



# Afghanistan: Monitoring Women's Security in Transition



Baseline Report  
June 2013

موسسه مطالعات عامه  
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### About APPRO

Afghanistan Public Policy Research Organization (APPRO) is an independent social research organization promoting social and policy learning to benefit development and reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan. APPRO is registered with the Ministry of Economy (Registration Number: 1212) as a not-for-profit, non-government organization, and is headquartered in Kabul, Afghanistan.

APPRO's mission is to measure development progress against strategic reconstruction objectives and provide insights on how to improve performance against the milestones set by the Afghan government and international donors. APPRO is staffed by personnel with extensive experience in development and scientific research.

### About AWN

The Afghan Women's Network (AWN) is a non-partisan, non-profit network of women that serves as an umbrella organization for 112 NGO members, and 5,000 individual members who are committed to support the women of Afghanistan. AWN has offices in Kabul, Herat and Jalalabad and works through local partners in several Afghan provinces. Primary concerns for AWN are issues related to: gender-based violence, youth empowerment and girl's education. The network also represents and promotes the views of Afghan women in political and social arenas through advocacy and by challenging Afghanistan's leaders to enforce legislative reforms for the protection of women's rights.

## About Cordaid

Cordaid, based in the Netherlands, has a focus on international development and collaboration in vulnerable regions and areas of conflict. Its mission is to build flourishing communities in fractured societies. Monitoring the transition in Afghanistan is part of Cordaid's program on Women's Leadership for Peace and Security (WLPS). This program aims to increase the capacity of women's networks, give a voice to women at the local level in processes of peace and security, and promote the women's agenda in national and global arenas. For more information see: [www.cordaid.org](http://www.cordaid.org) <<http://www.cordaid.org>> or contact [stj@cordaid.nl](mailto:stj@cordaid.nl) <<mailto:stj@cordaid.nl>>



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APPRO takes full responsibility for all omissions and errors.

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## List of Abbreviations

AIHRC	Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission
ALP	Afghan Local Police
ANA	Afghan National Army
ANP	Afghan National Police
ANSF	Afghan National Security Forces
AOG	Armed Opposition Groups
AWN	Afghan Women's Network
CCA	Cooperation Center for Afghanistan
CSO	Civil Society Organization
DDR	Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration
DOWA	Department of Women's Affairs
EVAW	Elimination of Violence Against Women
FCOMAIL	French Cooperation Office of Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Irrigation
FRU	Family Response Unit
IMF	International Military Forces
IRD	International Relief and Development
ISAF	International Security Assistance Force
MAIL	Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock
MoE	Ministry of Education
MoPH	Ministry of Public Health
MoPW	Ministry of Public Works
MoWA	Ministry of Women Affairs
MRRD	Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development
NGO	Non-governmental organization
PRT	Provincial Reconstruction Team
UNAMA	United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan
WAW	Women for Afghan Women



## Executive Summary

Conflict and violence affect women and men differently, and although women are rarely direct participants in conflict, they often suffer the most.<sup>1</sup> Afghanistan's various conflicts over the last three decades prove this, with the nation's women – as well as children – enduring incredible hardship in conflicts they were rarely participants in. However, despite the suffering the Afghan women endured during the years of civil war and under the conservative Taliban regime, clear progress in terms of women's rights has undeniably been made in Afghanistan in the past decade since the return of representative government in 2001.

Soon after the initiation of the security transition, announced by the President of Afghanistan in March, 2011 and scheduled to be completed by the end of 2014, women across Afghanistan voiced critical concerns about the hard-won rights of Afghan women being put at serious risk. Many women are concerned about a transition process that does not appear to be including the needs of women and children. They fear that the transition process is solely focused on military and security issues, and pays no attention to the needs of women and children with regard to their civil rights or protections.

This study was commissioned to examine the ways in which the security transition affects the overall wellbeing of women as

well as to provide insight regarding the needs and concerns of women during and after the transition. To accomplish this, fieldwork consisting of individual interviews and focus group discussions was conducted in nine districts across seven provinces. The discussions focused on concepts including women's overall security, their access to justice, work and services as well as their freedom of movement.

With regard to women's overall security and access to justice, the study presents a mixed set of findings. For example, although the district centers and provincial capitals seem to be relatively unaffected by the security transition, several of the rural districts in their immediate surroundings were reported as having become inaccessible due to increased AOG presence and activities. The increased AOG presence and control over remote areas that previously were under the control of the government is likely to have serious implications for the rights of women. On the other hand, most schools, reported increased female enrollment since the transition began. Other research findings included indications for a decrease in employment opportunities and development projects for women, along with an increased hostility against women that work outside their homes and participate in public life.

The research conducted regarding the harassment of women (and schoolgirls in particular) yielded encouraging results.

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<sup>1</sup> See UN fact sheet: Women and Armed Conflict, available at: <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/followup/session/presskit/fs5.htm>

The researchers found that the cooperation between schools, communities and the ANP has increased significantly in the period that followed the security transition. In several of the districts included in this study, the research indicated that the ANP has increased their efforts to protect women and girls from harassment in public, which consequently increases women's mobility and access to education and other public services. Other key findings included increased support among communities with the ANP and ANA, while female concerns about the presence and activities of the ALP were prevalent. Communities and key informants identified a lack of proper military equipment and training as two major challