a national or local level. This was the case during the centuries in which there existed something that could be termed an Afghan state, and through the changing governments of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Despite the policies of the Afghan governments from the 1960s to introduce a more democratic state, especially with the adoption of the Constitution of 1964, these trends of “New Democracy” mostly remained a “democracy from above”<sup>10</sup> without really involving local communities.

Although Afghan government structures were highly centralised and bureaucratic, with a strong and still - after 24 years of war and conflict - existing network of provincial and district government agencies in place, this network did not involve communities in any real cooperation. From the perspective of local communities - villages and nomad camps - the government has largely been an extractive one-way system in which local communities were mostly involved through the various edicts and decrees, extraction of taxation, and conscription of labour for public works and recruits to the national army. The interrelations between the government and the rural communities, including the communication of new edicts, in many cases took place through a community headman (*malik*) who mostly acted as a “middleman” in this top-down governmental system. The *malik* could be a local leader in his own right, or a front-man for the people who held the real influence in a particular community. Relations between rural communities and the local or central government was usually based on a factional mode of politics, where the leaders of locally dominant factions aligned with the central government in Kabul. These leaders would have privileged access to local and possibly even central government functionaries, and occasionally use this access to ensure that development assistance would benefit the factional leader and his followers. In such cases of political “brokerage,” the people involved would be exclusively male. Women traditionally have never been involved in formal political processes at the local level.

The concept of free and fair elections in the Western democratic sense were first introduced in Afghanistan by the 1964 Constitution. However, elections were elections of personalities,<sup>11</sup> as political parties were never introduced or permitted until the present, despite the never implemented draft of a Political Parties Act that was introduced subsequent to the 1964 Constitution. Despite the formal rights of all Afghan citizens to participate in elections as equal citizens, there was in practice very limited participation in elections in rural areas. This could be ascribed in part to the traditional distrust between the mainly illiterate population in the rural areas and the literate elite in the power-centre of Kabul.<sup>12</sup>

The uneasy relations between the government in Kabul and the people in the rural areas continued after the Communist coup d'état in 1978, with the introduction of a Communist one-party state and the abolishment of elections along with other democratic rights. The growing tensions soon evolved into open and violent conflict between the government of

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<sup>10</sup> Grevemeyer, J.-H. *Afghanistan. Sozialer Wandel und Staat im 20. Berlin: Jahrhundert.* 1987.

<sup>11</sup> Duprée, L. *Afghanistan.* Princeton, New Jersey. 1980 (1973).

<sup>12</sup> See Duprée, 1980, op cit., 589.

the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan<sup>13</sup> and the population in the provinces. A decade of resistance to Soviet occupation followed by civil war between the rival *mujahidin* parties, and the subsequent rigorous Taliban rule in most of the country from 1995 to 2001, did nothing to improve relations between the centres of power and the rural population. Thus, after more than four decades of what the rural population had mostly experienced as broken promises or outright repression by the government, rural communities have a deep-rooted suspicion and distrust of central authority. Even more so than before the conflict began in the late 1970s,<sup>14</sup> the rural population try to live their everyday life with the least possible interference from the state. Following the ousting of the Taliban, this traditional local distrust of government interference conflicts strongly with the need for state building and state managed assistance to address reconstruction and development needs. The resulting tensions were noticeable in the communities involved in this study, and affected the relationships between NSP, the implementing NGOs, and the communities.

### *The jirga or shura - customary councils*

On the local level a customary system of "self-governance" continues to exist in many areas, especially among the tribal Pashtun.<sup>15</sup> This was and is the *jirga* (*shura* in Dari), a local council consisting of male representatives (the elders or "white-beards") of all lineages and/or extended families of a village or tribal group. The *jirga/shura* is in principle an egalitarian body in which every member has one voice, representing his lineage (*khaum*) or its constituent households. In practice, however, this egalitarian principle is compromised by the social inequality that is found more or less pronounced throughout rural areas. The *jirga/shura* functions mainly as a local conflict resolution body, and while it has an important role in maintaining social order, it is not geared to handle day-to-day governance, but situationally mobilised to deal with specific conflicts. One important feature of the local-level *jirga* institution is striking: it may be seen as a local-level democratic institution, but its democracy only includes men. Women are never allowed to participate in this customary "governance" and conflict regulatory system, except in very unusual circumstances, for example, when they may act on behalf of a deceased husband.

This *jirga* system has at times in Afghan history been activated as a model for nation-wide consultative gatherings when representatives from all tribes and regions come together to make decisions involving the nation, namely in the form of the *Loya Jirga* (the "Grand Jirga"). Thus the Constitution of 1964, which could be seen as Afghanistan's first modern constitution<sup>16</sup> was discussed and adopted by a *Loya Jirga*. This system was continued with the *Emergency Loya Jirga* in June 2002 which elected Karzai as the head of the TISA, and the *Constitutional Loya Jirga* of December 2003, which agreed on a new constitution to replace the 1964 Constitution. According to the 1964 Constitution, a limited number of women were allowed to participate in the parliamentary bodies. The new Constitution states that one-third of the members of the *Meshrano Jirga* shall be appointed by the President after the election of members from the provincial and district councils. Fifty percent of these members shall be women.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>13</sup> The Democratic Republic of Afghanistan was established with Soviet support in April 1978 and dissolved after the Soviet withdrawal in 1989, the collapse of the Soviet Union, and the fall of the DRA government to the *mujahidin* in 1992.

<sup>14</sup> See e.g., Duprée, 1980; Grevemeyer 1987; Christensen, A. *Aiding Afghanistan. The Background and Prospects for Reconstruction in a Fragmented Society*. NIAS Reports (Nordic Institute of Asian Studies), No. 26, Copenhagen, 1995; and others for discussions of the relations between centre and periphery in Afghanistan.

<sup>15</sup> See Steul, W. *Paschunwali. Ein Ehrenkodex und Seine Rechtliche Relevanz*. Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag. 1981. See also Elphinstone, M. *An Account of the Kingdom of Caubul*. Karachi, London, New York: Oxford University Press. 1972 (1815) for a detailed and critical discussion of the Afghan *jirga* system.

<sup>16</sup> See Dupree, 1980.

<sup>17</sup> The Constitution of Afghanistan 2004, Article Eighty-Four, Chapter 5, Article 4.

## 2.2. The National Solidarity Programme

The National Solidarity Programme (NSP) is a national-level rural reconstruction and development project implemented by the Ministry of Rural Reconstruction and Development (MRRD). Funding has been provided through grants from the World Bank to the tune of \$117 million with substantial co-financing through the Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund (from UK, US, EC, and Canada), and additional co-financing from Denmark and Japan.

As described in the NSP Operational Manual, the programme consists of four core elements:<sup>18</sup>

- Facilitation at the community level to assist communities to establish inclusive community institutions through elections, reach consensus on priorities and corresponding sub-project activities, develop eligible sub-proposals that comply with NSP appraisal criteria, and implement approved project sub-proposals;
- A system of direct block grant transfers to support rehabilitation or development activities (sub-projects) planned and implemented by the elected CDCs;
- A series of capacity building activities to enhance the competence of CDC members (both men and women) in financial management, procurement, technical skills, and transparency; and
- Activities linking local institutions to government administration and aid agencies with available services and resources.

The government intends for NSP to reach the country's estimated 20,000 villages over a four year period. The target for the first year of implementation, which began in July-August 2003, is to reach about 5,000 village communities across the country. During year two, operations will expand to cover the remaining villages in the initial districts, and/or villages in new districts.

One block grant will be allocated to each community at a rate of US\$200 per family with an upper limit of US\$60,000 per community. The community is required to develop one or more eligible sub-project proposals within the framework of the block grant allocation and its own contributions. One CDC will be established for each community. CDCs can not be established for sub-sets of an existing village (i.e., a village can not be split into its constituent political or ethnic/kinship sub-divisions). Afghan and international FPs (22 NGOs and UN-Habitat) contracted by MRRD support communities in the formation of CDCs, and the planning and implementation of projects. The FPs will also support communities with capacity building in such areas as financial management and procurement.

The NSP Operational Manual emphasises that community-level planning must follow an approach that complies with the basic principles of (i) participatory planning of activities through inclusive community meetings and representative elected development councils; (ii) community contributions to capital costs and operations and maintenance; and (iii) transparency and accountability of budgeting and accounting. To ensure inclusiveness in terms of different socio-economic, factional, and ethnic/tribal (*qaum*) sub-groups within the community, the election process is based on a division of the community into groups of families (clusters), which each elect one representative for the CDC. Since neighbours are often also relatives, the division into clusters will also reduce restrictions on women and thereby facilitate their active involvement in discussions about the qualities required for representatives and in the election itself.

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<sup>18</sup> The NSP Operational Manual, 20 March 2004, 6-7.

<sup>19</sup> NSP Operational Manual.

The size of the election clusters will vary depending on the size of the village, but should generally not exceed about 20 families. The clusters will in turn serve as the framework for community-wide consultations on proposals from the CDC concerning the use of the NSP block grants through a process whereby the elected councillors consult with and seek feedback from their electorate before decisions on priorities, sub-projects, and community contributions are finalised.

Elections are conducted according to a specified set of rules which require that (i) everybody in the community who is entitled to vote in government elections is entitled to be registered as a voter; (ii) each person has one vote; (iii) the voting is conducted through a secret ballot; (iv) both men and women are eligible to vote and to be members of the CDC; (v) candidates and electioneering is prohibited; and (vi) at least 40 percent of eligible voters have to vote for an election to be valid.<sup>19</sup> Prohibition of candidature and electioneering is a critical measure to reduce the likelihood of elite capture and intimidation, while it is recognised that they are not sufficient to remove it in practice.

The inclusion of and participation by women is a high priority in the NSP, as is the participation by all sub-groups in the communities, in order to ensure gender, socio-economic and ethnic equity in decision-making and access to benefits. However, the rule that at least 40 percent of eligible voters have to vote for an election to be valid creates space for elections of CDCs that have only been elected by men. This is a conscious design provision by NSP to enable valid elections to take place in communities where the prevailing norms would not permit women to participate. The political costs of excluding “conservative” communities, which would not allow women to participate in the elections, is considered more critical than the potential exclusion of women that this rule provides for, since mandatory registration and participation of women in the electoral process could provide ammunition for radical Islamic opposition to the central government. At the same time, it is expected that the FPs make a serious effort to involve women in the electoral process and in decision-making regarding the utilisation of block grants, by inter alia employing female facilitators to promote female participation. The NSP views the participation of women as a process, rather than something that can be decreed, and expects that this will gradually take root through a culturally sensitive facilitation effort, and through the example of benefits achieved where women are enabled to participate in the elections as beneficiaries of specific sub-projects that address their needs.

However, despite these alternative arrangements to provide an avenue for women to influence decision-making, this may in practice be problematic in the context of the specific relations between male and female community members. On the other hand, both male and female participation in elections and the use of block grants through CDCs could possibly over time contribute to changing existing local gender relations and powers of decision-making if the CDCs prove to be sustainable institutional innovations at the village level. These issues concerning gender participation and relations in the framework of NSP are a central concern of this study.

### 2.3 Afghan Women and Participation in Community Decision-Making

Although the situation of Afghan women may vary according to different ethnic groups and social and practical contexts, it is similar in essential aspects. The extended family, lineage or sub-lineage (*khaum*) play a central role in the traditional Afghan social order, which is based on the principle of kinship relations. The patrilineal family is thus to a large extent the focal point and the main framework of personal and social identity to its members. Marriage and marriage alliances between related or non-related lineages or sub-

lineages are a basic element of social structure and strategies of alliance, especially among tribal groups.<sup>20</sup>

In this order, which is predominantly organised on the basis of male blood-relations, women - and the children that they bear in marriage - are construed as being part of the property and patrimony of the extended household. This is reflected by the custom of paying bridewealth<sup>21</sup> by the bridegroom's family to the father of the bride. The custom, which is practised among the Pashtun, of sometimes giving a woman in marriage to the injured household in order to settle a feud - i.e. as "blood payment" - also illustrates this perspective of women as family property. At the same time, the collective honour of the family, lineage, and sub-lineage (*khaum*), which is central in the Afghan value system and self-perception, and which can be seen as the "symbolic capital" of the family,<sup>22</sup> is perceived as being essentially dependent on the control of its women in relation to the outside world. This is the normative framework of *purdah* - the Janus-faced concept of symbolic protection and control<sup>23</sup> which entails the seclusion and veiling of women. Women are normally not allowed to own or inherit property apart from personal belongings; the inheritance rule in Shari'a law which prescribes that a woman inherits half the share of her brothers is often not practised. Thus, despite the fact that women's labour plays a central role in the household economy as well as in the rural and nomad economy, men (and the male lineage) almost exclusively control the lives of women through control of property, marriage relations, and children.<sup>24</sup>

Although women may have ways of influencing male decision-making through different informal means and resources, and the domestic gender relations may vary according to the individual personalities and social contexts, women's opportunities to participate in formal decision-making are strongly restricted. This includes participation in decisions pertaining to local-level politics and planning, which are regarded as exclusively male affairs.<sup>25</sup> While in some cases these gender notions may have become somewhat modified by the 24 years of war and exile, in other cases they have become even more rigid. It is to be expected that the values and norms underlying Afghan gender roles in relation to formal decision-making will influence the participation of women in the reconstruction and development of their society.

Given this history, there is a need to focus particularly on the promotion of women's participation in decision-making in relation to the social, economic and political development of Afghanistan. This is the case both in view of the fact that women in many respects are a particularly vulnerable group in post-conflict Afghan society, especially widows and female household heads, and in view of the central role of Afghan women's labour in domestic, agricultural and pastoral activities in the traditional Afghan economy, and, while on a smaller scale, also in "modern" occupations within health, education and other sectors. The participation and human resources of women are necessary in view of the huge task of reconstruction and development of the country, and women's contribution as a resource in reconstruction and development activities should be accompanied by rights of participation in planning and decision-making, especially concerning aspects that affect their own lives.

<sup>20</sup> See for example Christensen, 1982, op cit.

<sup>21</sup> See Boesen's writings about Pashtun women in Kunar, for example, Boesen 1980, 1983, op. cit.

<sup>22</sup> Bourdieu, P. *Outlines of a Theory of Practice*. London: Sage Publications, 1977 (1972).

<sup>23</sup> Papanek, H. "Purdah: Separate Worlds and Symbolic Shelter." In: *Comparative Studies in Society & History*. 1973. 15(3).

<sup>24</sup> During the decades from the 1950s to the 1990s, there was an emerging emancipation of women, including participation in education, professional and political life; it was, however, limited to urban middle-class and elite women. The politics of women's emancipation included in the political programme ("Decree No. 7") of the post-27 April 1978 communist DRA regime was, moreover, a major cause for the ensuing popular resistance to the DRA government during the 1980s.

<sup>25</sup> As extensively documented in the ethnographic literature on the situation of Afghan women before 1978 and during war and exile (see for example Boesen, 1980, 1983, op cit.; Christensen, 1982, op. cit.; Delloyé, I. *Des Femmes D'Afghanistan*. Paris, Éditions des femmes, 1980; and Duprée, N. H. "A Socio-Cultural Dimension: Afghan Women Refugees in Pakistan." In: Anderson, E. & Hatch Duprée (eds.): *The Cultural Basis of Afghan Nationalism*. London and New York. 1990; among others.

### 3. The Districts and Communities

While all three provinces visited for this study shared the characteristics of poverty and extreme vulnerability due to the destruction of the main means of livelihood, the districts and communities were very different with regard to their experience of the Soviet occupation and subsequent civil war. They also differed in terms of their ethnic, religious, and socio-economic composition, and political history and allegiances. This rich variation and diversity even applied to villages within the same district, where the populations of different local communities may have had quite different experiences with regard to war and exile. These experiences again might have influenced the attitudes and outlook of village people in relation to such issues as formal education and gender roles. For these reasons, the areas included in the study are described separately, and whenever references are made to communities with regard to specific issues, the particular village or community is specified.

#### 3.1. Qarabagh District, Kabul Province

Qarabagh District is located on the Shamali plains north of Kabul. In this district, the Sanayee Development Foundation (SDF) is the FP implementing NSP. The area, which was a rich and fertile agricultural region before the war, was heavily fought over and destroyed in the 24-year long conflict. In addition, the long absence of large groups of the local population who became refugees further contributed to the collapse of the agricultural infrastructure and in particular the irrigation systems due to neglect. Today, in 2004, the area is still heavily marked by the war, and by the three years of drought from 1998 to 2001.

Despite the destruction, the Shamali area, including Qarabagh, has been a major centre for refugee return and resettlement. Since the end of 2001, the local population and the returnees have received massive emergency assistance in the form of food and shelter. Local people have undertaken an impressive amount of repair and reconstruction of their villages, by their own efforts as well as with assistance from aid agencies. The villagers in Qarabagh are struggling to maintain a mixed farming economy, mostly as small-holders owning from  $\frac{1}{2}$  to four *jeribs* of arable land. Most farmers combined the cultivation of mostly unirrigated (*lalmi*) land with animal husbandry, occasional wage labour (including working in Kabul on a commuting basis), and various income-generating activities, including a limited amount of carpet-weaving. However, in 2004, the area could still be characterised as extremely poor and vulnerable. In this context, SDF had found the task of selecting the 72 most vulnerable villages for the first phase of NSP implementation in 2003 very difficult because all of the villages were very poor.

Ethnically, the population of Qarabagh District is a mixture of Tajiks and Pashtuns (approx. 60 percent Tajik, 40 percent Pashtun)<sup>26</sup>, with small communities of Hazaras. There are a substantial number of returned refugees; according to UNHCR statistics from 2002, more than 50 percent of the local population are estimated to be returned refugees and IDPs.<sup>27</sup>

#### 3.2. Dahna-e-Ghori and Andarab Districts, Baghlan Province

In Baghlan, the two districts visited were Dahna-e-Ghori District, approximately one hour's drive to the west of Pul-e-Khumri, and Andarab District, which is a somewhat remote area

<sup>26</sup> Afghanistan Information Management Services (AIMS). Available at: [aims.org.af-country\\_profile-unhcr\\_district\\_profiles\\_UNCHR\\_central\\_district\\_profile-Kabul-D\\_Qarabagh-District\\_Profile\\_Qarabagh\\_04\\_0402.pdf.url](http://aims.org.af-country_profile-unhcr_district_profiles_UNCHR_central_district_profile-Kabul-D_Qarabagh-District_Profile_Qarabagh_04_0402.pdf.url) (accessed 07.06.04).

<sup>27</sup> Ibid. The UNHCR statistics dating from 2002 (no later data available from AIMS), show that the estimated population in 1990 were 66,743; returnees incl. IDPs in 2001 totalled 15,000; and expected returnees and IDPs in 2002 was estimated as 23,000, totalling 38,000 refugee and IDP returnees at the end of 2002, which would be more than 50% of the 1990-population.

in the south-eastern corner of Baghlan bordering Kapisa Province. Dahna-e-Ghori consists of plains surrounded by hills, while the valley of Andarab is more mountainous. Before the war, both districts had been fertile agricultural areas growing wheat, maize, barley and other crops. But by the time of the field visits, both districts had suffered during the war, similar to Qarabagh District. Most of the irrigation canals, bridges, and roads had been damaged or destroyed, and the rusted remains of tanks and other wartime equipment were strewn across the landscape. In particular, the main valley of Andarab had been heavily mined due to its key strategic position as an access route to the Panjshir valley. In both districts, wheat was struggling to grow in the un-irrigated fields at the time of the visit. This cultivation was combined with animal husbandry, occasional wage labour, and various other income-generating activities.

In Dahna-e-Ghori District, the population consists of both Tajiks and Pashtuns, while Andarab is almost exclusively populated by Tajiks.<sup>28</sup> In Dahna-e-Ghori, beside the Tajiks (30 percent) and the Pashtuns (40 percent), Shi'a Muslim Hazaras are well represented, constituting approximately 30 percent of the population,<sup>29</sup> including some Shi'a Ismaili.<sup>30</sup> Moreover, communities including Uzbeks were also found in Dahna-e-Ghori, but in contrast to Jawzjan, they were a minority in Baghlan. Similar to the Shamali plains, Baghlan was said to have one of the highest refugee return rates in Afghanistan. According to AKDN statistics, the percentage of returnees was approximately 12 percent in Dahna-e-Ghori as an average. In some of the villages visited during the study, the ratio of returned refugees was much higher, estimated at almost 80 percent by the community members. In Dahna-e-Ghori and especially in Andarab, a large part of the local population had taken refuge in the surrounding hills during the wars, and had lived in caves. The people said that they were too poor to travel abroad to seek exile in Pakistan or Iran.

Andarab District has several particular characteristics which could be ascribed to its remote location as well as to the political history of the district. The area has been relatively isolated, with limited contacts with the outside world and had no experience of NGO assistance prior to the arrival of AKDN except post-conflict emergency aid. In addition, the Andarabi people are Sunni, and conservative with regard to the values and norms of *khaumi*. The townspeople regarded them as a warlike people, who also engage in factional feuds ("*gundi*"- factional conflict - which can be seen as the reverse side of *khaumi*) amongst themselves. However, as with most tribal or lineage-organised people in Afghanistan and elsewhere, they remain united against the outside world. In general, the people in Andarab still seemed to refuse to believe that the war was over, and some expressed that they had little if any trust in the post-2001 transitional government of Afghanistan and its leader, President Karzai. Many feared that the fortunes of war might still be changing and that the Taliban might make a come-back or return to power. At the same time, it was clear from the group discussions with women villagers in Andarab that the women, similar to the women in the other districts of the study, were extremely weary of war and fighting, and only wished for peace and security.

This background would go a long way towards explaining why the Andarab people were seen by the outer world, including AKDN,<sup>31</sup> as extremely wary and fearful of change. External development aid in the form of NSP was seen as one source of change that might affect the traditional, conservative gender roles and family patterns. However, it was

<sup>28</sup> According to UNHCR/AIMS, the population of Dahna-e-Ghori is estimated as 40% Pashtun, 30% Hazara, 30% Tajik, and an unknown percentage of Uzbeks. A total of 15,000 refugees were expected to have returned to Dahna-e-Ghori by the end of 2002. In Andarab, the whole population is listed as 100% Tajik, and only 100 returnee families were expected for 2002. AIMS. Available at: [aims.org.af-country\\_profile\\_unhcr\\_district\\_profiles-UNHCR\\_northern\\_district\\_profile-Baghlan-D\\_Dahana-i-Ghori-Dahna-i-Ghori\\_09\\_04\\_02.pdf](http://aims.org.af-country_profile_unhcr_district_profiles-UNHCR_northern_district_profile-Baghlan-D_Dahana-i-Ghori-Dahna-i-Ghori_09_04_02.pdf).url (accessed 07.06.04).

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> There were no statistical data available concerning the number or percentage of Imami Shi'a and Ismaili Shi'a communities. It could be that this was regarded locally as a sensitive issue.

<sup>31</sup> In this context, the fact that AKDN is an international NGO network funded by the Ismaili Aga Khan Development Foundation, which especially aims to support the Ismaili minority in Afghanistan and elsewhere, might have played a role.

found during the field research that there were indications of changing attitudes in some of the communities. This could partly be due to their involvement with NSP and the careful trust-building in relation to community mobilisation on the part of AKDN. At the same time, the people in the communities visited strongly perceived the needs for reconstruction and development in the context of poverty.

### 3.3. Aqcha, Faizabad, and Khwaja-de-Koh Districts, Jawzjan Province

In contrast to Qarabagh District and the two districts visited in Baghlan, the districts visited in Jawzjan Province had suffered more as result of the protracted drought and ensuing famine than the effects of war. This province had not been a front area during the war. However, the fine sandy soil (*loess*) of the plains north of the Hindu Kush mountain range, which is very fertile if there is enough water, turns to dust in dry periods and is very vulnerable to drought.

Although a part of the population had been refugees or IDPs during the war, the majority had remained. But the sight of numerous deserted villages and the collapsed domes of houses were a sign that a considerable number of people had also been forced to leave due to the drought. The conditions during the drought had been extremely difficult, as described by an old woman in Fazilabad village, Faizabad District: “*When we went away, there was no food. One day there was one potato; we divided it in two parts and ate half in the evening and the rest the next day.*” In the spring of 2004, at the time of the research, people in the communities were struggling to survive using the limited assets available. Among these assets, the emergency food relief donated by different aid agencies played an important role. As water was generally very scarce, growing crops was difficult. Agriculture was supplemented by the keeping of livestock. In addition to small livestock such as sheep, goats, and donkeys, cattle were important, as well as horses which are kept for transport and recreation. Among the different non-farm income-generating activities in the districts, carpet-weaving was the most important.

The population is very mixed both in the two districts in which GOAL Ireland<sup>32</sup> is active as NSP FP, namely Aqcha and Faizabad, and in Khwaja-de-Koh, where Actionaid is the FP. The communities visited were mostly Uzbek or Turkman, with some Tajiks. Moreover, small groups of Pashtuns originating from the Kandahar area in the south-east of Afghanistan were found in Aqcha and Faizabad Districts. There were also small communities of Arabs, who were originally pastoral nomads living in the northern areas of the country.<sup>33</sup> Tensions and conflicts between the *Junbesh* and the *Jamiat-e-Islami* parties occurred and still occur in the province, which is under the control of Governor Dostum. It was difficult to ascertain whether these parties and their rivalries played any role in the allegiances and daily life of the villagers. However, what did have a direct impact on their lives, according to the villagers, was the problem of powerful local warlords and commanders who had monopolised control of the supply of irrigation water and deprived ordinary villagers of this critical resource.

### 3.4. Security

Security is a very important concern in relation to the implementation of NSP. Security issues are related both to the security of the staff of the FPs, as well as to people in the communities. This was the case in the communities included in the study, as well as in the provinces and districts of other FPs. The presence of powerful and armed commanders in the districts of the study was a serious problem to people in the communities, for example through their control of land or water. In some communities, especially communities

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<sup>32</sup> In the period following the completion of this study, GOAL Ireland has since removed itself as a Facilitating Partner implementing NSP in the provinces, due to the deteriorating security situation across the areas in which it worked.

<sup>33</sup> See Orywal, E. (ed.) *Die Ethnischen Gruppen Afghanistans*. Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1986.



where the people had opposed the attempts of local commanders to influence the CDC elections (see section 7), people said that it was unsafe to work in the fields. The local population strongly wished for the disarmament of the local militias.

To the FPs, threats, intimidations, or attacks from local commanders and other powerful persons in the programme areas, as well as by Taliban, are the most important security problems. Such threats and incidents had occurred in all districts covered in the study. In addition, SDF had experienced direct attacks on field staff, including the killing of five staff members who were travelling back to Kabul from Sarobi in February 2004. Security incidents have also been reported by the FPs operating in other areas, especially NGOs implementing NSP in Pashtun areas, such as CARE International (including in Paktia) and the Swedish Committee for Afghanistan (in Wardak). Such threats and intimidation frequently assume the form of “night-letters” reflecting anti-government and anti-Western attitudes; attacks on schools, especially girls’ schools, including the burning of schools, and other intimidation directly aimed against the education of girls; and the participation of women in NSP. Threats and night-letters are frequently directed against the NSP elections, which are perceived as identical to the upcoming national election. As of June 2004, the security situation for FPs implementing NSP in the provinces was poor and steadily deteriorating. In practice, FPs are left very much on their own with regard to security, despite official assurances of protection.<sup>34</sup>

At the beginning of the field research, there were tensions in the communities in Qarabagh due to the perceived delays in disbursements of NSP block grants. These tensions affected the staff of the FP as well as the members of the CDCs. They also affected research for this paper with regard to access to communities.

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<sup>34</sup> Bhatia, M., Lanigan, K., & Wilkinson, Ph. *Minimal Investments, Minimal Results: The Failure of Security Policy in Afghanistan*. Kabul: AREU. June 2004.

## 4. The Facilitating Partners: Approach and Practices

### 4.1. Sanayee Development Foundation (SDF)

The Afghan organisation SDF is the FP in Qarabagh District. Similar to the other FPs, NSP is only one of a number of different projects (12 projects) run by SDF, which has a long-standing history of development activities in Afghanistan. The activities of SDF include emergency relief projects in different sectors, including health and medical assistance, and a peace-building training and institution-building programme. In addition to Qarabagh, SDF also implements NSP in Paghman and Sarobi Districts.<sup>35</sup> In Qarabagh, SDF aims to implement NSP in 72 villages in three cycles or “batches” of 24 each.

The concepts and practices of the SDF peace-building and conflict-solving programme play an important role in SDF’s approach to the implementation of NSP. For example, peace-building training involving local *shuras* and CDCs has contributed to the positive reception and understanding of NSP by communities.<sup>36</sup> Similarly, the concept of trust-building is key in the SDF approach. The quality of the process of community mobilisation, community participation and capacity building aimed at self-reliance are central concerns. For the training of staff, SDF follows the training guidelines developed by UN-Habitat in the framework of Participatory Rural Analysis (PRA), and the NSP guidelines. With regard to women’s participation, SDF has adopted a careful approach that is sensitive to the risk of forcing changes of gender relations and not allowing sufficient time for the communities to accept the notion of women’s participation in community affairs. This perspective on women’s participation is shared by all FPs involved in the study.

In the first phase of implementation, SDF’s policy has been to give priority to men’s projects in order to establish trust and positive relations with the communities. However, this provoked protests on the part of the women, who complained that “all power [in relation to NSP in the communities] still rested with the men.”<sup>37</sup> As a result, SDF has decided that a minimum of 10 percent of the block grant money shall be earmarked for women’s activities.<sup>38</sup>

In Qarabagh District, there are 16 community facilitators (CFs), eight male and eight female; they are supervised by two male social organisers (SOs). The eight CFs visited a total of 24 villages on a rota basis, in pairs. During the first cycle, until the communities of the first “batch” established their CDCs, the CFs visited the communities every week. After the establishment of CDCs, the facilitators paid follow-up visits to the communities and CDCs of the first “batch” once every second week, at the same time as starting the community mobilisation process in the villages of the next cycle, “batch two.” All facilitators were from Kabul. From interviews with the field staff and observations of their relations with the communities, it appeared that the staff were generally highly committed. The female facilitators were aware of the importance of the gender aspect and related well to the women in the communities, for example as reflected by the case of women’s elections in Qarabagh (see section 8).

### 4.2. Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN)

AKDN is the FP in Baghlan Province, where field research was carried out in Dhana-e-Ghori and Andarab Districts. Similar to SDF, AKDN has long-standing experience in Afghanistan.

<sup>35</sup> After the killing of five staff members travelling between Sarobi and Kabul in February 2004, SDF has ceased to operate in Sarobi District.

<sup>36</sup> Personal communication, Jana Frey, Project Development Manager, and Dr. Zia Safiq, Provincial NSP Manager, SDF, Kabul, 24 February 2004.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, 22 April 2004.

The approach of AKDN differs from the approach of the other FPs in several respects. It is based on the concept of integrated and long-term community-based social and economic development, with a commitment of 10-20 years. With regard to NSP, the programme is implemented in Baghlan and Badakhshan as an integrated element. Project activities are integrated in the “Five Year Village Development Plans” which are evolved by communities in cooperation with AKDN. In addition, AKDN aims to transform community development from “supply-driven” to “demand-driven,” which is in accordance with the approach of NSP.<sup>39</sup> Furthermore, MRRD funding for NSP is supplemented by additional AKDN funding. These factors enable the implementation of NSP over a longer time than the three-year phase based on contracts for one year at a time, to be extended according to an NSP performance evaluation. It also allows for the implementation of the programme in all communities simultaneously instead of in successive cycles or “batches.” Thus, elections for CDCs, which are termed Village Development Committees by AKDN, had been carried out in all communities except one in Andarab at the time of the field research. In each of the two districts, NSP includes 40 villages.

The concept and methodology with regard to programme implementation and training of staff is similar to the methodology of SDF and the other FPs involved in the study. Thus the quality of process and capacity-building in relation to community mobilisation and cooperation were central issues. In this context, AKDN particularly focuses on strengthening the CDCs as local-level institutions for self-governance in the long-term development perspective of AKDN.<sup>40</sup> Training material for field staff is based on the manuals developed by UN-Habitat, but adapted and simplified by AKDN, as they had been found to be too detailed to allow for flexibility in different contexts. Similar to other FPs involved in the study, the training of field staff consisted of a combination of workshops, systematic in-service training and on-the-job training. The training of trainers is an important element in the perspective of local capacity-building.

### 4.3. GOAL (Ireland)

GOAL (Ireland) was the FP implementing NSP in two districts in Jawzjan Province, Aqcha and Faizabad Districts.<sup>41</sup> NSP was one of a total programme of 12 projects that GOAL was involved with, mainly in the sector of rural development and water supply. GOAL aimed to implement three cycles or “batches” of NSP communities in each province, with 16 villages in each “batch.”

In the implementing approach of this NGO, the focus is particularly on the quality of process and on capacity-building with the long-term perspective of community self-reliance. The training materials for staff of different levels, including SOs and CFs, are strongly centred on these issues. The conceptual framework underlying the training and training material is the PRA approach to community-based social development. Most of the training had been undertaken by GOAL staff, with materials developed by the NGO. From interviews with field staff, and observation of the practices of implementation and relations with the communities, the intensive and systematic training was reflected in a high level of awareness and commitment on the part of the staff. This included an understanding of the gender aspect on the part of male as well as female staff. For example, community members were involved in the planning and organisation of elections for CDCs, including the registration of voters, through participation in “community empowerment groups” of 50-70 community members on a voluntary basis. As also mentioned above regarding SDF and AKDN, the policy of GOAL with regard to women’s

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<sup>39</sup> Personal communication, Ilona Schäfer, Grants Programme Manager, AKDN main office, Kabul, 24 February 2004.

<sup>40</sup> Personal communication, Eliza Hilton, Monitoring Advisor, and Mr. Abdullah, Provincial Social Organiser, AKDN, Pul-e-Khumri, 10 March 2004.

<sup>41</sup> GOAL has since pulled out of the provinces due to heightened insecurity.

participation in NSP implied that participation should not be enforced, for example through mandatory elections of female members to CDCs.

The field staff, which consisted of two teams of 16 CFs in each district, were based in the communities on a rota schedule which included five days in the field and two days off. This ensured a continuous presence in the communities which had shown to be efficient in relation to the initial establishment of trust and cooperation between the FP and the community members. Similarly, the SOs (four in each district, including one female SO) worked in shifts around the week from the district office in Aqcha. GOAL had found it very difficult to find and engage sufficient female staff with the necessary qualifications, including local language skills, and willingness to work in the communities. Thus only 20 percent of the total GOAL NSP staff was female at the time of the study. The problem of recruiting female staff was common to all FPs involved in NSP.

#### 4.4. Actionaid

Actionaid is the FP responsible for implementing NSP in Khwaja-de-Koh District in Jawzjan. The target of the programme activities is 72 villages<sup>42</sup> in three “batches” of 16 villages. Similar to the other FPs involved in the study, Actionaid has a long-standing experience of community development, both in Afghanistan and in rural areas in many other countries. The approach and methodology of Actionaid is based on the concept of community-based and participatory social development, in the framework of PRA and with focus on the process, as well as the outcome, of social development.<sup>43</sup> Gender issues and women’s participation in development are important elements of Actionaid’s approach and methodology. Actionaid has considerable experience with regard to the development of training materials and conduct of staff training as capacity building on all levels in Afghanistan. In the framework of capacity building, Actionaid’s approach to the implementation of NSP is different from the approach of the other FPs, namely through the strategy of engaging in partnerships with national NGOs for the actual implementation in communities. The long-term aim of this strategy is to enable Afghan partners to take over the implementation of rural development projects. In Khwaja-de-Koh, Actionaid had contracts with three national partners: Aryana Reconstruction-Afghanistan Reconstruction Unit,<sup>44</sup> Jam Foundation; and Naw Bahar Reconstruction.

The implementation approach of Actionaid was also different in another respect, namely with regard to the organisation of electoral clusters. Instead of basing the clusters according to geographical criteria, according to the NSP guidelines, Actionaid has adopted the policy of identifying clusters according to socio-economic status (wealth). The aim of this is to achieve socio-economic equity with regard to representation in the CDCs. Thus the clusters were divided into the categories of “rich,” “medium,” “poor,” and “very poor,” and the families were given cards of different colours according to their socio-economic category.<sup>45</sup> In practice, it appeared that geographical criteria were also applied.

The district staff were employed and trained by Actionaid, whereas the field staff (two SOs and eight CFs, four male, four female), were employed and trained by the partner organisations. The training of field staff was coordinated by the Actionaid district office staff and implemented by the partners. However, in this training, both with regard to the training of the partners and the field staff, both the Actionaid district staff and the

<sup>42</sup> In order to achieve this target, Actionaid had started implementation of NSP in two other districts in the north of Jawzjan, as “overflow districts,” as the northern part of the province is relatively thinly populated. These districts were not included in the study.

<sup>43</sup> Personal communication, Smruti Arvind, Policy Director, Actionaid, Kabul, 9 June 2004.

<sup>44</sup> According to engineer and social organiser, A. Rasuli, the two NGOs worked together as one in practice. Personal communication, meeting in the office of ARU, Khwaja-de-Koh district bazaar, 10 April 2004.

<sup>45</sup> In the communities visited during the research, no families belonged to the “rich” category, and only very few were “medium,” whereas the majority of families were “poor” (green cards) or “very poor” (yellow cards). See also section 6.

implementing partners had experienced problems. These problems were particularly related to the issue of women's participation. It also appeared, from observations during field visits, that there were problems involved with the training of a participatory approach to community mobilisation.<sup>46</sup>

In order to ensure participation by women in the NSP programme, Actionaid and the national partners had organised separate elections for women in so-called "women's clusters" (only comprising women of the families of a certain number of clusters). The female representatives elected by the women were formally included in the CDCs.

#### 4.5. The Role of Community Facilitators (CFs)

The CFs play a key role in ensuring the quality and successful implementation of the NSP. This is particularly important in relation to the involvement and participation of women. The task of involving and communicating with rural women may be a difficult challenge to CFs, especially when they themselves have an urban background. It is a particular challenge to male facilitators who, for culturally normative reasons, may be prevented from contact with the women in a village, and in addition may often themselves share local conservative views about women's participation in community affairs. For this reason, all the FPs involved in the present study emphasise the importance of engaging female staff as CFs. The FPs with whom the field research was carried out also found it valuable when female CFs were themselves from a village background, preferably from the same area as the villages where the NSP project took place, in order to gain access to the community. This was related both to distrust and unwillingness on the part of the community to allow strangers to enter the village uninvited, and to local norms that women in the community could not communicate with men outside the family. In practice, however, there are several problems related to the employment of village women as facilitators, first of all due to the need for basic education in order for the women to be able to participate in formal training.

The facilitators' task involves engaging people in local communities in a face-to-face discourse about participation in a project which is based on entirely new concepts in relation to conventional aid and government assistance, namely, participation of all community members, including women, in a democratic decision-making process about community development. Not only does this task require a broad range of skills and knowledge, both in relation to the project - the "message" of NSP and the details of the step-by-step community mobilisation process - but also with regard to general communication skills that emphasise inclusion and participation. This includes both linguistic and non-verbal communication skills and the adoption of a participatory rather than authoritarian attitude in relation to the community members, thereby enabling the community mobilisation process to become a process of inclusive and shared learning by doing. As Afghan norms and attitudes in relation to education and learning are traditionally rather authoritarian and didactic, these attitudes in the context of community facilitation are new and often also demanding for the facilitators, who mostly have a limited level of education.<sup>47</sup> Materials and manuals aimed at training CFs have been prepared by several FPs, including UN-Habitat, whose training manuals are widely used, or used in modified forms, by other FPs, including SDF and AKDN. As already described, the training materials prepared by GOAL and Actionaid also strongly emphasise communication skills with a view to establishing trust and participatory cooperation between the NSP implementing agency and the community.

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<sup>46</sup> According to the SO of ARE/ARU, this training had been "difficult to understand," especially with regard to the gender issue. Personal communication, engineer and social organiser A. Rasuli, meeting in the office of ARE/ARU, Khwaja-de-Koh district bazaar, 10 April 2004.

<sup>47</sup> The formal minimum requirement of education is 12 years of schooling, but in practice it is often less, especially when the facilitators are recruited from the villages in the project district.

The emphasis on the need for the deployment of locally based CFs, as large a staff presence in the communities as possible, and quality training, is also shared by ACTED and Concern International. Concern thus finds that:

*“Linked to the above issue [women’s participation] are the skills level of the NSP staff. For example one of our lessons learned was the need to focus more and more on the ‘facilitation skills’ of our staff. Unless they have the correct facilitation skills we will continue to miss women’s priorities. However, this is as we know connected with time, continuous coaching and practice.”<sup>48</sup>*

AKDN, GOAL, ACTED, and Concern International all found that female staff could act as positive role models for women to work outside the home. For example, Concern had used this actively in the implementation of NSP in Takhar and Badakhshan.<sup>49</sup> From a monitoring survey, including interviews with village women in their homes by a female SO, ACTED found in Baghlan that women’s participation in NSP strongly correlated with the active presence of female facilitators.<sup>50</sup> On the other hand, the recruitment of female CFs from villages was frequently very difficult, due to the need for a basic formal education and because village women would often be hesitant to engage in unaccustomed employment outside the home, due to local norms and sometimes to resistance on the part of their families.

The tasks and working conditions of the CFs could also be characterised as being difficult and demanding, especially in the case of married female staff. First of all, the female staff need to carefully observe local norms of women’s behaviour in the communities, both to ensure their own safety and the acceptance of the programme in the villages. Thus all female facilitators wear *burqas* in the districts, even if they are of an urban background and would not normally wear *burqas*. Second, working in the communities is demanding for married women in relation to their families. This is the case regardless of whether the facilitators commute daily to the districts or are based for the week in the communities. Commuting staff usually arose around 5-5:30 AM to see to the family’s needs and perform household tasks before leaving for work which began at 8 AM in the SDF office in Kabul. In the late afternoon after returning from the field, they had to complete and deliver their data from the day’s work; in addition, most of the staff had a long distance to travel from their homes to the office. While the female staff of AKDN working in Andarab District had to commute every day due to security, the staff in Dahna-e-Ghori were able to stay at the district office during the week. However, married female staff had to arrange for their husbands to take care of children during the week, or some would keep young children with them in Dahna-e-Ghori. For at least one CF in Dahna-e-Ghori, these problems led her to look for another job in Pul-e-Khumri.

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<sup>48</sup> Personal communication (e-mail), Michelle Small, NSP Manager, Concern, 21 June 2004.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid, 29 April 2004.

<sup>50</sup> Personal communication, Elizabeth Kronoff, (M & E Manager, ACTED), 25 May 2004.

## 5. Communities' Perceptions of NSP

### 5.1. General Views of NSP

In the study communities, the interest in and receptivity to the idea of NSP, and the motivation of the community members to participate in NSP, was dependent on a number of factors. Above all, people were weary of 24 years of war and the resulting death or exile, mass destruction of livelihood assets, and poverty. For example, the women participating in a discussion meeting in the village of Sayad Markazi (Andarab District) told of the many years of conflict and war in the district, saying how tired they were of this “*jang, jang, jang*” (fighting, fighting, fighting). NSP was perceived in many communities as a solution not only to the problems of the community itself, but also to the problems of Afghanistan.

*“During the 24 years of war people have suffered very much. After that, MRRD has called us to help us to develop and reconstruct our own society and Afghanistan.”* (Accountant of CDC, Khanaqa Uzbekia village, Aqcha District)

*“Now we have community cooperation. We ourselves try to work together in peace, we want to give our children a peaceful life.”* (Women in Kalta Shakh Sufia village, Aqcha District)

*“Before the NSP we had a lot of problems but nowhere to go with them. Now we have a place to go to solve our problems.”* (Woman, member of women’s CDC, Shishkhana Afghanistania village, Faizabad District)

Other factors that affected communities’ perception of the NSP included:

- The general attitude towards external aid, earlier experience of NGO assistance, and the relations with the facilitating staff of the FP in the communities, as well as the perceptions and understanding of the project in the community (which was closely related to the quality of the information and community mobilisation of the FP).
- The socio-economic composition of the communities and the existence of relatively egalitarian structures with regard to wealth or poverty. As experienced by SDF in Sarobi District, there are indications that, in communities with marked wealth and power differences, the more wealthy community members such as landowners and commanders would generally not be very interested in participation, due to fears that the participation on equal terms of the whole community would constitute a threat to their power. However, none of the communities visited in the context of the research were characterised by significant socio-economic differentiation. They were all very poor.
- The exposure of villagers to “foreigners” and Western ideas. Such exposure tended to contribute to a positive attitude to participation in NSP. On the other hand, remote communities that had been relatively isolated, or had negative experiences with the world outside their district, tend to be more hesitant or resistant to the change that participation in NSP would entail. Such attitudes reflect the communities’ experience that the government could not be trusted in the past, so why should it be trusted now? According to reports by AKDN field staff, several communities in parts of Andarab that were more remote than the communities visited by the research team reflected such anxiety or negative attitudes towards the programme. Similar suspicion and lack of trust of NSP and the government had also been found in districts in the northern provinces of Takhar, Badakhshan, Kunduz, Balkh, and Samangan, as reported by ACTED and Concern.

In areas and districts which are characterised by generally suspicious or antagonistic attitudes towards foreigners, these negative attitudes have often led to the rejection of or outright hostility towards NSP, as for example experienced by CARE International in several villages in Ghazni and Paktia Provinces. The negative attitudes are also often related to fears that NSP is a political programme in support of the transitional government, or that NSP is a “foreign” and anti-Islamic programme which aims at religious conversion and abolishment of traditional Afghan values, especially concerning women and family. Similar attitudes were experienced by other FPs in the Pashtun-dominated provinces in the south and east of the country, such as UN-Habitat in Farah and Kandahar, and Ockenden International in Zaranj District in Nimroz Province. On the other hand, it appears that such negative attitudes, including resistance towards women’s participation, can be overcome, as shown by examples from these districts in Pashtun areas, and also reflected by the experience of AKDN among Tajiks in Andarab District. In many cases, when NSP has been introduced in some communities, other villages who were at first hostile to the project have later decided that they would after all like to participate and get their share of the project benefits. Both UN-Habitat and CARE, as well as SDF in Sarobi District, have reported examples of villages who initiate procedures similar to NSP on their own initiative without waiting for NSP to reach them.

In particular, the actual disbursement of block grants plays an important role with regard to communities’ attitudes towards NSP. Examples were reported by UN-Habitat from a village in Kandahar, where the programme had been met with strong reservations, but nevertheless, the village participated and elected a CDC. But it was not until the CDC reached the stage of proposal writing for funding that the community started to believe that “*the NSP is for real.*”<sup>51</sup> A similar example of distrust, which also extended to the FP and the CDCs, was found in communities in Qarabagh District. During the initial visits of the research team, there were strong tensions in the communities that caused insecurity on the part of the SDF field staff in relation to the communities. These tensions were caused by what the communities perceived as delays in the disbursements of block grants for the projects for which proposals had been submitted some months earlier. The proposals were still being processed in MRRD. This had been explained repeatedly to the communities, but apparently not understood. On the other hand, the frustrations could be understood as the disappointment of being “cheated” yet another time out of the assistance promised by the government. From the point of view of the communities, the blame was on the CDCs, believing that the CDC members had received the money without informing the community and were spending the money for personal use. The members of the CDCs felt that they were in a very difficult position and had been “let down” by NSP and MRRD.<sup>52</sup> The atmosphere towards NSP changed dramatically when the first village received notice that the cheque for the block grant was on its way to the CDC’s bank account in Qarabagh.

### ***The Message of NSP***

It was generally an additional barrier to the understanding of and interest in the programme if the “message” of NSP was communicated by persons who were strangers in the communities, persons with whom the community members, especially the women, were not sufficiently familiar, or whom they did not trust. As mentioned earlier, this was

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<sup>51</sup> Article entitled “*NSP is for Real: An Experience from a Pilot Village*”. In: *Voices from the National Solidarity Programme* Kabul: UN-Habitat Afghanistan. (n.d., possibly January 2004)

<sup>52</sup> The tensions were further strengthened by the killings of five staff members of SDF on the road near Sarobi on their way back to Kabul after work, five days before the first visit to Qarabagh. As the killers had not yet been identified, the SDF staff strongly feared that the incident reflected local resistance towards NSP, not least the resistance of local power-elites and commanders to the community empowerment through elections and co-operation introduced by NSP, something which was perceived as a threat to the existing structures of power and control.



a major reason for the FPs to attempt to recruit female CFs from the villages in many areas. Thus, based on these findings and people's statements in all the communities, trust played a key role in the perceptions of NSP and readiness to participate.

*"All villagers do not believe in this programme, you should bring the help to us, then we will believe you."* (Old widow, Kishinabad, Andarab)

Furthermore, the notion of women's participation in many cases contributed to anxiety in communities with regard to participation in NSP. This has been confirmed by all FPs involved in the study.

On the one hand, the villagers' interest in NSP took as its starting point the community's needs for development assistance, and the expectations that participation would give access to the benefits needed. On the other hand, the access to information about the programme, and the form in which information and community mobilisation was delivered and undertaken by the CFs in dialogue and cooperation with the community, played a very significant role in alleviating initial resistance and suspicion. In this context, the presence and interaction of CFs with community members, not least elders and other respected and authoritative persons in the communities, played a key role during the preparatory process.

*"In the beginning, we did not understand, but slowly, slowly we got information about NSP and we all want to rebuild the village, and want to participate equally."* (Female community members in Shishkhana Arabia village, Faizabad District)

*"The government speeches ... will do something for our benefit, make power, road, clinic .."* (Male community members in Serkala village in Dahna-e-Ghori District)

*"The NSP programme is awareness of the people in the village about the solidarity of the country and the role of community in the reconstruction of the village."* (Male and female community members in Shishkhana Arabia village, Faizabad District)

*"NSP is a good thing for us, it will solve our problems, and perhaps we can help each other by working together."* (Women in the community of Shishkhana Arabia, Faizabad District)

In all the districts visited, unity (*ehthead*) and community cooperation were very highly valued in relation to community members' understanding of NSP. In many communities, especially in Aqcha and Faizabad Districts, community cooperation in the context of NSP was also perceived as a means of working together for self-reliance in development.

*"Hambastagi e-Milli [NSP] is about unity so we can work together to improve our village and improve Afghanistan."* (Male community members and CDC in Serkala village, Dahna-e-Ghori District)

*"We know a lot about the NSP - it means solidarity in the village and improving the village people and their lives."* (CDC in Qala-e-Kuna, Qarabagh)

*We don't want foreigners to come here every year and help us. We should help ourselves and Afghanistan. NSP is helping us with this idea."* (Women in Shishkhana Arabia, Faizabad District)

However, on the whole, it was the experience of the research team that each invitation to discuss NSP and the community members' views of the project invariably began with a discussion of the community's needs for assistance. If development priorities or projects had already been identified, the discussion would include the enumeration and

explanations of these projects. In almost all interviews and discussions, it seemed clear that to the villages participating in NSP, the focus was very much on the “end product.” Thus, discussions of process and perspectives always had to be introduced in the conversation in a polite and diplomatic way after the community members stated their needs and the projects they wanted to implement. There were generally high expectations of the NSP and the CDCs but also fears that if the NSP and CDC did not “fulfil the promises” by showing effective development results that improved people’s lives, they would feel “cheated.” Thus, an elderly woman in the village of Tapa-e-Sangak, Dahna-e-Ghori District had very pessimistic expectations of NSP:

*“They will give us nothing, they [the government] have never given us anything.”*

## 5.2 Perceptions of the Government’s Role in NSP

As also discussed in section 6, the elections for CDCs in many cases appear to have caused fears and negative attitudes towards the programme in the communities. This had been experienced by SDF, in the districts of Qarabagh, Paghman, and Sarobi. Other examples of such fear of participation in NSP was reported, e.g., by Concern International from the northern provinces, and SCA from Wardak. Communities thus feared that the NSP was a cover for national political agendas related to or identical with the national political elections. It has taken a long time and careful information and awareness-raising in the communities on the part of the FPs to establish trust and credibility in NSP as a programme which exclusively aims at rural reconstruction with local community participation.<sup>53</sup>

In all of the communities visited during this study, the majority of the community members were aware that NSP was in some way related to the central government in Kabul. In general, men had a clearer understanding than women that the government played a role in relation to the programme; this could be related to the fact that women’s access to information about the programme was more limited (see section 5.3). On the other hand, it was also clear that the men’s perceptions of the specific relations between the NSP and the FP, and between “the government” and MRRD as the government agency which funded and executed the programme, were mostly very diffuse. This lack of understanding also included male CDC members. Similar lack of knowledge and understanding of the role of the government in NSP communities was reported by other FPs such as ACTED.<sup>54</sup> Thus, in interviews and group discussions, community members had very different understandings of how the programme “worked” in relation to the government, MRRD, and to the World Bank, the donor agency.<sup>55</sup> There were examples of CDCs who did not know anything about the role of the government, or had forgotten the information given by the FPs, such as in Yandarak village, Aqcha District, where the CDC members said that, “*we were not told about the role of the government.*”

There were also communities where the role of the government and MRRD in relation to NSP was understood more clearly, as in the village of Khanaqa Uzbekia, Aqcha District. Here the CDC explained “*the MRRD has called us to help us to develop our village and Afghanistan.*” The CDCs were generally familiar with MRRD through the MRRD provincial office. While “the government” in a more general sense was distant in relation to the experience of the local communities, MRRD, through the provincial office, was a familiar institution to the CDCs and communities, with a presence in the provincial capital.

<sup>53</sup> That this is the case, and that there is no direct linkage to the planned national elections, was confirmed by both ministers of MRRD and MoF in response to concerns by FPs when their contracts were handed over at a meeting at MRRD in the early summer of 2003.

<sup>54</sup> See the report entitled *Men’s and Women’s Participation in the NSP. Preliminary Results*. ACTED NSP Team, Monitoring and Evaluation Department. Kabul. May 2004; 12.

<sup>55</sup> Especially to many illiterate women, the notion of the World Bank was very difficult to understand, as they had no experience of banks and the concept of bank had no meaning in the context of their everyday experience.

These diffuse perceptions of the role of “the government” in relation to NSP were clearly reflected in the interviews and group discussions. The reactions of the community members frequently included confusion, eager discussions among themselves or embarrassed silence. Many different explanations were offered, such as:

*“The government helped us ... with bringing this programme here.”* (CDC members, Fazilabad village, Faizabad District)

*“The role of the government is to give money for the project.”* (Male CDC members, Qulbaqa Areq village, Khwaja-de-Koh District)

*“Yes, the government of Afghanistan is not our enemy and has a very important role in reconstruction through promoting the programmes of reconstruction and letting foreigners work for the Afghan people.”* (CDC members, Shishkhana Turkmenia, Faizabad District)

The issue of security in relation to the programme was generally perceived as a very important aspect of the government’s role in all districts visited:

*“Through security we know that the government has a role in the programme - without security we cannot work in the fields ...”* (Chairman of CDC, Khalta Shakh Sufia village, Aqcha District)

*“It [NSP] is the work of ISAF ...”* (CDC secretary, Shishkhana Uzbekia, Faizabad District)

*“The government gives security for foreigners to visit our villages.”* (Community member, Qara Boin Jangali village, Aqcha District)

*“Our government wants the people to be disarmed and wants their people to be developed.”* (Male CDC members, Sayad village, Dahna-e-Ghori District)

On the whole, the limited knowledge and understanding of the role of the government in NSP is an important issue which reflects the need for improved information of the community members through quality facilitation with particular focus on women.

### 5.3. Men’s and Women’s Access to Information

A very important element influencing men’s and women’s different perspectives and participation in NSP was access to information. Due to the restrictions on women’s mobility, socially and spatially, in the context of *pardah*, women were less able to participate in information meetings and community mobilisation in general. This was especially found in Qarabagh, Andarab, and Khwaja-de-Koh, where community attitudes towards women’s participation were very conservative. Similar problems of women’s participation have been found by ACTED in interviews with women in their implementation area.<sup>56</sup>

In many cases, people had difficulties in understanding the “messages” and information provided by the CF. This could be related to the nature of the information and the way it was given, as well as the relations with the facilitators. To illiterate persons or persons with very limited formal education, information about the concepts, including participation in elections by all community members, could be difficult to understand or remember if they were told about it only once or a few times. This was found to be the case in a number of Turkmen communities where all adults were illiterate, such as in Aqcha and Khwaja-de-Koh Districts, and also in communities where most women were illiterate.

<sup>56</sup> See the report entitled *Men’s and Women’s Participation in the NSP: Preliminary Results*. ACTED NSP Team, Monitoring and Evaluation Department. Kabul: ACTED. 25 May 2004.

*"I went to one or two meetings, but I can no longer remember what they told us."* (Old woman in Serkala village, Dahna-e-Ghori District)

*"We were told, but we don't remember."* (Women, members of "women's *shura*" in Qulbaqa Areq, Khwaja-de-Koh District)

Thus, attitudes towards NSP and knowledge and understanding of the project were also related to gender - more men than women knew about the project and understood its structure and implications.

Furthermore, perceptions of NSP were related to age and education. Older women and illiterate women tended to know very little about the project. This was frequently related to women's lack of access to information and participation in information meetings, because their husbands would not allow them to go out due to *pardah*. Thus, young women, especially daughters-in-law, often experienced difficulties with regard to access to information and participation due to the views of the older women and their mothers-in-law that it was their duty to stay at home to do the housework and look after the children. For example, in a women's meeting in the village of Sayad Markazi in Andarab, young women complained that they were not allowed to participate as much as they wanted because they were not permitted by their mothers-in-law: *"The old lady says that my daughters-in-law should work at home and not go out."* They were very unhappy about this because they were particularly interested in the new ideas and wished to participate in the change and development of their community.

But it could also reflect a lack of interest because it was perceived to be exclusively a male affair:

*"We are only women who work in the house - how can we know about men's business?"*  
(Women in Serkala village, Dahna-e-Ghori)

*"They [the community facilitators] said a lot about NSP. We don't remember because we are so busy."*(Women in Qulbaqa Areq, Khwaja-de-Koh District)

#### 5.4. Development Needs and Projects

The need for assistance in the impoverished and partly ruined communities was huge.

The first need and project priority that was mentioned in practically all communities in the study, except in Andarab District where there were natural springs and mountain streams, was ***the need for water***. This desperate need for irrigation water as well as for drinking was particularly critical in the spring 2004 as this year had seen a relatively poor rainfall in March and April (at the time of the field research). The villages were all dependent on rainfall for their irrigated land, as the irrigation systems had mostly been ruined during the decades of war. For this reason, projects concerning irrigation, such as the repair and reconstruction of canals and *karezes*, or construction of new canals, were generally the first priority. This was particularly the case in Aqcha, Faizabad, and Khwaja-de-Koh Districts in Jawzjan, where the ground water sources tend to salinate due to the high evaporation during summer, and Qarabagh District in Kabul Province.

In some cases, the traditional specialist in the management and distribution of water for irrigation to all farms in a village, the *mirab*, contributed and gave valuable advice in the identification and planning for irrigation reconstruction projects, as for example in the village of Shishkhana Uzbekia, Aqcha District. In this function, the *mirab* acted as a "specialist consultant" in the framework of a community-based feasibility committee (established by GOAL, the FP) under the CDC. In the communities in Dahna-e-Ghori and

Andarab, which were situated near mountains, the community members could use the water from mountain springs. Not all villages had access to such springs. Thus a development need frequently described in these districts consisted of simple pipe-schemes for piping water from streams to the villages. AKDN had already assisted in the construction of several such drinking-water schemes for communities in Dahna-e-Ghori.

In addition to the need for water for the irrigation of crops, there were huge needs for wells or deepening of existing wells for drinking-water. This need was especially felt by women.

*“In the past, we fetched water from the river but now there is no water in the river, we go in the night to wells far away for water, we take turns and sometimes wait for three or four hours before we can get the water.”* (Women in Khanaqa Uzbeki, Aqcha District)

However, the shortage of water was not always the consequence of the destruction of canals or *karez*s, or drought and the failure of rain. It could also be an issue of power and control. In many communities, community members/CDCs told stories about local commanders controlling and diverting water from the poor, as related in a group discussion with community members and the CDC in Khanaqa Uzbekia, Aqcha District.

**Schools and educational facilities** for adults (literacy classes) were in high demand, as development projects in most of the communities visited during the study. This was primarily expressed by women, but many male community members and CDCs also shared the view that education was very important. This should be understood in the context of the high rate of illiteracy in the communities, and the difficult access to schools for children in the more remote villages, including Dahna-e-Ghori and Andarab Districts. In Qarabagh, there were primary schools in some villages, but many children had to go to school in Qarabagh bazaar, which was several kilometres away.

*“After the many years of war and fighting, people think that education is very important both for improving life and to prevent more conflict.”* (Female CDC chairperson, Nawa Khel village, Dahna-e-Ghori District)

*“Here education is considered more important than age and experience. This is a new thing. People here think that educated persons can solve any problems in the home and the village, also with husbands and children.”* (Female CDC member, Azizan-Abad village, Dahna-e-Ghori)

*“From education, human beings become bright and enlightened, also girls. Women with education can bring up children better.”* (Male community member, Serkala, Dahna-Ghori)

The research team found two cases of school construction projects already underway, one in Nawa Khel, Dahna-e-Ghori District, and the other in Shishkhana Uzbekia and the neighbouring villages in Aqcha District. However, in the context of NSP, the construction of schools can only be approved as community development projects with approval by the Ministry of Education (MoE), as the MoE needs to register the school, provide teaching staff and learning material, and ensure that the curriculum taught is consistent with the national curricula. Thus, the construction (or reconstruction) of schools needs to be approved by and coordinated with the MoE on district and provincial levels.

In all districts, there had been schools before the war, but many had been destroyed or burned by the Taliban. Access to primary education for children was a serious problem in most communities. In communities where there were no primary schools, as in a number of the communities in Aqcha, Faizabad, and Khwaja-de-Koh, children had to rise at 3 AM in order to walk to the nearest school. In Dahna-e-Ghori, Andarab and the districts visited in Jawzjan, UNICEF had provided tented schools for the children as a temporary solution, but especially where summer temperatures often reach 50 degrees Celcius, such tents were too hot.

Projects for schools were generally intended to include schools for girls as well as boys. In the more conservative communities and districts, such as Qarabagh and Andarab, there were, however, problems in relation to the education of girls. In Andarab, girls were not permitted to continue schooling after grade 5/6 when they would reach the age of puberty and would have to observe *purdah*. But, according to the views of the male CDC interviewed in Kishinabad village, there were indications of changing attitudes to this issue. This CDC had plans for a girl's school in addition to a boys' school which was already functioning.

Other frequently mentioned projects included:

- ***The reconstruction or construction of bridges and houses.*** In Dahna-e-Ghori and Andarab, there were also needs for roof-beams for the reconstruction of houses, because timber logs were in short supply or very expensive (Andarab). Locals also cited the need for local roads to be repaired as well as improved transport facilities and a common vehicle for the whole community for transport.
- ***Electricity projects.*** The women in the village of Kishinabad, Andarab District wished for electricity in order to make their housework easier. Many male CDCs mentioned the idea of buying and installing small generators. In Dahna-e-Ghori and Andarab, the male community members discussed the possibility of establishing small-scale hydro-electric schemes.
- ***Activities which could generate employment, both for men and women.*** Unemployment or under-employment were very serious problems affecting women as well as men. This could partly be seen as a consequence of the large-scale destruction of the means of livelihoods in these areas, which limited the possibilities of undertaking normal activities with farming, animal husbandry, and the cleaning and preparation of the products (widely the task of women). In addition, the large-scale unemployment found in the districts may also reflect demographic trends and the growth of the population after the war, which also includes the substantial influx of refugee returnees.<sup>57</sup>

In the communities in Dahna-e-Ghori and Andarab District, the NSP projects were furthermore planned in the long-term perspective of the Five Year Village Development Plans evolved by AKDN, the FP. These plans involved the communities in the drawing of "dream maps" for the future of their villages in five years' time.

An exceptional example of a "dream map" was found in the village of Nawa Khel, Dahna-e-Ghori. The CDC chairperson was a woman, which was exceptional in the context of the study (see also section 8). The map showed a perfect modern town in the place of the village, including square multi-storey apartment buildings with electricity, running water, and TV-antennae; buildings for schools; a new mosque; a clinic and a veterinary clinic; a poultry factory which would offer employment for widows; other small industrial enterprises, and a kindergarten for the children. Yet the structure of the village was still visible, including roads and streams. The water of the streams had been diverted into a pipe-scheme for the buildings. Livestock and fields were drawn around the outskirts of the town. This map, which seemed to reflect the city planning of the Soviet era, could be seen as representing "a town moved into the village." The CDC and the community members present at the meeting said that everything in the "map of the future" was the idea of the women in the community. They commented, "Why should we not hope to live in the same way as other people in the modern world? We are tired of living in mud houses like this."

<sup>57</sup> Turton, D. and Marsden, D. *Taking Refugees for a Ride? The Politics of Refugee Return to Afghanistan*. Kabul: AREU. 2002.

### ***Women's Projects and Needs***

In addition to reconstruction and development projects that were identified for the benefit of the community as a whole, NSP also provides opportunities for separate projects for women. This is in order to ensure that women in the communities are also given opportunities to participate and benefit from the block grants. In practice, however, there are problems in relation to the allocation of the block grant funds to include women's projects, in the context of community prioritisation of projects and the preparation of budgets. As also discussed in section 8, this issue, which was related to the cooperation, or lack thereof, between the "men's *shura*" (CDC) and the "women's *shura*" was a serious problem with regard to women's participation in decisions concerning development projects in many of the communities visited, as well as in the districts of other FPs. The project needs that were particularly important to the women in the study communities are discussed in more detail in section 8.

### **5.5. *Ashar* & Community Cooperation, Contribution and Self-Reliance**

The concept of community cooperation on activities for common community improvement, such as building or repair of irrigation canals, mosques and schools, is commonly found in Afghan rural society. It is known as *ashar*. *Ashar* can also be extended to involve the cooperation of several communities, if necessary, for example in relation to the construction or repair of irrigation systems. The notion of *ashar* could therefore contribute to the understanding of community- and inter-community cooperation in the new framework of NSP as relevant and meaningful and thus support the introduction of the new programme. This was confirmed by community members in some of the communities visited in Dahna-e-Ghori, Aqcha and Faizabad Districts. The notion was sometimes discussed in relation to "*khaumi jirga*" (kinship group council), referring to local customary cooperation which primarily covers social functions such as weddings and funerals (example from Qala village, Aqcha District). In some communities where there had been a *malik* or *qariadar* (headman) before the CDC, the community members said that, "*before, the qariadar told us what to do - it was very different from NSP.*"

In the context of NSP, the tradition of *ashar* has been mobilised as a resource for community cooperation, including community contributions in labour or in kind (including cash, land, or buildings). This community cooperation also included different *self-initiative projects* identified by the communities themselves. The approach of re-vitalising traditions of community cooperation is included in the NSP project cycle, mainly by UN-Habitat, particularly with regard to the maintenance of assets funded under the programme. This policy is also expected to build community confidence in the newly elected CDCs and provide the CDCs with experience of organising and implementing local development initiatives. UN-Habitat has experienced such self-initiative projects in a considerable number of communities.<sup>58</sup>

In the study communities, the concept of "community cooperation" in the framework of NSP was perceived in a wider sense than the traditional *ashar*. This was reflected in most communities visited, as expressed in the village of Yangi Qala, Faizabad District: "*The new thing is that NSP solidarity can really do something to solve our problems.*" In all the districts, expressions such as "*working hand in hand*" "*working together as one hand*" and similar metaphors were used to describe the new community cooperation. In Yandarak village, Faizabad District, the CDC members described it as follows:

<sup>58</sup> In eight districts where UN-Habitat is the FP, 287 community self-initiative projects were implemented, involving the participation by over 23,700 persons. The projects primarily include literacy courses, road repair, canal cleaning, mosque repair and Holy Quran courses. See UN-Habitat: *National Solidarity Program, Monthly Report No. 5*, October 2003, Kabul.

*“Look at your hand. The thumb is strong, but alone it cannot do anything. Only when all fingers work together as one hand will it become a strong hand.”*

While mainly a community-level phenomenon, collaboration involving *ashar* can also take place between communities. An example of inter-community cooperation was found in Faizabad District, Jawzjan Province, where four villages of different ethnic compositions had submitted a joint project proposal for the construction of a school to be shared by all four villages.<sup>59</sup> The communities had bought a plot of four *jeribs* of land and planned to construct the school with inter-community contribution of labour and funded by the NSP block grant. The communities and their CDCs were very proud of this initiative and looked to the project as one which would really change the future. Not only would the school provide opportunities for education to the growing generation; through the shared education with a common curriculum and learning language, Dari, all the children would grow up as *Afghans* and citizens in the Afghan society. Another example of community cooperation and community contribution for school construction was found in the village of Nawa Khel, Dahna-e-Ghori District, where the community members had collected about 50,000 Afghanis (US\$1000) to buy a building plot for a village school which would be constructed by SCA. SDF also had experience with inter-community project proposals concerning the construction of bridges and roads in Paghman and Sarobi Districts.<sup>60</sup>

Community cooperation involving *ashar* in the context of NSP included the mobilisation of local community resources, as well as strengthening a spirit of community solidarity and independence from external aid. Thus, a community contribution of a minimum of 10 percent of the block grant is mandatory under the NSP, as well as responsibility for operation and maintenance of some community assets.<sup>61</sup> In the long term, it is envisaged that community contributions to reconstruction and development projects will be generated by economic activities within the community, including income-generating projects for women, and income generated from employment in relation to the reconstruction and development projects. In the communities visited during the research, the notion of community contribution appeared to be widely accepted and understood.

There was a general attitude in the communities, expressed by both women and men, that community contribution was a very important element of community cooperation with regard to the community's future self-reliance and independence from foreign aid. In the communities under study, community contribution was frequently perceived in the context of traditional community cooperation and self-reliance. Self-reliance was highly valued against a history of the long-term dependence on external aid during and after the war, as well as in exile. Such dependence on aid is ill-suited to the values of Afghan society and culture, in which family autonomy and independence are essential.<sup>62</sup> As expressed by village women in Shishkhana Arabia Faizabad District:

*“We don't want foreigners to come here every year and help, we should help ourselves. NSP helps us in helping ourselves.”*

In light of this, the NSP policy of strengthening a spirit of community solidarity and independency through *ashar* and community contributions seemed to be remarkably successful.

<sup>59</sup> In fact there were five, but one which was very small had been merged with another in order to meet the minimum requirement of NSP of 50 families.

<sup>60</sup> Personal communication, Jana Frey, Project Development Manager, SDF, Kabul, 22 April 2004.

<sup>61</sup> Assets to be maintained under community contribution include, e.g., electrification or irrigation, but not education, where the running costs for teachers' salaries and textbooks are expected to be funded by MoE.

<sup>62</sup> Boesen, I. W. “From Autonomy to Dependency. Aspects of the ‘Dependency Syndrome’ Among Afghan Refugees.” In: *Migration Today*. 1985; XIII(5).



## 6. Elections for CDCs

*“My father told me that our system can not be changed. This election is just for play. But when we go for voting and my father saw the process of election that it was secret, then he told me to go for voting.”* (Young man in Kishinabad, Andarab)

At the time of the field research in spring 2004, the elections for CDCs had been completed in the first batch of villages in all the six districts included in the research. For this reason, the discussion of CDC elections in this section is primarily based on narratives of batch one elections by community members and field staff of the FPs. However, in Qarabagh District, elections in the second batch were just beginning, thus offering an opportunity to observe elections in practice.<sup>63</sup>

The following discussion will address the participation by men and women in the elections with a focus on the following questions: extent of participation; possible changes in gender relations through women’s participation in elections; information, motives, and expectations with regard to voting; election practices for men and women; perceptions of the fairness of the elections; and lastly, the issue of interference by local elites and political stakeholders.

First and foremost, it should be noted that the elections are part of the NSP programme and thus also perceived and understood by the community members as embedded in the NSP. The elections for CDCs, and the CDC as a community-level participatory and inclusive institution, are closely interrelated since the elections are a condition for access to block grants. While it is thus useful to address these issues separately for the purpose of analysis, this interrelatedness must be borne in mind. This applies particularly with regard to people’s motives for participation in elections and their expectations of the outcomes of voting.

In all the communities visited, the CDC elections had occurred with very significant participation on the part of the voters, as reflected by an average voter participation of between 80-100 percent by both female and male voters (see tables 1 and 2). To a wide extent, this strong interest in the election of representatives for CDCs was the result of several months of careful preparation and facilitation on the part of all the FPs involved in the study. In this process, the establishment of trust, as well as a quality process of public education that included women as well as men, were key concepts of this community mobilisation. The process of community mobilisation appeared to have influenced and changed the initial negative attitudes and false perceptions of the CDCs as a front for national elections, as reflected in the following words, *“The elections were safe because the people leading them [AKDN] are very trustworthy”* (Male CDC members, Kishinabad village, Andarab). It was generally experienced by the FPs that the elections for the second batch of villages were easier, and also that the participation of voters tended to be higher than in the first batch due to improved facilitation, information, and community mobilisation.

### 6.1. Perspectives and Expectations of Elections and Voting

The elections and the system of secret voting were primarily perceived by the community members as an instrumental and project-focused context of NSP and community development. Thus, participation in elections was clearly motivated by expectations that

<sup>63</sup> These observations are described in two “cases,” one of a “male” election and one of an election for women, in an annex separate from this paper, available at [www.areu.org.af](http://www.areu.org.af).

<sup>64</sup> Thus, in a meeting in Kabul on 10 May 2004 between the Oversight Consultant and the FPs implementing NSP, the issue of joint or separate arrangements for women’s participation, including separate CDCs for women, was discussed. The majority of the participants in the meeting agreed that *“the quality of the voices of women are stronger if they have the right to a separate CDC.”* Personal communication, e-mail, 12 May 2004, Håkan Törngård, Swedish Committee for Afghanistan.

voting would give access to sharing the decision-making with regard to the benefits of the NSP projects through the CDCs. This direct linkage between elections and reconstruction projects was reflected by a number of statements, such as:

*“When we were told about the elections, we thought it was a good idea and useful for the people - because we had no water.”* (CDC, male and female members, Fazilabad village, Faizabad District)

But elections were also perceived in a wider context than NSP. In many communities, the elections and the CDCs were seen as a new mechanism and institution for strengthening community cooperation and enabling the community to address other problems in the future, as well as seeking contacts and support from other agencies and NGOs.

*“It was a good voting process - we can do it ourselves in the future for other purposes.”* (CDC and community members, Fazilabad village, Faizabad District)

*“We thought that the elections for shura are a good way of solving our problems through community cooperation. One weak person and another weak person - together they make a strong hand.”* (Community members and CDC, Yandarak village, Faizabad District)

*“Election and secret voting is good, every person can vote after his or her choice. It is a good process that can be used for other purposes, solving conflicts ... building a school.”* (Community members, Shishkhana Turkmenia village, Faizabad District)

## 6.2. Male vs. Female Participation

In most of the communities, as well as in the districts of other FPs, there were separate arrangements for the participation of women in elections and community cooperation through the CDC. This reflected the practical difficulties experienced by the FPs in involving women due to the local values and norms of gender relations and *purdah*, according to which women’s participation in public is regarded as shameful. These different arrangements had been adopted by the FPs in order to strengthen and promote women’s participation in a way that would be acceptable to the local gender norms.<sup>64</sup> However, in the AKDN districts in Badakhshan, joint elections with the participation of both women and men had been possible. According to two internal AKDN post-election evaluation reports<sup>65</sup> regarding the districts of Ishkashim and Wakhan, Badakhshan Provinces, women belonging to the Shi’a and Ismaili communities were actively participating in the joint elections, whereas it had been difficult to include Sunni women. Similar experience with regard to Hazaras in Bamyan (UN-Habitat)<sup>66</sup> appears to indicate that the Shi’a communities may be more tolerant of women’s participation.

But in all the communities studied, and in the majority of elections undertaken in other districts and provinces by other FPs, separate elections were held for men and women. In some cases they occurred on the same day, but they could also be held on different days. In most communities, there were also separate CDCs or *shuras* for men and women. The women thus mostly had their own CDC or women’s committee, which could be either a part of the joint CDC or a parallel forum for women’s needs and projects (see section 8 for a detailed discussion of the women’s *shura*). In one district, Andarab, the male community members had been very negative towards women’s participation in elections and joint

<sup>65</sup> AKDN (Aga Khan Development Network). Internal post-election evaluation reports for Badakhshan, no. 1 entitled “NSP Post election evaluation in the districts of Ishkashim and Wakhan, Badakhshan Province” and 2, entitled “NSP elections in district Ishkashim.” 2003.

<sup>66</sup> See the internal report prepared by the UN-Habitat, regional offices, for the AREU study of elections and community participation in NSP: *Questions concerning elections, women’s participation, and communities’ perceptions of the role of the government in NSP. Herat, Farah, Kandahar, Parwan, Bamyan Provinces.* Kabul. April 2004, as well as several issues of the UN-Habitat Newsletter “Voices” (n.d.) with accounts of positive experience with regard to women’s participation in Bamyan.

CDCs. As AKDN, the FP, had not wished to enforce female participation, partly because this would not likely lead to actual participation by women, and partly because AKDN did not wish to alienate the district, the approach taken was to allow time for the communities to evolve the notion of women's participation by themselves, meanwhile establishing parallel, self-selected "women's development committees" (see section 8).

### ***Elections in Practice***

In general, elections occurred according to the guidelines of NSP and the implementation manual adopted by the FPs. In every community, the election procedures began with the division of the village into clusters based on initial social mapping and geographical criteria (neighbourhood); each cluster normally included between 20-25 families. All eligible voters were registered by the FP. The elections were guided and supervised by the field staff of the FP in cooperation with the community, most frequently in the form of an election commission consisting of an SO and two to four community members who may include village elders, and perhaps the village teacher or a *mullah*. In the communities where GOAL was working, about 60-70 community members selected by the community participated in this process as members of an ad-hoc "empowerment committee," helping the field staff with the practical house-to-house registration. The elections included two steps: (i) the elections of cluster representatives for the CDC, and (ii) the election of the CDC posts among the representatives.

When the election took place, the registered voters participated and voted cluster by cluster. The male voters gathered in a public area, most frequently in the main mosque of the village or in the open space outside the mosque. (In the districts and communities studied, women were not allowed to appear in public places and participate in a mixed-gender election but voted separately in a house, as described below.) When the voters had all appeared and gathered in groups waiting to cast their vote, the registration cards were exchanged for ballot slips. The ballot box was usually placed centrally but at a short distance from the waiting lines of voters, and guarded by members of the election commission. One by one, the voters would go up to the box, write the name of the person whom they wanted as cluster representative on the ballot slip and put the ballot in the box. Illiterate voters were helped to write in the name of their preferred representative. The helper might be either a person from the community (a scribe, teacher, or other literate person), or a literate person from a different community in order to ensure impartiality; or he may be a facilitator from the FP. When all voters had cast their vote, the ballot box was opened by the election commission, the votes were counted and registered by the SO, and the elected members of the new CDC were announced. The second step of electing the chairperson and office-holders of the CDC might either take place immediately after the general election, or on the following day. In many cases, this election might occur through discussion and selection by the representatives themselves. If the elected representatives preferred it, or if no agreement could be reached, this election would also be in the form of secret voting.

### ***Women's Elections: Organisation and Practices***

While the men's elections took place in public spaces, elections for women usually took place in a private house. They were organised and supervised by female staff of the FP. In many villages, for example in Qarabagh, the male CDC decided the date of the women's election. Not only were the elections separate, in a number of the communities visited, there were different practices for voting between women and men. Especially in communities in Qarabagh, women's election practices included the practice of voting by hand-raising instead of by ballot, as described below. The practices of election of male representatives by women and vice-versa also varied in different communities. In some communities in Jawzjan, including the communities visited in Khwaja-de-Koh, separate

electoral clusters for women (“women’s clusters”) had been arranged in order to ensure women’s participation. Otherwise, women could also vote for men (they often said that they had voted for their husband, son, or other male relative), and men could vote for women.

Three elections for women were observed in Qarabagh.<sup>68</sup> In all three, the voting took place in the guest-room of a private house. The women arrived and participated cluster by cluster. For this reason, and because of the distances the women had to walk and the need for them to finish the household duties before they could leave their home, the process took time, and the elections lasted for several days or a whole week, until the women of all clusters had been able to participate. According to women’s narratives of their election experience in other communities in Qarabagh, as well as in the other districts covered by the study, this was a common practice.

In the elections observed, two different systems of voting were practiced. The first election occurred as secret voting by ballot, with the CFs assisting the women with writing the names of their chosen representative (the women were all illiterate). In the second and third elections, the women elected their representatives by discussion and joint decisions, in one case through hand-raising. These elections were thus selections rather than elections. (Similar practices have been reported by UN-Habitat from three districts in Kandahar.)<sup>69</sup>

In Qarabagh, this practice of election by discussion and selection rather than by secret voting had been accepted by SDF for the women’s elections in the cases when the women preferred it, in order to involve as many women as possible in the elections, including women who felt insecure or afraid of the “new” voting by ballot. The practice of voting by selection was termed “*open voting*.” It was also seen as more free than voting by ballot. In the elections observed, the women explained that there was no need for secret voting because all the families and women in each cluster know each other, perceiving themselves as *votandar*,<sup>70</sup> and they agreed on the choice of a representative. In addition, voting by selection was perceived as easier to practice for illiterate persons, because, as the women said, “*for literate people, the ballot system is better, they can write themselves. But for illiterate people as we are, ‘open voting’ by raising hands is better. Then we are not dependent on the facilitator.*” Thus it seemed that, to many women in the communities in Qarabagh, selection and “open voting” by hand-raising was perceived as more “fair” and “free” than the ballot system of secret voting.

In all the other districts where women were allowed by men to participate in elections, elections occurred by secret ballot.<sup>71</sup> It is possible, however, that voting by selection was sometimes practised in relation to women’s elections with the tacit consent of the CFs, but this issue was obviously difficult to explore in the presence of the facilitators. Most women in the communities in Dahna-e-Ghori, as well as in Aqcha and Faizabad Districts, said that they preferred the secret voting:

*“Election is better than selection, because everybody can share that and choose their own representative.”* (Women in Charm-Ab village, Dahna-e-Ghori District)

The collection of photographs of election events in each FP’s district office clearly reflected the importance and ceremony of the occasion in the community. The following

<sup>68</sup> Descriptions of cases of elections observed are included as a separate annex to this paper.

<sup>69</sup> According to an informal report which was prepared by the regional staff for the particular purpose of the present research: *Questions concerning elections, women’s participation, and communities’ perceptions of the role of the government in NSP. Herat, Farah, Kandahar, Parwan, Bamyan provinces.* Kabul, April 2004.

<sup>70</sup> People living in the same place or neighbourhood.

<sup>71</sup> The special practices of establishing “women’s development committees” by AKDN in Dahna-e-Ghori and Andarab Districts involved the selection of representatives by the women of the clusters in the village. See section 8 for more details.

narrative of an election is typical of the accounts of elections in all communities and districts visited:

*“On election day the whole village had come together, all people. Men voted in the mosque, the women in a house. About 80-85 percent voted. Women were also very interested. Before the election people wanted to get their voting card. People were arguing if somebody wanted to take their voting card. [There were] no examples of pressure. It was secret voting, the box was locked. We think that secret voting is good. The CFs have made us aware of the [NSP] programme. Secret voting is good for the reconstruction of Afghanistan ... [and] we feel safe - for the first time we voted safely, also women.”* (Female CDC members in the community of Khanaqa Uzbekia, Aqcha District).

The following table illustrates the participation in elections by men and women in the districts covered by the study, with the exception of Khwaja-de-Koh, where election data were not specified according to male and female participation.<sup>72</sup> (In the tables that concern participation in elections and CDCs in the present study, the percentages are based on the total voting by eligible and registered voters.)

*Table 1: Participation in Elections by Women and Men in the Six Districts*

	Male registered voters (total)	Female registered voters (total)	Male voters voted	Female voters voted	% of registered males voting	% of registered females voting	Total % of voting
Qarabagh	7983	8399	5532	6890	69.3	82.0	75.8
Dahna-e-Ghori	7498	7014	6478	6148	86.4	87.7	87.8
Andarab*	6352	0	6016	0	94.8	0	94.8*
Aqcha**	2182	2316	2173	2275	99.6	98.2	98.9
Faizabad***	2171	1980	1938	1756	89.2	88.7	89.0
Khwaja-de-Koh****	All voters registered 11,117		All voters voted 10,104		Total % voting: 90.8		

\* Women were not allowed to participate in elections in Andarab. The percentage of total voting is calculated on the basis of the eligible male population only. In one village (Arzengan Bala) elections had not yet taken place at the time of the data registration due to difficulties in implementation.

\*\* Data of eligible numbers of male and female voters were missing from one village (code no. 1706-10: (Bakawol Afghanistan/Turkmenia), while the number of male and female voters participating were complete.

\*\*\* Data of eligible numbers of male and female voters, and voters, were missing from one village (code no. 1708-01, Aliabad).

\*\*\*\* The election data available were not specified according to male and female participation. The data were related to batch 2, while the data for the other districts were from batch 1.

These figures show a significantly high level of participation in elections by women as well as men, with the exception of Andarab. Participation by women was as high as the male turnout, and in both Qarabagh and Dahna-e-Ghori more women than men voted. In Andarab, participation by male voters was remarkably high in view of the initial local reservations with regard to the programme.

Similar high percentages of voting by women have been found by other FPs in districts not included in the present study. UN-Habitat has reported good results with female

<sup>72</sup> The complete election statistics by village are included as a separate annex to this paper.

participation in election and voting, however with separate women's CDCs in all provinces except Bamyan<sup>73</sup> (see section 8).

In Aqcha, Faizabad and Dahna-e-Ghori Districts, the community members, both men and women, had frequent contact with male and female CFs. They generally said that they understood the concept of elections and participation in NSP well, and the level of information and awareness of the NSP and the elections was high. This was also found in interviews with community members during the research. In Qarabagh and Dahna-e-Ghori Districts, women's awareness of the programme and participation in the elections varied among the villages.

*Table 2: Participation in Elections by Women and Men Dahna-e-Ghori*

	Male registered voters	Female Registered voters	Male voters voted	Female voters voted	% of male voters	% of female voters	Total % voting
Zir Kala	135	110	124	98	91.8	89.1	90.6
Azizan Baba*	176	182	152	172	86.9	94.5	90.7
Tapa-e-Sangak	85	92	80	77	94.18	83.7	88.7
Charm-Ab	359	288	318	216	88.6	75.0	82.5
Nawa Khel*	133	138	121	117	90.9	84.8	87.8
Sayad	320	351	295	238	92.2	67.8	94.0

\*In these two villages, women were members of a joint CDC, see below.

In the two villages with the lowest female participation in elections, Charm-Ab and Sayad, practically all the women were illiterate. These mixed Tajik and Hazara villages were situated at a considerable distance from the district centre and seemed to be relatively isolated. During the war, the population had taken refuge in isolated mountain caves rather than leaving the province or the country, as the majority of the IDPs and refugees in the district had. Initially, the male population had been reluctant to let the women participate. This fact, in addition to the relative isolation of the villages, may possibly contribute to explaining women's limited access to information about NSP and participation in the elections. However, during the interviews the women all said that they expected very much from the voting.

### ***After Elections, What Happens to Women's Participation?***

The statistical data concerning the composition of the CDCs showed that women were represented in the CDCs in all districts except Andarab. Especially in Qarabagh and Khwaja-de-Koh, the figures seemed to indicate that women participated equally with men in all CDCs. But, did this mean that women's voices were actually heard in the CDCs? Behind the figures there were different realities which reflected local arrangements for broaching the tricky question of women's equal participation with men in decision-making.

<sup>73</sup> According to the internal report prepared by the UN-Habitat, regional offices, for the AREU study of elections and community participation in NSP: *Questions concerning elections, women's participation, and communities' perceptions of the role of the government in NSP. Herat, Farah, Kandahar, Parwan, Bamyan provinces.* Kabul, April 2004.

Table 3: Women's Participation in CDCs\*

	Total no. of CDCs	No. of CDCs with female members
Qarabagh	24	24
Dahna-e-Ghori	40	2
Andarab	39	0
Aqcha	16	6
Faizabad	16	11
Khwaja-de-Koh	16	16

\* Details for each village are included in the election statistics in a separate annex.

The apparently high degree of female members of CDCs in Qarabagh, Faizabad, and Khwaja-de-Koh Districts shown by the figures in the table did *not*, however, reflect actual participation by women in terms of practical participation in joint CDCs and joint decision-making with regard to project proposals and prioritisation. In all districts covered by the study, women's participation in CDCs together with men was a problem. As further discussed in section 8, women participated through separate women's CDCs in almost all communities. The only exceptions found were in Dahna-e-Ghori, Azizan-Abad and Nawa Khel villages, where two women were office-holders in joint CDCs, as chairperson (Nawa Khel), and accountant (Azizan Abad). But the female accountant in Azizan Abad, who was the only female CDC member, was not invited to participate in the CDC meetings by the male members. Similar experience of the isolation of female members in joint CDCs is reported by ACTED.<sup>74</sup> In the predominantly Uzbek villages of Yandarak and Fazilabad, Faizabad District, two women, both elderly, participated as non-office holders in joint CDC meetings, and in joint discussions with the research team.

Furthermore, it was found that the data regarding CDC membership in Khwaja-de-Koh did not reflect the actual participation of women with influence in decision-making in joint CDCs. In most communities in Khwaja-de-Koh, including the communities visited, separate voting arrangements had been provided for women in the form of "women's clusters," in which women could vote for female cluster representatives. Although these female representatives were listed as CDC members in the election statistics, in practice these representatives formed separate female CDCs or "women's *shuras*." Thus, this practice with regard to female participation in NSP, possibly indicated an approach of mandatory female participation which the other FPs had avoided.

### 6.3. Motives for Election of CDC Representatives

According to the male community members interviewed in the communities, the following qualities were regarded as important for a CDC cluster representative: a person should be honest, fair, and trustworthy, especially with regard to communication between cluster members and CDCs about the meetings and discussions of the CDC; he should "*think about the social*" (i.e., be interested in the society and willing to help the community members) (Shishkhana Uzbekia) - be a "*good member of the society*" (Yangi Kala); be liked by people; he should know all people in the village; and he should be able to work for the community and have capacity for work. Ability to work with foreign NGOs to help the community was regarded as an important skill (mentioned by male CDC members, Qulbaqa Areq village in Khwaja-de-Koh, and other communities). Wealth was not regarded as important. Education was frequently mentioned as a useful and desirable quality in a CDC member, but mostly in communities where some parts of the population were literate. For example, community members in a community where practically all adults were illiterate (Shishkhana Uzbekia, Faizabad District), said that "a little education" was useful (only the chairman of the CDC and the accountant had schooling, the chairman 10 years, and the accountant 7). Schooling was regarded as particularly desirable for the clerks (secretaries,

<sup>74</sup> See the report *Men's and Women's Participation in NSP; Preliminary Results*. ACTED. 2004:11.

*munchi*) and accountants of the CDC. Moreover, the traditional qualities ascribed to age (maturity) and experience were mentioned in many communities, especially where all or the majority of the population was illiterate.

According to women interviewed in all the districts where women were allowed to participate in elections, the qualities which women valued included honesty, truthfulness, and the courage to “speak up” about women’s problems at the *shura* meetings as well as to men and members of the male CDC. A representative should be brave and clever so that she was capable of helping other people, be a friend of the women, and the women should like her. A woman representative should also be a good Muslim. The importance of education varied in different communities. In communities where most or all women were illiterate, education was regarded as less important than personal and social qualities, similar to the male discussions of motives for electing representatives. Age (maturity) was also regarded as less important in relation to other qualities.

#### 6.4. Electoral Clusters - Locality, Kinship, or Both?

In the study communities, the registration of voters was largely organised in accordance with the NSP Operational Guidelines. Thus the electoral clusters were organised according to geographical criteria, with the exception of the districts where Actionaid is the FP.

As mentioned in Section 4, Actionaid’s approach to cluster formation is primarily based on socio-economic criteria. Clusters are identified among wealthy families, families of middle income, poor, and very poor families. Members of the different categories are given voting registration cards of different colours in order to make it easier for the community members. The purpose of this approach is to ensure an equitable representation in the CDC of all socio-economic categories of the communities. In addition, the national implementing partner of the FP said that the clusters had also been organised by neighbourhoods. There seemed to exist a certain confusion with regard to the clusters in the communities and CDCs visited in Khwaja-de-Koh. This confusion was related to the different categories of clusters according to socio-economic status as well as neighbourhoods, in addition to the practice of separate gender-based cluster formation to ensure women’s participation (the so-called “women’s clusters”). The community members interviewed in these communities did not perceive clear distinctions between the socio-economic clusters. “*We are all very poor,*” they said. However, the approach of basing clusters on socio-economic criteria could entail the risk of tensions and divisions arising in the CDC and between the clusters in the communities, namely between the interests of wealthy and poor community members and CDC representatives with regard to the prioritisation of projects.

Thus, clusters for elections normally comprise neighbourhoods which are often also a kinship group. On average, between 20 to 24 families were in each cluster. However, it was found in most communities that the community members, especially women, perceived the clusters as kinship groups rather than neighbourhoods. In practice, it appeared that there was a considerable cross-cutting and overlapping of residential units and kinship (*khaumi*) relations. Women especially tended to vote for relatives, even if they lived in different clusters.<sup>75</sup> Although the women said that they did not vote for a representative from another cluster, they sometimes did so on purpose if they wished to support a particular relative. In some cases, for example in Qarabagh, the staff of the FP (SDF) explained that the women did not know exactly which cluster they belonged to.

In all districts included in the study, community members mentioned the concept of *khaumi* (lineage solidarity) as important in relation to voting as well as to community

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<sup>75</sup> This was confirmed to be the case in all the SDF’s NSP districts according to the SDF NSP Manager, Jana Frey.



cooperation. At the same time, families in one neighbourhood often perceived themselves as “*votandars*,” namely, “people sharing the same place or homeland.”<sup>76</sup> For example, in group discussions with women in Qarabagh about their experience of elections, the women said that *votandari* was more important to them than actual kinship relations. They said that among *votandar*, “*women are like sisters and mothers*.” But many male community members in Qarabagh also emphasised the importance of *khaumi*, in some cases claiming that the shared residential locality of a cluster was the result of the fact that every family (or almost all) in the cluster were somehow interrelated and *khaumi*. Since the communities in Qarabagh were predominantly Pashtun, these perceptions might be related to the important role of the notions of *khaum* and *khaumi* among Pashtuns. However, similar perceptions of the clusters were also found among communities in other districts visited, including in non-Pashtun villages. In Qarabagh, the community members explained that the strong feelings of unity and common belonging in a group perceiving themselves as *votandar* had been due to the fact that the majority of the population had been refugees in Iran or Pakistan. In exile, the common identity as belonging to the same homeland, and the shared memories of Afghanistan, had bound them together, whereas kinship relations had come to play a less important role since families and relatives had often become separated and scattered in distant places.<sup>77</sup> However, judging from the community members’ perceptions of shared residency in relation to kinship ties, it appears that refugee returnees to a certain extent have succeeded in resettling as groups interrelated through kinship ties. In addition, the different perceptions with regard to the role of *votandari* in relation to kinship of women and men may reflect different experiences of “practical kinship”<sup>78</sup> in everyday life.

## 6.5. Secret Voting and Voting as “Fair and Free”?

The secret voting practised in the context of the NSP elections was generally highly appreciated in the communities included in the study. It was frequently described as free (*asadi*), fair, clean, and in most cases also as safe.

*“The voting was good. The box was locked ...The box was opened in front of all people ..”*  
(Woman in Shishkhana Arabia village, Faizabad District)

*“The voting was fair. The counting was correct.”* (Male community members in Khaltachaq, Aqcha)

*“In the elections, people voted very peacefully. The election was in the mosque. We voted for representatives ... we voted with the ballot papers ... even the commander of the village took part in the elections. No weapons were allowed during elections. The commander voted for us, he did not vote for himself, we did not vote for the commander but there were no threats afterward.”* (Community members in Shishkhana Afghani, Faizabad District)

These statements by members of the communities included in the research are supported by similar views from districts and communities where other FPs are working. Thus ACTED reported that people in the district of Pashtun Kot, Faryab Province, found that “*secret voting is good, because then people are free to disagree, and nobody would know who it was*.”<sup>79</sup> UN-Habitat reported from the provinces of Herat, Farah, Kandahar, Bamyan, and Parwan that the elections had been generally free and fair, with the exception of attempts by local commanders and *mullahs* in certain districts to influence the process. In

<sup>76</sup> The concept of *votan* (“homeland”) is highly relative, principally referring to “nearness” rather than distance in relation to different contexts (see, e.g., Glatzer, B. “War and Boundaries in Afghanistan: Significance and Relativity of Local and Social Boundaries.” In: *Die Welt des Islams*, vol. 41, 3., 2001).

<sup>77</sup> Ibid. See also Boesen, 1986, op cit.

<sup>78</sup> Bourdieu, op cit.

<sup>79</sup> Personal communication, e-mail, Elizabeth Kronoff, ACTED.

Bamyan, people perceived the secret voting as giving “*less space for manipulation of election outcomes.*”<sup>80</sup>

In some communities there appeared to be a conflict between the practices of secret voting and local customs of community decision-making by discussion and hand-raising. According to this view, secret voting (voting by ballot) could invite cheating and thus be misused and unfair (however, no examples were mentioned of such cheating). This view was especially expressed by women, in particular by female community members and members of the women’s *shura* in the relatively conservative communities in Qarabagh where voting occurred through hand-raising and selection. This was also found in a women’s meeting in Sayad Markazi in Andarab. These views further highlight the key role of trust between the community and the FP, especially in relation to such a sensitive issue as secret voting. As emphasised by the AKDN staff in Baghlan: “*Secret ballot is a matter of confidence.*”<sup>81</sup>

As mentioned above, doubt and distrust with regard to the elections was also found in some communities visited, especially in Andarab:

*“I don’t like the shura and I was not interested in this election. I did not vote. Why should I vote while I know that nothing will be changed. This kind of NGOs just come here to waste their time, and also the Andarab commanders never want to lose their power .... ”* (Middle-aged man interviewed in a shop, Khishinabad village, Andarab)

Almost all women in the study communities said that they needed the permission of their husband, brother, son or other male guardian (*maharam*) in order to be allowed to participate in elections. Furthermore, they were mostly told by the husband or male relative whom they should vote for. In some communities in Aqcha and Faizabad, women said that they were able to vote according to their own choice. But, on closer questioning, all had discussed their voting with their husband, brother, or son before the election.

Just as women need men’s permission to vote, women generally also needed their permission in order to participate in women’s *shuras* or women’s committees as representatives. This could prevent women from participating even if they were elected by their cluster. In several villages, for example in the village of Charbagh, Faizabad District, the female representatives elected were not allowed by their husbands to participate. The male members of the CDC said that, “*here, men do not like that women are members of the shura.*” Similar to other communities where women were not allowed to participate in a joint CDC, the FP had established a “women’s *shura*” as an alternative forum for the women to discuss their needs and identify projects. This women’s *shura* included the four women who had been elected but not allowed to participate in the CDC. In two communities visited in Andarab, where women’s committees were about to be formed, the women were afraid to participate in the meetings due to fear of their husband’s anger. They were also afraid of having their names written down as representatives by the CF, because they had been told by the men that the staff of the city-based AKDN would then take them away to Kabul to make them “*like Kabul women or even like foreigners*” and make them forget how to behave properly as Afghan women.

In several communities, for example the village of Tapa-e-Sangak, Dahna-e-Ghori, the women explained that failing to obtain permission from male relatives could lead to the husband divorcing them, in accordance with the Islamic divorce “*talaq*” which is unilateral and only requires that the husband repeats three times, “*I divorce you.*” In rural Afghan

<sup>80</sup> According to the internal report prepared by the UN-Habitat, regional offices. *Questions concerning elections, women’s participation, and communities’ perceptions of the role of the government in NSP. Herat, Farah, Kandahar, Parwan, Bamyan provinces.* Kabul. April 2004.

<sup>81</sup> Personal communication, Sachin Sachdeva, Regional Project Coordinator, AKDN Provincial Office, Pul-e-Khumri, 21 March 2004.

society, where families are primarily structured according to patrilineal descent, divorce means that the husband's lineage retains control of the couple's children. Thus a divorced woman would lose not only her access to livelihoods through her husband's lineage, but also her children. For this reason, women took the need to ask permission from men before participating in NSP for granted, and were very surprised, and sometimes offended, that the issue was even raised and discussed by the research team.

In light of the need for women to obtain the permission of their husband or *maharam* in order to participate in voting and the choice of cluster representatives, as well as of the different voting practices including "open voting," it is clear that the principle of secret voting in the context of the NSP elections did not, and could not, apply entirely to women in the communities looked at in this study.<sup>82</sup>

## 6.6. Interference in Elections by Local Elites and Political Parties

The NSP block grants are obviously an attractive new resource for different local-level stake-holders in addition to the communities covered by the programme. Attempts to gain access to these assets through forcible influence over CDC elections on the part of local elites, commanders, or parties have thus been a significant problem in relation to NSP in many provinces. The means of influencing the NSP elections may also include existing patron-client relations, for example, between landowners and tenants or share-croppers. With regard to the districts included in the study, there are indications and anecdotal evidence, including evidence provided by the FPs, that local economic or political interests and affiliations in some instances have influenced voting. This included examples of influence by political parties or militias, including *Hezb-e-Islami* in Qarabagh, *Hezb-e-Islami* and *Jamiat-e-Islami* in Dahna-e-Ghori and Andarab, as well as conflicting allegiances to *Jamiat-e-Islami* and *Junbesh-e-Melli Islami* in Jawzjan and Saripul.<sup>83</sup> However, it was not possible to explore these issues within the limited scope of the present study, as this would have required longer-term field work to obtain information on the actual allegiances and factional divisions within villages, something people do not readily volunteer information about. In general, the issue of patronage and factionalism plays an important role in local-level political dynamics in Afghanistan.<sup>84</sup> Although the CDCs in all the districts under study included "landowners," this concept in itself did not necessarily indicate wealthy landlords.<sup>85</sup>

While almost all elections in the districts were reported to have occurred in an orderly fashion and without interference, electioneering or candidacies, there were some cases of commanders attempting to force the community members to elect them as chairmen of the CDC. This had been the case in Qarabagh,<sup>86</sup> Dahna-e-Ghori and Andarab, and the districts in Jawzjan. UN-Habitat reported<sup>87</sup> that in the three districts in Herat Province, some commanders and mullahs tried to prevent people from participating in the elections. In the three districts in Bamyan, where the communities had found the elections free and fair, "*these results were unexpected for the people holding power traditionally, who had*

<sup>82</sup> In several cases, the research team found that the discussions of this issue seemed to be sensitive and upsetting to the women. In other situations, such as in communities in Aqcha and Faizabad Districts in Jawzjan, community women were interested in discussing the subject and comparing the Afghan practices with the actual practices in many Western families, where husband and wife may discuss election and voting issues and for whom they would vote, before an election.

<sup>83</sup> For example, Annette Wulff, German Agro Action, reported a conflict in one village in Saripul between supporters of *Jamiat-e-Islami* and *Junbesh* over the NSP CDC. Interview in Kabul 23 February 2004.

<sup>84</sup> See for example Christensen 1982, 1995, op cit.

<sup>85</sup> The category "landowner" in the NSP form does not specify size of the landed property. Thus it was not possible to distinguish between landlords and small-holders from the data.

<sup>86</sup> Personal communication, Jana Frey, Project Development Manager, and Dr. Zia Safiq, Provincial NSP Manager, SDF, Kabul, 24 February 2004.

<sup>87</sup> According to the internal report prepared by the UN-Habitat, regional offices, for the AREU study of elections and community participation in NSP: *Questions concerning elections, women's participation, and communities' perceptions of the role of the government in NSP. Herat, Farah, Kandahar, Parwan, Bamyan provinces.* Kabul, April 2004.

*perhaps hoped to be elected into the CDC.*”<sup>88</sup> In Farah (two districts), only a few communities had experienced attempts by commanders to influence the outcome; and in Kandahar (three districts), it was estimated that in approximately 30 percent of the elections there were similar attempts by influential people in the area, such as landlords, commanders, and *maliks*. The report comments that “*we suspect campaigning attempts before our visits. We would have had better results if we would have had the logistical support to visit more frequently and establish better relationships with the community members.*”<sup>89</sup> Similarly, in Parwan (three districts), it was noted that “*a commander who was voted into the CDC tried to influence elections of CDC officials by trying to persuade CDC members that he should become chairperson. But the CDC refused, then a conflict arose. Elections then had to be postponed, and the District Governor was asked to attend, and then the District Governor, Facilitating Partner, District Manager, Social Organizer and CDC sat down and agreed that the CDC should elect an alternative candidate.*”<sup>90</sup>

However, CARE International has reported numerous cases from Pashtun provinces, where CARE is the FP, of interference in elections by local commanders, landlords, and *mullahs*. In these areas, it appears that such local powerful persons constitute a considerable proportion of the members of CDCs. Similar trends have been reported by other FPs, including Concern International.

At the same time, community members in all communities visited during the study strongly resented and resisted interference by traditional powerful persons.

In the village of Charm-Ab, Dahna-e-Ghori District, a local commander who had controlled the area for many years, extracting substantial amounts of wheat from the villages with the support of a well-armed militia, had tried to pressurise the community to elect him for the CDC. The community had refused, however, because they wished to use the opportunity of the NSP election and the support of the FP, AKDN, to rid themselves of his control. The commander continued to complain about the “unfairness” of the elections, accusing the FP of corruption (i.e. through accepting bribes from the community), demanding re-election, and generally attempting to harass the community. The community members on their part refused these attempts by the commanders to regain control. “*We don’t want a shura with powerful commanders. Because of the commanders we are homeless, our children are homeless, but the commanders have arms. Now the power is in our hands, this is good*” (CDC members in Charm-Ab and the neighbouring village Sayad).

In Qarabagh, SDF staff told of a case of two commanders who had attempted to force the members of a community to elect them for the CDC but had been rejected by the community. The people had told the commanders, “*During the war, we did all that you said, but now it is our people who decide, now it is our turn.*”

### ***The Lessons of Election and Voting***

The elections for CDCs are thus a central element of NSP, both with regard to community participation in reconstruction and development, and as a catalyst for inclusive learning about democracy. It appears that the CDC election experience has thus impacted positively on perceptions of national elections and community participation. The agency Global Risk Strategies that is involved in voter registration has found in Takhar Province that the task of explaining the concept of elections and universal voting rights, as well as voter registration, was very easy in the communities that were involved in NSP, compared

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid, 2. The report covers these issues in the following districts and provinces: Enjil, Zendajan and Ghozarat Districts, Herat Province; Poshterod and Balabluk in Farah Province; Dandh, Damand, and Arghandab, Kandahar Province; Pashjir, Baghram and Salang in Parwan Province, and Yakawlang, Bamyān and Saigan, Bamyān Province.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid, 4.

to non-NSP communities.<sup>91</sup> At the same time, the experience of NSP elections may have created positive expectations of democratic participation with regard to the upcoming national elections.

*“In the future we could maybe elect our cabinet member by the same way of election.”* (Male community members, Kalta Shakh Sufia village, Aqcha District)

With regard to women’s participation, the experience of the NSP elections also reflects considerable variations in the practices of women’s elections. These practices may sometimes consist of selection rather than election. While these flexible approaches to elections at the local community level allow the process to be adapted to different local conditions with regard to women’s participation, it is not possible to apply them in the context of national elections, which have to follow a uniform procedure.



Voting for CDCs, as observed in a village in the study

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<sup>91</sup> Personal communication, Pat Foley, Monitoring and Evaluation Advisor, Concern International, Concern, Kabul, 9 June 2004.

## 7. CDCs - Perceptions and Practices

The primary function of the CDC is to identify project needs in close cooperation and consultation with the community members by whom it was elected, to prioritise projects, and to prepare and submit proposals for projects to MRRD. After the project has been approved, and the block grant released to the village, the CDC is responsible for managing the physical implementation of the project with community contributions. The CDC is furthermore responsible for the procurement of goods, works and services, as well as accounting and reporting on expenditures and the progress of the project. For these functions, the CDC can hire technical assistance, including engineers and support with accounting. However, as both are in short supply at the present time, especially in remote areas, the CDCs have to rely principally on the initial support of the FP. The CDC is trained and supported by the FP to undertake these tasks. This community-level capacity-building is an important element of NSP.

The formal posts of the CDC are: chairman/chairperson (*rais*), deputy chairman, secretary or clerk (*munchi*), and accountant. There may also be deputy or assistant clerks and accountants, according to the size of the CDC and the community. Most CDCs also include at least two or three community representatives without particular functions, and also select committees for special purposes, including project feasibility studies, the collection of bids from providers of services, and the evaluation of bids.

In the communities visited during the research, the communities of the first batch had completed and submitted their proposals. This had occurred mainly according to the NSP Operational Manual guidelines. The communities in Qarabagh (SDF) had completed elections and submitted proposals in the autumn of 2003 (October-December); in Dahna-e-Ghori and Andarab (AKDN), elections were completed in all communities but some community CDCs were still in the process of preparing and submitting project proposals. However, in GOAL and Actionaid's districts, as well as in the districts of some FPs not included in the field research (for example ACTED, CARE International, and Concern International), the preparatory process had taken much longer than the time allowed by these guidelines, which is eight to ten weeks. This had been primarily due to the difficulties of establishing a quality process of community awareness and mobilisation that could involve community members in a process of real community cooperation with participatory identification and prioritisation of projects. Thus it has been emphasised by all the FPs involved in the study, both those FPs with whom the research was carried out, and the others that were interviewed in Kabul or contributed information otherwise, that quality of process takes time. Such a quality process of community mobilisation is necessary to promote and enhance local participation and ownership of the CDCs in communities.

However, despite being "behind schedule," the communities in all the study districts were eagerly awaiting the release of funds, so that the projects could get started. With regard to projects related to farming activities, such as reconstruction of irrigation systems, construction or deepening of wells, and purchase of poultry, goats, sheep or cattle for women's activities, it was especially important that the projects could get underway as early in the agricultural season as possible.

### 7.1. The CDC as a "New *Shura*"

How were the CDCs understood in the communities and how were the functions and mandate of the CDCs perceived and understood by the CDC members?<sup>92</sup> The CDC as a

<sup>92</sup> The English term "CDC" was not familiar in all communities, not even to CDC members themselves. Instead, the term "*shura*" was used in all communities. CDC was thus mostly translated as *shura* both in questions and answers.

formal community council was certainly perceived by the members of the communities in the study as a community body which was new in several important ways. First of all, it was elected by the community according to “*their own wish*,” as emphasised in many communities. Moreover, the CDC was open to the participation of women, if the community found it appropriate. In addition to the CDC function of proposing projects for the improvement of the community, the most decisive aspect with regard to the perceived credibility of the CDC and the community members’ trust in the “*new shura*” was the fact that the CDC was a formal and legitimate body. It had been registered and authorised by the government, and the members of the CDC had been registered in the provincial MRRD office with photos and signatures or thumb-prints. Through this, the CDC had a legitimate status and official functions in relation to government structures, as well as to other external structures and bodies such as NGOs. This official authorisation gave the CDC and its members status in the communities.

Thus the CDCs were already perceived in the communities as a meaningful local-level institution, which could also have wider functions than the NSP (this enhanced role of the CDC is fully in line with the aims of the programme). Such perspectives of the CDCs were found particularly in the communities in Aqcha and Faizabad Districts.

*“Other organisations could also work with the CDCs because people trust in them and want to work with them [the CDCs].”* (Female CDC member in Shishkhana Afghania, Faizabad District)

*“The most important thing about CDC is to work together to become self-sufficient, not to be dependent on help in the future.”* (Male CDC member, Charbagh village, Faizabad District)

The usefulness of having a representative body, elected by community members, to act on behalf of the community, was strongly emphasised in many of the study districts.

In all of the communities visited, the CDCs were clearly perceived as a new *shura* which was different from the village councils or other institutions that had existed before. Such structures had included village headmen, *malik*, also termed as *qariadar*, or councils of elders. Moreover, the CDC was generally not confused with the old village structures for conflict resolution if one had existed in the community. Many CDC members explained that the new *shuras* were better because the members were elected representatives of the community, and the CDCs were therefore reliable and trustworthy. For example, the CDC in the joint village of Charm-Ab and Sayad, Dahna-e-Ghori District, said that, “*The old shura just grabbed the aid from the NGOs and used it for themselves.*” Similar statements were made in many other communities.

In the village of Khanaqa Arabia Sufia, Aqcha District, the new CDC chairman was a young and energetic man in his early twenties with seven grades of schooling and experience of working with NGOs both locally and in Iran as a refugee. He, as well as three other male CDC members who were present at the meeting and who were all older than the chairman, clearly understood the functions and tasks of the new *shura* as the framework for cooperation for improving the community, in the context of NSP as well as in relation to other structures. In the words of the chairman: “*The primary purpose of the new shura is to work for the community... The shura is good because people can decide for themselves. Before we could not do anything without asking the elders.*”

This may perhaps also reflect a certain impatience on the part of young and active persons with some education, who are eager to participate in social and economic development.

In the village of Khanaqa Uzbekia in Aqcha District, members of the CDC and other community members explained the difference between the “*new*” *shura* and what had gone before.

*“Before there was no shura. We had an elder (rish-e-safid) who was also the qariadar (village headman). The rish-e-safid came together with other elders from other villages and discussed. Now there is one in the new shura. We have the tradition that without an elder we cannot decide anything. It is not the same rish-e-safid. Before there were a lot of commanders. Now we have elected very useful persons to the village shura. Now we are free to decide ourselves.”*

This example is typical of communities’ experience of the CDC in relation to the old governance structures. In the customary informal system of community governance, a village *malik* or *qariadar* could be elected by the people, but he was usually a rich and influential person. During the decades of war, the commanders and militias that had emerged in the context of the anti-government resistance groups, the *mujahidin*, frequently assumed the control of villages as *maliks*. In many communities visited, this was still said to be the case:

*“The commander is rich and armed. People have to ask permission from him about what they would do. He supported mostly the rich, the poor only a little.”* (Community member in Shishkhana Uzbekia, Faizabad District)

An important aspect of the role of a traditional *malik* was his function as middle-man or “broker” between the village and the government at the district level (*woluswali*). This function could include for example the reception of new edicts from the district office and reading and explaining them to the community; and reporting from the village to the district office matters pertaining to land taxation and conscription to the army. Apart from such unpopular functions, he might also play a role in the settling of local conflicts; in more serious cases he would, however, need to resort to the assistance of the *woluswali* in order to solve the problem or punish a culprit.

The informal *shura* or *jirga* had even less access to sanctions in relation to conflict-control and relied widely on the custom of unanimous decisions on the part of all elders participating as representatives of the families or lineages of the village. Compared to the new CDC or the new *shura*, these traditional discussions were often said to be very time-consuming, but not always efficient:

*“Before, about twenty or thirty elders were sitting in here [in the village meeting room where the discussion was held with the research team] discussing and wasting their time. People think now that the NSP shura is more efficient, and the rest of the village can do their work.”* (CDC and community members in Yandarak village, Faizabad District)

### ***The Issue of Age -Trends of Change from Elders to Younger Members?***

While a detailed and systematic investigation of this issue in all districts and communities was not possible in the scope of the present study, it was found through observations and discussions that there were signs of changing trends with regard to the age of *shura* members towards including younger members. Although in addition to this emerging trend of participation by young community members, it was also found in several communities that elders had also been elected as members of the CDC. In some cases, for example in the village of Yandarak, Faizabad District, the community members said that some or all of these elders had previously been members of the customary *shura*.



Table 5: Age composition of CDCs in the study districts (male CDCs only)<sup>93</sup>

District	Total no. of males who stated their age (of all members)	Age 18-29	% of total no. stated	Age 30-39	% of total no. stated	Age 40-49	% of total no. stated	Age 50+	% of total no. of stated
Qarabagh	296 (296)	20	6.8%	76	25.7%	79	26.7%	121	40.9%
Dahna-e-Ghori	57 (238)	11	19.3	11	19.3	18	31.6	17	29.8%
Andarab	45 (238)	3	6.7%	12	26.7%	13	28.9%	17	37.8%
Khwaja-de-Koh	62 (146)	8	12.9%	14	22.6%	16	25.8	24	38.7%
Aqcha	41 (134)	2	4.9%	8	19.5%	13	31.7%	18	43.9%
Faizabad	70 (89)	5	7.1	21	30.0%	17	24.3%	27	38.6%
Total	571	49	Total average 9.6%	142	Total average 24.0%	156	Total average 23.9%	224	Total average 31.8%
Total below 50	347								60.8%

(Source: NSP Database. It should be noted that apparently not all CDC members have provided information regarding their age, as there are significant discrepancies between the total number of CDC members in the election statistics and the data supplied to the NSP database.)

Thus the majority of the male CDC members were below the age of 50, 9.6 percent aged below 30 years, and 47.9 percent between 30 and 49 years of age. Less than one-third (31.8 percent) of the CDC members in the districts were aged 50 and above.

The practice of electing elders in the NSP communities, together with persons with other qualities than age, is not surprising. In Afghan society, as in most other traditional societies where the education and experience of the modern world has not yet influenced the lifestyles and customs of the village, elders, including women, are respected for the knowledge and wisdom gathered through a lifetime, as reflected by the statement quoted above, from the community of Khanaqa Uzbekia, Aqcha District (“*we have the tradition that without an elder we cannot decide anything*”). In several communities, the *mullah* was also described as a “*wise and educated person who is much respected.*” That elders, who in some cases had also been members of the traditional *shura*, are still elected as representatives in the CDC, could be understood in light of cultural and social continuity in NSP villages, especially in view of the short timeframe of communities’ experience of NSP.

Thus there appears to be a tension, which could be very constructive in a future perspective, between generations and age groups in relation to reconstruction and development. This tension includes the relation between the traditionally respected age groups of mature men and women, and young and active persons who are eagerly interested in change and development initiatives, many of whom have a certain amount of education or practical skills. Many young community members have experienced life in other countries, having grown up in exile. This also reflects a tension between traditional and conservative wisdom and new education and knowledge; the experience of age versus youthful energy and openness to change. This issue was also found to exist in relation to women.

<sup>93</sup> The CDC data available only covered the male CDC members in the districts.

The chairman of the CDC in the village of Khanaqa Arabia Sufia, Aqcha District, was an example of the emerging role of the young generation in the context of community development. He was in his early 20s, had seven years of schooling, and was eager to work hard for the community. The same trend was found in a community in Khwaja-de-Koh.

Similar indications of participation by younger community members in CDCs have been found by UN-Habitat in Herat Province, especially regarding females. According to these findings, the majority of all the elected members (55.6 percent) were below 50 years. However, 75.7 percent of the women members were in this category. Furthermore, 47.6 percent of male members were between 30-49 years of age, while 45.3 percent of female members were between 18 to 29 years old.<sup>94</sup>

### ***The “New Shuras” vs. Existing Local-level Power Structures***

As discussed in section 6, there were problems of interference in CDC affairs by local powerful persons such as landlords, *mullahs*, and commanders. Similar attempts on the part of local elites to become elected members of CDCs also was reported by FPs from other areas and districts. According to the experience of CARE, the presence of local elite persons in the CDCs was estimated to be as high as 50-70 percent. This indicates that the new CDCs do not entirely replace the old power structures, and that in many places, underlying tensions and conflicts exist between the CDCs and local power-elites.

However, in the districts included in the study, the data showed the presence of only one commander as a member of a CDC in Qarabagh. The election statistics from Khwaja-de-Koh, which provide the names and occupations of all male CDC members, furthermore, show that eight *mullahs* were members, one as chairman, two as assistant chairman, three as secretaries, and one as treasurer. In this context, the literacy skills of *mullahs* are likely to contribute to their election for these posts.

*Table 6: Commanders, mullahs, and landowners as members of CDCs*

District	Commanders	Mullahs	Landowners*
Qarabagh	1	5	201
Dahna-e-Ghori	(no data)	(no data)	49
Andarab	(no data)	(no data)	22
Khwaja-de-Koh	(no data)	8	9
Aqcha	(no data)	3	47
Faizabad	(no data)	3	64

(Source: NSP Database.)

\* As discussed in section 6, the category of “landowner” is imprecise, as the size of landholdings is not to be specified in “Form 2”. The data thus do not reflect socio-economic differentiations, if any, with significant representation of wealthy landlords.

In the districts in Herat, UN-Habitat found that only 5.2 percent (86) of the total male elected members were commanders, *mullahs* or landlords (two commanders were elected as chairmen, and two as general members).<sup>95</sup>

If there is indeed a trend of dominance by traditional leaders and local elites in some of the NSP areas, it could have a negative influence on community cooperation, especially with regard to access to the block grants. On the other hand, as commented by UN-Habitat, while “*the information does show the emergence of a new cadre of leaders in the election process ... the process is flexible enough to include traditional leaders. This situation...must be closely monitored to ensure that the process of social change catalysed*”

<sup>94</sup> UN-Habitat Afghanistan/NSP. *National Solidarity Programme, Monthly Report no. 9*. February 2004; 9.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*

*by the NSP elections does not threaten traditional leaders and provoke a backlash against either the elected CDC or the NSP [and the] government.*"<sup>96</sup>

However, in the case that a community CDC is dominated by traditional powers, there is a risk that the CDCs could emerge as a new framework for the continuation of existing local-level power relations. Such power could be based on the key role of the CDC as the mediator between the community and NSP with regard to project proposals and block grants. It has been seen before that access to aid can be an important new asset for establishing power and influence, as demonstrated by the role of certain *mujahidin* commanders in relation to cooperation with NGOs during the 1980s and 1990s.<sup>97</sup>

## 7.2. Views about the Future of CDCs

*"The CDC is useful - when a community solves a problem together as in the CDC, it will be very useful for a community in the future .. for building a school or a mosque.."* (Community members, Khaltachaq village, Aqcha District)

*"After the project proposal is finished we will cooperate in the shura as long as we live."* (Middle-aged woman, member of CDC in the village of Alali Mohajir, Aqcha District)

There were numerous examples, especially in Dahna-e-Ghori, Aqcha and Faizabad Districts, of perceptions that this new *shura*, as well as the system of secret elections, was a useful institution which they hoped would continue. In the future, communities envisioned that the *shura* could be used for relations with other NGOs, for joint undertakings, such as the building of a school or a mosque or even, as stated by CDC members in Yangi Qala, Faizabad District, that the CDC could be a forum for appointing for example a new, competent and reliable headman (*qariadar*) or a *mullah*. If this becomes practical in the future, the CDC would contribute significantly to changing the customary local-level relations of power and dependency in relation to local power structures, including *mullahs* and *maliks*.

In terms of future sustainability, the CDCs need time if they are to be consolidated as local-level institutions of self-governance. In this regard, community cooperation and self-initiative projects in the context of *ashar* described above were envisaged to strengthen the local credibility and capacity of the CDCs in relation to project management and implementation. The CDCs particularly need to demonstrate effectively their ability and capacity to manage block grants and implement projects, in ways that are fully participatory and transparent to community members.

What also remains to be done to constitute the CDCs as viable local governance institutions is to establish more formalised linkages with existing state apparatuses at the district and possibly also provincial level. At the moment, the relation between CDCs and the state is at the central MRRD level from where the block grants flow, although this is mediated by the provincial MRRD offices. There is as yet no clear linkage between CDCs and district authorities that gives the CDCs any role in participating in governance at the district level. The NSP has recently taken steps to rectify this gap by establishing a block grant window for district school rehabilitation where CDC representatives, together with district and provincial authorities, will plan the district level rehabilitation of schools, and where the CDC representatives will have to consent in order for these plans to receive funding. Further roles envisaged for the CDCs vis-à-vis district authorities, apart from their involvement in such joint planning, is a role in the monitoring of delivery of social services such as education or health.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> See for example Christensen, 1995, op. cit.

## 8. Women's Participation in NSP, CDCs and Women's *Shura*

*"Sometimes men listen to women's problems, all men are not the same, some men are friendly, but most are not...Men tell women to be quiet."* (Women in Sayad Markazi, Andarab)

*"Our village people know clearly the rights of women."* (Female chairperson of CDC in Nawa Khel, Dahna-e-Ghori District)

### 8.1. Perceptions of Women's Participation and Access to Information

As already discussed, women's participation in NSP is a very sensitive and difficult issue in most communities and districts. All FPs involved in the study found that this issue had generally been the most difficult aspect of implementation. The issue of women's participation in planning and decision-making for community development seemed to be new and disturbing in relation to the most central and fundamental values and norms of Afghan culture and society, namely those that concern gender relations in the context of the family and family honour. To put these norms and values on the agenda as an issue of debate in the context of social change clearly appeared to cause deep tensions or anxieties within most communities. But these anxieties mostly reflected insecurity with regard to changing gender relations on the part of men. The majority of women involved in the study, especially younger women, but also middle-aged and older women, expressed a strong interest in participating in the programme. This was also reflected in the very high degree of participation in the CDC elections. A female monitoring officer from ACTED summed up the issue in the following words, *"The main problem with women's participation is the men."*<sup>98</sup>

Almost all of the FPs involved in the study had adopted the attitude that the issue of women's participation in elections and CDCs should be addressed very carefully and not be enforced, as this could entail the risk of alienating communities entirely from participation in NSP. The FPs regarded it as necessary to let the process of women's participation evolve gradually amongst the communities themselves in the framework of trust building between the community and the FP. In this regard, all FPs had experienced the need for careful and sustained facilitation by female staff in order to reach and involve the women. The female CFs played a key role in this process, as also mentioned in section 4.

However, in recognition of the sensitivity of this issue and in order to avoid endangering the overall programme of community development, women's participation is not mandatory in NSP. As mentioned earlier, the NSP Operational Manual allows for alternative provisions to ensure women's participation in NSP, if women are not allowed to participate fully in the CDC, and even recognise CDCs as properly constituted if only 40 percent of the electorate comprising men alone have voted.

Nevertheless, in some areas and communities, the community members had understood the "message" of NSP differently. Here the wish for participation in the programme as a means to obtain access to development aid in the form of block grants had overshadowed the reluctance to let women participate at least symbolically. This was reflected by the following example from Nahrin District in Baghlan, told by a male monitoring officer of ACTED:<sup>99</sup>

*"When the elections [for the CDC] were about to begin, a mullah was standing in the field where the elections would take place. He was very angry that women would also participate in the elections, separately, and shouted 'what, women?!' He declared that he did not allow it, this was forbidden. Then another respected and educated elder of the community went up*

<sup>98</sup> Personal communication, Ms. Assya, Monitoring Officer, ACTED, interview at AREU, Kabul, 7 June 2004.

<sup>99</sup> Personal communication, Mr. Enyatullah, Monitoring Officer, ACTED, interview at AREU, Kabul, 7 June 2004.

*to him and persuaded him to allow women to participate, because otherwise the community would not be able to benefit from NSP and get the block grants.”*

On the other hand, there were also many examples of communities and districts where the male population were tolerant of women’s participation or positively supported the women. This might reflect a growing recognition of a need to include the whole community, also women, in the new process of reconstruction and development. Examples of this were found in some communities in Dahna-e-Ghori, as well as in many communities in Aqcha and Faizabad Districts. In some cases, male community members explained that they had understood the need to include women in the development of the community because of their experience during the war and as refugees. Thus, for example, in a predominantly Hazara village in Dahna-e-Ghori where the majority of the population had been refugees abroad, the chairperson of the CDC was a female teacher. The CDC of the mainly Uzbek village of Fazilabad, Faizabad District, also included one middle-aged female member. She was present at the discussion with the research team, which was in itself a very rare occurrence. The male chairman explained that:

*“.. about the NSP .. we first understood that we should participate in the community with each other and sit together and discuss what we needed, also with the women ...”*

Similar examples have been found and described by UN-Habitat and CARE International, especially with regard to Hazara villages in Bamyan and Ghazni.<sup>100</sup> It appeared that Hazara communities were often more positive towards women’s participation than communities of other ethnic backgrounds. Thus, positive attitudes towards women’s participation might possibly also be related to factors other than war and exposure to change through refugee experience, but also to factors such as ethnicity and levels of formal education.

In all other districts and communities, the issue of women’s participation and gender cooperation for development was regarded with varying degrees of reservation or scepticism. However, although the examples of female CDC members who actively took part in the CDC discussions and decision-making were few, they seemed to indicate an emerging, albeit slow, change of attitudes on the part of the male population. This was also confirmed by the experience of other FPs, including UN-Habitat, as mentioned above.

An example of changing perceptions on the part of male community members was found in a village in Andarab District, which was otherwise generally perceived by the outer world, including the AKDN staff, as very conservative. In the village of Kishinabad, women who were gathered in order to discuss women’s participation and the election of a “women’s development committee,” said that they did not need the permission of male relatives in order to participate as representatives on the committee. Although there were many widows present in the meeting (according to the community, more than 60 percent of the adult women, young and old, were widows, many from the war), this fact did not explain the women’s ability to participate. Here, as in all communities visited, widows were generally dependent on the permission of a male relative (their *maharam*) with regard to the need for permission to participate in community development activities. The men in the village CDC on their part emphasised their interest in reconstruction and development. In this context, they also said that they were ready to allow women to participate in the women’s committee or *shura* and to propose projects especially for women. The middle-aged CDC treasurer added that, “*maybe sometime in the future, women can also participate in elections, but first they must be educated.*”

The argument that women needed education in order to be able to participate in community cooperation with men, or that “*the women are not interested because they are illiterate,*” was offered by a large number of male CDCs, even where the male CDC

<sup>100</sup> The example of women’s participation in Hazara communities, which include the case of the election of a female chairperson of the joint CDC, is reported in the UN-Habitat-NSP Newsletter, issue entitled “Stories of Change” (n.d.).

members themselves were illiterate. Such attitudes were also sometimes shared by women, as expressed by a young woman in Sayad Markazi village, Andarab:

*“We are uneducated, we do not know, we are happy that husbands do the shura work.”*

CARE International had experienced what seemed to be a total lack of interest on the part of Pashtun women in a group discussion in Gardez. The women, who were of different age groups, including young women, repeated that, “.. no, no, no, they did not want to participate. They had too much work in the house and too many children, men looked after these matters.”<sup>101</sup>

A similar lack of interest in the programme or refusal to participate was found among illiterate women in many other areas, including non-Pashtun provinces in northern Afghanistan, as confirmed by the findings of ACTED.<sup>102</sup> Actionaid had found that it had been very difficult to initiate contact and establish community cooperation for women's participation in NSP in Khwaja-de-Koh.<sup>103</sup>

It is difficult to assess the background and motivation for such attitudes, as an in-depth exploration of the factors influencing women's different attitudes to participation in different areas and communities would require a separate study. The reservations expressed by Pashtun women in Gardez could for example be related to shyness or perceptions of shame in relation to foreigners; fear of becoming involved in a new programme introduced from the outside; and lack of information about the programme. It could also be due to a fear of sanctions from their husbands or *maharam*.

The statement of CARE International further reflects another, frequently proposed, argument on the part of men to explain why women were not allowed to participate in community cooperation, namely that “*women were too busy in the house and with carpet-weaving*” (this was stated by men in the Turkmen community Quara Boin Jangali, Aqcha District). In many cases, men simply maintained that there was no need for women to participate in the CDC work, “*because the development problems were common to all, and women did not have special problems.*” Interestingly, women mostly commented that the men did not want to discuss the women's problems.

### ***Age and Social Status in Relation to Women's Participation, and Trends of Change***

While it is difficult to generalise about the issue of women's participation in NSP, the study found that it depended on a multitude of different factors. These factors included women's individual personalities, which played a role in the community as well as among the women themselves in relation to participation and their concepts of NSP. As mentioned above, ethnicity, the community's previous history of contact with the wider world, including international NGOs and the literacy and education of men and women in the community, also influenced women's participation. Women's age and social status further influenced the way that women could participate.

In Afghan society, women's age is an important factor in relation to possibilities for social interaction, including communication with men. In general, only women who have reached mature age and who have grown-up children, especially sons (and possibly also daughters-in-law) are able to enter discussions with men; they may also have more mobility in the social spaces of the village. In certain ethnic groups, particularly among nomadic

<sup>101</sup> Quoted from personal communication, Sally Austin, Assistant Country Director, CARE International, in an interview at AREU, Kabul, 21 April 2004.

<sup>102</sup> Personal communication, Elizabeth Kronoff, Monitoring and Evaluation Advisor, ACTED, at AREU, Kabul, 25 May 2004 and the preliminary report entitled *Men's and Women's Participation in the NSP: Preliminary Results*. ACTED NSP Team, Monitoring and Evaluation Department, Kabul, 25 May 2004.

<sup>103</sup> Personal communication, Smruti Arvind, Policy Director, Actionaid, Kabul, 9 June 2004.

pastoralists, older women might often be able to participate in decision-making concerning the common affairs of the group.<sup>104</sup> This tolerance in relation to older women, which in many areas or ethnic groups allows them to participate more actively in community life than in the strict confinement of the *pardah* of the young, has frequently been termed as a status of “honorary male” in the ethnographic literature on the subject of women in Middle Eastern Muslim societies.<sup>105</sup>

In relation to NSP and especially to the relations and cooperation between women’s and men’s *shuras*, women of mature age thus frequently played a key role as negotiators in relation to the men’s CDC. Due to their respected status, which frequently also allowed them to move more freely in the community, the “elder” women of families or extended families were generally more able to participate, and also had more access to information about the programme, than younger women. The older women were able to move among the community and consult with women and families, primarily in their own clusters, about their needs and project priorities. In some communities, it was also acceptable that such older and respected women could participate in the men’s discussions. In a Turkmen village in Aqcha District (Shishkhana Turkmenia), the men of the CDC said that “*as long as the women are inside the village, women can sit with men.*” In villages such as this one, where the population mainly consisted of interrelated families, women also appeared to have more mobility and opportunity to participate due to kinship relations.

Furthermore, the social status of women in relation to the family and household, including women’s social position in the village – such as widows, co-wives in polygynous households, mother-in-law in relation to daughter-in-law, and the wife or wives of wealthy landowners – also played a role. No examples were found of women from wealthy families who had been elected as CDC representatives. This could be related to the fact that the communities in general were rather poor.

An interesting example of the role social status plays in women’s participation was reported from Warsaj District in Takhar by Concern International. There were two interrelated ethnic groups or tribes, Ishan and Mazdor, in the district. The Ishan is a wealthy tribe of high status, which claims to be direct descendants from the Prophet Muhammad. The Mazdor was a poor, landless tribe traditionally serving as labourers for the Ishan. Among these tribes there were remarkable differences with regard to women’s participation in CDCs. It appeared that it was the women of the Mazdor who were elected as CDC members, while women of the Ishan did not participate. According to the findings of the FP, this was because the Ishan were not willing to risk the reputation of their women by letting them become members of the CDC, as long as the NSP was still regarded as a “pilot project,” the success of which was still to be proved. On the other hand, the women of the Mazdor had less to lose, as they were already poor and of low-status. According to Concern, other FPs had analysed this situation similarly, concluding that if this analysis was correct, the implications might be that the situation would change in the next phases of NSP, at which point the Ishan women could also participate.<sup>106</sup>

In many of the communities visited, there appeared to exist an age hierarchy among women concerning access to participation in NSP. Older women stated that their daughters-in-law should not go to meetings or participate in NSP activities. The women said that their daughters-in-law should work at home, and should not participate in information meetings or elections for CDCs or the women’s *shura*. Examples of such attitudes were especially found in communities in Qarabagh, Dahna-e-Ghori and Andarab Districts. Similar attitudes had been found by other FPs in their districts, including ACTED and Concern International. Thus it appeared that daughters-in-law could in practice be a

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<sup>104</sup> See Tapper, 1992, op. cit.

<sup>105</sup> See Beck, L. and Keddie, N. (eds.) *Women in the Muslim World*. Harvard University Press. 1978.

<sup>106</sup> Personal communication by e-mail Michelle Small, NSP Manager, Concern International, 29 April and 26 June 2004.

marginal group with regard to women's participation in NSP in many communities. However, as also discussed in section 7, there were indications that the role of age was changing in relation to women's participation. Younger women could be elected as cluster representatives of CDC or women's *shuras* on the basis of social qualities, education or special skills such as tailoring. A similar trend of electing younger women was also reported by UN-Habitat from Herat, where female members elected to the CDC were found to be far younger than male members.<sup>107</sup>

It was often found that particularly young women, regardless of education or literacy, were most interested in change and development and ready to engage in project activities energetically. Older women were often either sceptical with regard to change, or disinterested in activities outside the house. However, there were also examples of old women, including poor widows, who were interested in participating in the programme activities, especially with regard to income-generating activities (for example widows in women's *shura* meetings in Qala-e-Kona, Qarabagh District, and Sayad Markazi, Andarab).

Such age-related differences with regard to older and younger women's interest in participation in NSP were clearly observed in two women's meetings in Andarab. The meetings had been initiated by the FP for the purpose of inviting women in the community to elect or select (nominate) representatives for a women's development committee ("women's *shura*"). In the village of Sayad Markazi, the women present were mostly middle-aged or older. They expressed strong reservations about participating in a women's *shura*, and many of the women refused to discuss the issue with the FP staff. In the second meeting in Kishinabad, the women were considerably younger. The interest in the discussion of NSP, women's projects, and the formation of a women's *shura* was overwhelming. The meeting lasted for several hours, cluster representatives were elected, and the gathering was concluded by a meal in which the new women's representatives as well as the research team participated.

## 8.2. The Women's "Shura"

All four FPs with whom the field research was carried out, as well as the other FPs involved in the study, had found it necessary to make alternative arrangements to allow for women to participate in CDCs. These parallel structures were usually called "women's CDCs" or "women's *shuras*." In all the districts included in the study, the female representatives in most cases functioned in the framework of such separate women's CDCs despite women being elected to CDCs in a number of communities. As the women representatives were mostly unable to participate in decision-making in joint male-female CDCs, the "official" female representation could in practice be seen as symbolic rather than real in most communities. While such parallel structures allowed for women's participation, they could also, as pointed out by ACTED,<sup>108</sup> entail the risk of "ghettoisation" or isolation of women without influence from decision-making with regard to development projects. For this reason, the FPs needed to pay careful attention to the role and functions of women's *shuras*.

The women's *shuras* either consisted of representatives elected by the women only, or elected by both women and men in the general election. Thus they could include the female CDC members who had been elected by the clusters but were unable to participate in the male CDC, as well as women elected specially for the women's *shura*. It had been particularly difficult to include women in elections and representation in joint CDCs in Dahna-e-Ghori and Andarab Districts. In Andarab District, no women had been allowed by

<sup>107</sup> See the statistical data concerning the age of women elected for CDCs, collected by UN-Habitat, in section 7.1., and UN-Habitat/Afghanistan NSP: *National Solidarity Programme, Monthly Report no. 9*, February 2004; 9.

<sup>108</sup> See the report *'Men's and Women's Participation in the NSP: Preliminary Results'*, by ACTED NSP Team, Monitoring and Evaluation Department, ACTED, Kabul, May 2004.



the male community members to participate in the elections and CDCs. In order to ensure women's participation, AKDN, the FP, had established "women's development committees," which were under the overall responsibility of the CDCs. The members of these committees were selected by the women of the families in the village, with assistance of the AKDN SOs and facilitators. They were sometimes, but not always, selected as representatives of a cluster. According to observations of these selections in practice, the actual selection of representatives depended on who attended the meeting, and which of the women selected were ready to accept the office.

In the 30 study communities, only three women (i.e., in 10 percent of the communities) participated as full members of the joint CDC, including in meetings and decision-making. One was a female chairperson in Nawa Khel village in Dahna-e-Ghori District (see box), where the people are predominantly Hazara, and the two others were in Uzbek communities in Faizabad District, in the villages of Fazilabad and Yandarak. While the female chairperson was relatively young, the female CDC members in Faizabad District were both above middle-age. In addition, there was a female CDC member who held the office of accountant of a mixed-gender CDC in the village of Azizan Baba, Dahna-e-Ghori District. She had been elected due to her education and skills and experience as accountant. Despite this fact, she was not invited to the meetings of the CDC because, as she said, the meetings were held in the mosque where she was not allowed to go because of *purdah*. According to her, the problem of participation was mainly due to the fact that the CDC had no other place to meet. Thus, if the meetings could take place in a private house, for example her own house, the problem would be solved. The AKDN staff were aware of this problem and hoped to help the CDC find a solution.

In all other communities where women were registered "officially" as members of CDCs, the women were not able to participate in meetings and discussions. This was also the case in the communities visited in Khwaja-de-Koh, despite the fact that the national implementing partners said that the women were full members.<sup>109</sup> In some communities in the districts where ACTED is the FP, the problem of women's participation in a mixed-gender forum was solved through screening the women from the view of men by a sheet which divided the room.<sup>110</sup>

Latifa was the chairperson of the CDC in the village of Nawa Khel in Dahna-e-Ghori District, where the population are a mix of Hazaras, Tajiks, and Uzbeks. She was in her early thirties. She and her husband had five young children, the youngest still a baby. She was a trained teacher, as was her husband. They lived in an extended household including Latifa and her husband and children, and the husband's two brothers and their families. Both Latifa and her husband and his family were Hazara and Shi'a Muslims.

During the Taliban era, the family had a very difficult time. Her husband had fled to Pakistan, but she had remained. She had wished to move to Pul-e-Khumri, and sold all her belongings, but in the end she was unable to go, so she stayed. During the whole period, and after the Taliban, she had worked for the community in her spare time. She had visited the sick and had a regular weekly evening vaccination programme in the school, or sometimes in the mosque. In addition, she taught extra classes for girls as well as sewing and carpet-weaving classes after school. She wished to be able to start a literacy course for adult women in the village as one of the development projects assisted by NSP; she hoped that it would be possible to start next year. The village women wanted it very much.

(cont'd)

<sup>109</sup> Found from interviews and discussions with women's *shura* in *Qulbaqa Areq* and *Mingajek* communities.

<sup>110</sup> Personal communication, Elizabeth Kronoff, Monitoring and Evaluation Advisor, AREU, Kabul, 25 May 2004. See also the report "Men's and Women's Participation in the NSP: Preliminary Results", by ACTED NSP Team, Monitoring and Evaluation Department, ACTED, Kabul, May 2004.

She had been elected by all the families in her cluster. The people's motives for electing her had been that she was a good person who devoted her time and energy, as well as all the skills she had, to assisting and serving her community. Her husband was also highly respected in the village, and supported her in the election as CDC chairperson, as well as in the *shura* work. As the chairperson of the CDC, even as the only female member in the committee, she was able to work with the male members of the CDC, discuss development planning and make decisions. The weekly meetings usually took place in the school or in her house. The CDC consisted of five members, including Latifa; the other members (deputy chairman, accountant and secretary) were all older men. At a CDC meeting, Latifa hosted and chaired the meeting competently and professionally; it seemed that her control and routine in this new forum reflected her routine as a teacher. The discussion was orderly, following the agenda prepared by Latifa, and every *shura* member participated.

*"Here the men are very positive towards women's participation in NSP," she explained. "But we [the community] have serious economic problems which we must try to solve. We are planning for the improvement of the community. And we are working on our children's future, hoping to build a new school for them. Education is all-important."*

The case of "Latifa" might be understood by looking at several factors, which include not only the ethnic composition of the village, which was mainly Shi'a Hazara, but also the positive attitudes towards women's participation in the village, which may be related to the fact that the majority of the village population had been refugees in Pakistan or Iran.

### 8.3. Men's and Women's *Shuras* and Women's Project Proposals

According to members of the women's *shuras*, they had accepted the responsibility as representatives of their cluster in order to "help their sisters" and "serve the community." The main activities of the women's *shura* thus consisted of visiting women in the clusters to consult with them about their problems. This could include such problems as children's health and other family-related problems, in addition to economic needs. The *shura* members also discussed ideas for women's projects with the women in the clusters, based on the most important needs of the women in the community. In addition, the women's *shuras* had important social functions as a place for women to gather and discuss matters of everyday life with each other. In some communities, such as Mingajek village, Khwaja-de-Koh District, the women in the *shura* said that they met every day, not just in order to discuss projects but also to talk about other issues.

#### **Women's Project Needs**

Women's project needs were generally related to the health and education of their children, as well as women's own health, and projects for generating income and employment. Literacy classes for women were in high demand (according to reports by UN-Habitat, literacy courses for women have been started in the districts of UN-Habitat where there were female teachers available in the communities as self-initiated, low-cost community projects). Thus women's projects typically included projects for schools, clinics, and projects for women's health and hygiene, as well as women's reproductive health, including the training of local midwives (this activity, which had been introduced by the FP, was included in women's projects, especially in the communities in Aqcha and Faizabad Districts).<sup>111</sup>

<sup>111</sup> Such training projects are allowed to take place according to the NSP Guidelines. Moreover, wells for water for the household, were a high priority in all districts.

In all the communities visited, women were also very interested in different income-generating projects. The women said that in spite of their existing work burden they needed work in order to earn money which was needed for example for the children, and for buying food. In the communities, women were wholly responsible for housework and child care. In addition, the women usually participated in harvesting or other agricultural activities. However, in many communities especially in Jawzjan Province, but also in Dahna-e-Ghori, the women, particularly Uzbek and Turkmen women, were already engaged in the weaving of kelims or carpets, although only very few of the families owned a loom. They said that the looms and tools had to a large extent been destroyed by the Taliban, and the sheep had been killed (for example according to community members in Dahna-e-Ghori and Jawzjan). The majority of the women who made carpets were employed by a carpet merchant in the district bazaar who lent the women loom and wool, and paid a small amount for their labour. The women said that they could earn several times more per square metre if they owned the loom themselves, as a community project, and had access to wool. The finished carpets would be marketed either by men from the village or through a reliable middle-man in the bazaar.

Other income-generating projects frequently mentioned by women were tailoring and embroidery projects, as well as the keeping of small animals such as chickens, goats and sheep. Livestock keeping was especially mentioned by older women, for example in Qarabagh. They said that this was their skill, and that sewing and embroidery could be done by young women in the house. Women in Kishinabad village in Andarab discussed the possibilities of starting a bakery. One elderly woman wanted to start a shop, employing one of her sons as the shop-keeper. In seven communities in Dahna-e-Ghori and Andarab, AKDN had helped the “women’s development committees” to start income-generating projects, including a bakery, a tailoring project, and a livestock project. The aim was to start women’s projects under NSP in at least half of the villages.<sup>112</sup>

### ***Communication and Cooperation Between Women’s and Men’s Shuras***

A central issue with regard to women’s projects in the context of the project proposals of the community was the prioritisation among men’s and women’s projects, and the allocation of funds for women’s projects from the NSP block grants. This issue was related to the communication and cooperation, or lack of, between the men’s *shura* (CDC) and the women’s *shura*. It was thus a key issue with regard to women’s participation in decision-making concerning development projects in many of the communities visited, as well as in the districts of other FPs.

Usually it was very difficult for women to influence the CDC to include the women’s projects in the community’s proposals for NSP. To a certain extent, this was also related to the problem of limited funding for projects, but it was also clearly an issue of prioritisation. If the block grant funds were not sufficient to cover the costs of both men’s and women’s projects, women’s projects would not be included, but put on a “waiting-list.” In several cases, the women said that they agreed with the men in these decisions, because, for example, water supply or road repair was “more important.” In a few cases, the need for preparing budgets which also included the women’s projects was discussed in the women’s *shura* with the assistance of FP staff. But normally it was not a common practice of the CDC to plan for the budgeting and management of the block grant in order to ensure that the costs of women’s projects could also be covered.

The projects that were identified by women were proposed in consultation with the male CDC. As women were generally not allowed to sit and talk with men, with the exception of some older women, these consultations and cooperation with the male CDC members

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<sup>112</sup> According to Eliza Hilton, NSP Monitoring and Evaluation Advisor, AKDN Provincial Office, Baghlan.

were problematic and approached in different ways. A common form of interaction between the women's *shura* and the men's CDC was communication through the female CFs as "go-betweens." Women also frequently asked their husbands to communicate messages to the male CDC. However, in many cases the men were not interested in listening to women, not even privately in their homes. Thus many women said that they were rarely able to talk about their problems with their husbands at home:

*"Men stop you if you start talking about women's problems, they say that women should be quiet."* (Women in Sayad Markazi village, Andarab)

Women in the women's *shura* in Alali Mahjer, Aqcha District, described the process of cooperation with the male CDC about project proposals in the following words, which neatly sum up the women's influence in decision-making in relation to NSP:

*"First we have meetings among women about the projects. Then the women speak to the men they have permission to [speak with], then the men can present the problems to the [male] shura."*

The approach to the problem of funding women's projects on the part of AKDN was to use leftover funds in the cases where the first priority project of the community did not use up all of the block grant. However, in order to strengthen and promote women's participation in phase two of NSP, AKDN had applied for additional funding for a budget for a female CF in every community.

In April 2004, SDF made the decision, which is in accordance with NSP Guidelines, to earmark a minimum of 10 percent of the block grant funds for women's projects.<sup>113</sup> This was done in order to ensure that development activities for women could also be implemented. At the same time, this approach would strengthen the role and activities of the women's *shura* and thereby also enhance their legitimacy in the communities.

This discussion reflects the difficulties of changing traditional Afghan gender norms with regard to women's participation in decision-making in relation to community affairs and NSP. But it also shows that the difficulties can be overcome. Careful and sustained community facilitation with particular focus on women is essential to involve the community in a process of accepting the notion of women's participation in reconstruction and development programmes that aim to improve the lives of the whole community. The female CFs play a key role in the relationship with women, and in supporting the women's *shura*. In particular, the roles and functions of the women's *shura* need attention and support from the FP in order to ensure that women actually participate in decision-making about their projects under NSP block grants.

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<sup>113</sup> Personal communication, Jana Frey, Project Development Manager, SDF, Kabul, 22 May 2004. The initial approach of SDF with regard to women's projects had been to give priority to the men's projects in the first phase of the programme, in order to ensure the participation of the communities.

## 9. Main Findings

1. *The CDC Elections:* In all of the study communities, the principles and practices of elections with secret voting have generally been well received, as reflected in the high percentage of voter participation by both male and female voters, and the positive descriptions of the experience of voting and the significance of elections for community cooperation. In rural Afghanistan, participation in secret voting is an issue of trust in the honesty and fairness of the election arrangements and the agency which is responsible for the elections.

Elections were widely perceived as free, fair and safe; their secret nature was perceived to protect voters from intimidation by, for example, local power-holders. Very few examples of attempts of interference in elections were reported by the community members. However, in some of the districts of other FPs, particularly from Pashtun areas, there had been interference by landlords, commanders, and *mullahs*.

2. *Voting:* It was clear from the observations and narratives of CDC elections that the community members, both women and men, had generally understood the principles of elections by secret ballot, although there was a general tendency that men had more information concerning elections than women. This has been confirmed by the agency Global Risk Strategies, which was involved in voter registration for the national elections in communities in Takhar Province and had found that explaining the concepts of elections and registration of voters for the national elections was significantly easier in the communities involved in NSP than in non-NSP communities. However, the increasingly poor conditions of security are likely to expose the voters to great risks, as already experienced in the context of voter registration in the provinces during June 2004,<sup>114</sup> and this may also influence participation in the elections in NSP villages.

3. *Women's Participation and Gender Relations in Community Development:* Women's participation in decision-making in relation to community development is the most difficult and sensitive problem in the NSP approach to inclusive community development. In most communities in rural Afghanistan, the concept of women's participation in community affairs is a significant challenge to central values and norms with regard to gender relations and *purdah*, and changing these values will take time. However, there were indications in many communities of emerging change, especially where the shared experience of war and exile have contributed to a growing recognition on the part of men of the need for including women in reconstruction and development. This understanding could be strengthened and enhanced through growing community awareness of the need for cooperation also with women; the approach and practices of community mobilisation of the FP played an important role in this regard.

At the same time, there generally seemed to exist significant anxieties with regard to the issue of women's participation in the communities studied. This was reflected in the many examples of women's "symbolic" participation in CDC, which could be understood as representations of women's participation on the part of male community members, as well as of FP staff, for the purpose of fulfilling expectations of gender participation in relation to NSP. Such symbolic representations of women's participation in CDCs further entail the risk of isolation and "ghettoisation" of women in relation to CDCs and project activities.

The most critical issues with regard to women's participation included:

- Limited access to information about NSP and development projects;

<sup>114</sup> Bhatia, Lanigan and Wilkinson, op. cit.

- The need for women to obtain permission from husbands or male relatives for participation in elections;
- The need for separate voting arrangements for women, and separate women's CDCs;
- The need for women to obtain permission from men with regard to women's choice of voting—in this light, it is questionable to what extent principles of voting are free, fair and secret;
- The need for women to obtain permission from male family members to participate as cluster representatives in the CDC or women's *shura*;
- Problems in many communities with regard to communication between men's and women's CDCs, and, in private, concerning women's needs and projects, and men's reluctance to listen to women's problems and needs; and
- Women's projects not being included in the overall project proposals if the block grants are not sufficient for covering both "men's" and "women's" projects.<sup>115</sup>

4. *The CDC as a Local-Level Institution:* In many districts, the CDC was already perceived as an established and legitimate institution in a wider context than NSP. This was due to two reasons. One reason was that the CDC is a structure which is elected by the whole community on a democratic basis without direct deference to traditional local power-holders. Furthermore, the formal authorisation of the CDC by the government through MRRD, and the official stamp and registration in the provincial MRRD office, was perceived as essential with regard to the legitimacy of the CDC in the communities. These factors were also perceived as the most important difference between the CDC as a decision-making body and the customary structures of local-level governance (*shura/jirga*) as perceived by the community members.

In some communities, it was found that elders were elected as CDC representatives, due to their traditional respected status. *Mullahs* and landowners were also elected in a limited number of cases. These practices to some extent reproduced customary structures of local governance, but there is also the risk that they may reproduce existing structures of politics, power and dependency. Furthermore, this could entail the risk that the CDC could become a new power basis in relation to access and control of development resources through the NSP block grants.

The future role of the CDC after the completion of the NSP project is critical to the sustainability of local community development based on community participation and self-reliance. It is closely related to the use and potentials of CDCs as a framework for local-level self-reliance in reconstruction and development, including relations with government bodies and NGOs, and self-governance. In this respect, the future role of the CDC in the relations between these and district and provincial government structures, specifically with regard to the planned collaboration between NSP and MoE concerning the rehabilitation of schools, will be very important.

5. *Age and Participation in Community Development and CDCs:* There were indications of a change in generations and age groups towards election of younger persons, with regard to both male and female, as community representatives for the CDCs. This trend involved a shift from electing traditional and respected elders to electing younger persons who are perceived as more active, engaged, and open to change. The young generation generally had more education, including opportunities of schooling from growing up as refugees, than the older generation, especially the people who had no access to education in Afghanistan during the war. However, as this trend was only partial, there was a tension

<sup>115</sup> It should be stressed that the distinction between "men's" and "women's" projects is not clear-cut, since many priority activities such as irrigation repair, drinking water, and electrification benefit whole households. However, the allocation of block grant resources to specific "women's projects" such as income-generation for women is the exception rather than the rule, as discussed in section 8.

between traditional knowledge and the experience of age on one hand, and new education and skills on the other.

6. *Community Perceptions of the Role of the Government in Relation to NSP:* In the study communities, most people understood that the government of Afghanistan played an important role in relation to NSP. However, the perceptions of the role of the government, as well as the understanding of the interrelations between the government and MRRD, were generally diffuse. While the CDCs, and to some extent also the community members, mostly understood that MRRD was responsible for NSP, including the disbursements of block grants, mainly because the CDC members had been registered in the provincial MRRD office, "the government" in a more general sense was perceived as distant in relation to the experience of the local communities.

7. *Community Participation in NSP, and Women's Participation - Variation and Diversity:* There was a significant variation and diversity between communities and districts with regard to perceptions of and participation in NSP, especially with regard to women's participation. In all provinces involved in NSP, many communities had initially been reluctant to engage in NSP due to their historically negative experience of unfulfilled government promises, and fear of change induced by foreigners, including the fear of threats to traditional norms and values by Western culture. These negative perceptions were particularly strong in Pashtun areas. Above all, the elections for CDCs had caused reluctance regarding participation because the communities believed the elections to be related to or identical with the national elections. This barrier necessitated special attention and efforts in the context of community mobilisation on the part of the FPs. These local variations could be related to such factors as ethnicity, exposure to the outer world, including the refugee experience, the experience of war, etc. They also reflected the different approaches and the quality of community facilitation on the part of the FP.

8. *The Role of the Facilitating Partner:* The approach and methodology of the FPs play a key role in the implementation of NSP. This particularly relates to the central issues of community participation in elections and CDCs, the participation of women, and the community's ownership with regard to the CDC as well as the community reconstruction and development projects. Thus a participatory and sustained process of mobilisation and awareness-raising, with an open and mutually respectful dialogue between facilitators and communities, especially about the new concepts of women's participation, showed clear results in enhanced understanding, capacity-building, and ownership. Especially regarding access to women in the communities, and women's information and participation, the deployment of female facilitating staff played an important role due to the norms of *pardah*. This was confirmed by all FPs involved in the study.

9. *Development Needs:* The need for employment and income-generating activities plays a very important role in the local communities, for women as well as for men. However, the scope of activities for income-generating projects is limited, especially for women. Partly due to the constraints of *pardah*, income-generating projects for women are mainly home-based projects such as tailoring and carpet-weaving. Such projects have limited marketing potentials and most of the profits accrue to middlemen. They are therefore of limited value in the perspective of generating a sustained income.

Education also plays an important role in most communities. Education, as well as special and vocational skills, was perceived by many community members, women and men, as an important qualification of CDC representatives. Education is also a very high development priority, in the form of schools for girls as well as for boys, and adult literacy classes.

In relation to the severe needs of assistance to water supply and irrigation, it was found that the problems of water were not only the result of drought or destruction of wells and irrigation systems. In all districts of the study, the communities experienced serious

problems with regard to access to water due to the armed control by local commanders and militias.

10. *Community Demand-Driven Development Takes Time*: There is need for a quality process of trust-building, community awareness, and mobilisation which can involve the community members in community cooperation with participatory problem analysis and prioritisation of projects, and election for CDCs by women as well as men. In NSP, this process involves the change of historical norms and practices concerning the participation and inclusion of local communities in a traditionally hierarchical and centralised state system, as well as of norms and values with regard to women's participation in community affairs. Thus the process of planning an inclusive development process requires skilled facilitation of community mobilisation to promote and enhance the local participation and ownership of the CDCs in the communities, and can not proceed faster than the attitudes of community members permit.

11. *Tension Regarding Time Needed to Make Projects Work and to Produce Results*: There clearly existed a tension between the need for time for preparation of a quality process of community mobilisation and cooperation in relation to NSP, and the communities' needs for rapid disbursement of block grants for the projects. On the one hand, as mentioned above, community-demand driven and inclusive development takes time. On the other hand, early disbursements of funds for assistance after the submission of project proposals played an important role with regard to establishing the credibility of the programme in the communities and maintaining the interest in participation, by demonstrating successful results of the programme in a short-term perspective.

12. *Security* is a serious and critical issue in relation to all aspects of the implementation of NSP and community participation, in particular with regard to women's participation. During the spring of 2004, the security situation for both the FPs that implement NSP in the provinces, as well as for the villagers, has been steadily deteriorating. Both are largely left to their own devices, and the government has not been able to create a security environment that is conducive to the implementation of the program. The government has not been able to do away with the abuses of local commanders denying villagers access to basic conditions necessary for their development and for making use of the block grant provided under NSP (e.g., monopolising irrigation water), with the intimidation of villagers in some areas by regime opponents resulting in fear of participating in the NSP, or with providing the overall security that would permit FPs to operate more effectively than is the case at present.



## 10. Conclusions and Recommendations

Community participation in the NSP reconstruction and development programme through CDCs elected by all adult community members has clearly been a catalyst for learning about democratic processes in rural Afghanistan. In general, people in the communities have embraced the concepts of democratic elections and representation, based on the principles of secret voting and the prohibition of electioneering or candidacy, with enthusiasm. The fact that the central government has engaged the communities in a partnership for reconstruction and development for the first time in Afghan history has been an empowering experience. It signals not only a process of democracy introduced “from above,” but it may also foster the emergence of democracy “from below” in a partnership between government and local communities, where the communities are enabled to establish more legitimate leadership that can interact with government authorities in a range of different tasks.

In this regard, it should be noted that the operational concept of “community” of the NSP is based on and adapted to the local social realities of the people involved in the programme. Official village definitions in Afghanistan date back to the early 1970s but are now outdated, due to demographic change, population movements during the decades of conflict and exile, etc. The new definitions of communities was developed by the FPs in collaboration with the concerned communities and local authorities, and thus reflect the local perceptions of social organisation. However, the NSP community development projects are not restricted to individual communities, and the communities that wish to collaborate on projects that address needs above the level of a single village can use some or all of the NSP block grants for inter-community projects involving collaboration between several communities. Thus it is left entirely to the local beneficiary population to make decisions based on existing social networks and relations to decide whether to define the unit of collaboration as an individual village or as a larger entity that could draw on local perceptions of structures of social and residential locality, such as *manteqa* (D.), *qaum*, or *gwandey* (P.).<sup>116</sup>

In addition, the process of mobilisation for community participation has strengthened the awareness and willingness of communities regarding cooperation and contribution to reconstruction in a long-term perspective of self-reliance. Self-reliance and autonomy are central elements of Afghan perceptions of identity. Moreover, the concept of democratic participation in decision-making is not an entirely foreign element in Afghan society and culture, as reflected in the customary councils of *jirga* or *shura*. Thus, although an election with universal voting rights and secret voting is a new and Western-based concept, it seems to go well with traditional Afghan values and norms, and by and large the rural Afghan communities have taken to democracy “like ducks to water.”

At present, it is, however, early to predict the future of this development. The CDCs need time for consolidation in the communities, in order to become fully recognised as new local-level formal institutions with wider functions than NSP. The implementation of projects in a way that is participatory and transparent to all community members, thereby validating the new institution in the local context, would be a very important part of such a process of consolidation. The CDCs also need time to strengthen skills and capacity, and for establishing relations with other programmes implemented by different ministries (health, education, irrigation) and other aid agencies and NGOs. Finally, the CDCs need to have linkages and formalised roles in relation to the existing government structure at the district and possibly also the provincial level. In a longer-term perspective, the newly established collaboration between CDCs and district and provincial governments with

<sup>116</sup> However, while such inter-community projects involving several villages are found among all ethnic groups, the social unit of reference is not always the concept of *manteqa*, which seems to be primarily found among the Hazara (see Glatzer, 2002; Favré, R. 2003; Roussel, F. and Caley, M.-P. n.d., ca. 1994).

regard to school rehabilitation in the context of NSP provide the first opportunity for such linkages, and thereby for the consolidation of the CDCs in a wider context.

There is also need for reflection and learning from the lessons of practice. This is in itself a very important aspect of capacity-building. Thus the process of evolving participation and democracy in Afghan society based on the CDC as the key institution in the local communities will take time. This has been clearly demonstrated by the experience of the FPs during the first phase of NSP. In particular, the important social and political-empowering dimensions of the programme are sensitive and need a stable and enabling wider political environment in order to be allowed to become firmly rooted in the Afghan communities. In a favourable and enabling political climate, there are indications that the NSP programme could contribute significantly to the development of a stable and democratic political process in Afghanistan.

However, the communities' experience of NSP, elections, and CDCs is new, and the process involves several aspects which challenge existing norms in many communities. The most important but also the most difficult element of all in this process is the participation of women in community cooperation and decision-making. This entails the challenge of values and norms which are central to Afghan gender relations and the notions of *purdah*. Although there are emerging signs of women's participation, there are still huge problems related to the participation of women in community cooperation and decision-making, especially concerning women's development needs.

Thus, the participation of women in democratic participation would need to occur in a dialogue with traditional local norms and values. This is reflected by the practices of the FPs involved in the study. However, just as culture constantly changes and evolves in the course of agency and social practice, it is possible that Afghan values and norms with regard to gender relations could also evolve in the context of NSP and community cooperation. There are signs that participation in NSP has initiated such a process of changing attitudes towards women's participation.

Learning the concepts of democracy through participation in NSP through community cooperation and CDC-elections for community development is an empowering process which could lead to the development of people from *subjects* to *citizens* in the national society. This learning and empowerment in itself would be a very significant development in Afghan history. But without the participation of Afghan women in this process, this empowerment as citizens will only include half of the people of Afghanistan.

On this background, important recommendations for the future phases of NSP would include the following:

### ***1. Strengthen the Methods and Activities of the Facilitating Partner***

The need for quality facilitation entails all key aspects of community participation in the programme, including awareness of the role of the government (TISA and MRRD) in relation to NSP. However, particular attention and support to women and women's CDCs is necessary in order to promote women's real participation in NSP and avoid the isolation or "ghettoisation" of women in women's *shuras* without influence on the decision-making concerning project prioritisation and implementation. The training and deployment of female facilitating staff (SOs and CFs) play a key role in relation to involving women in the project activities. Support to female staff is essential for obtaining access to women in the communities due to the *purdah* norms. This should include equal opportunities with regard to training, employment conditions, and career possibilities on a par with male staff.

## **2. Promote Women's Participation**

Promoting and enhancing the participation of women necessitates particular attention includes the following issues:

- Improving women's access to information about the programme, the programme components, elections and voting procedures, and expected outcomes of the programme.
- Facilitating women's access to communication and collaboration with men about women's project needs, particularly between "women's CDCs" and male CDCs (or overall CDC in the case of the AKDN districts).
- Paying attention to the actual functions of "women's CDCs" and the inclusion of women's projects in the project priorities of the community. There is need to ensure that women's projects are included in the prioritisation of projects by the overall CDC. If necessary, this can be implemented by earmarking a minimum of 10 percent of the block grant for women's projects in accordance with the NSP Operational Guidelines. When necessary, such a strategy to promote and enhance women's actual participation in NSP would entail particularly careful consultations between the FP and the communities, involving the CDC and other influential and respected community members.
- Strengthening women's CDCs through training and capacity-building of female CDC members equal to the training of the male or overall CDC, in areas such as budgeting and financial management, project implementation and maintenance, etc.

## **3. Develop Income-Generating Projects**

There is need for particular attention to the issue of projects which can generate much-needed income and employment in the communities. This includes projects for women as well as for men. Such income-generating projects should be financially viable so that they could yield a meaningful income to the participants, and involve contributions to a revolving fund so that other community members can benefit from access to funds/loans for income generation.

Sustainable income-generating projects would furthermore contribute to the sustainability of the CDCs. The issue of income-generating projects would necessitate

- Identification of a broader range of economically viable project activities, especially for women, with a view to new and sustainable marketing potentials; and
- Training in simple business planning to assess the viability and marketing potentials of proposed schemes. Such training should include the staff of FPs, as well as male and female CDCs.

## **4. Strengthen the Long-Term Constitution and Sustainability of the CDCs**

The government envisions the CDCs as permanent institutions of local governance supported by a recurrent annual block grant transfer from the central government to the CDCs, although at a smaller scale than the initial block grant. Leaving aside the question of whether this will be financially feasible, based on current and future government revenue generation, it raises the question of linkages between the CDCs and local government structures, and of clear guidelines for the continuity and re-election for the CDCs.

To ensure the long-term sustainability of the CDCs as legitimate local leadership, there is a need to define guidelines and parameters by the NSP for the constitution of CDCs in a longer-term perspective. This especially concerns the term of office of CDC members, and procedures for re-election. Such guidelines could for example include the phased re-election of parts of the CDC members, in order to avoid the simultaneous change of all members and ensure continuity. Re-election of CDC members would furthermore prevent the establishment of the CDC as a new local institution of power based on the access to and possible misuse of development funds.

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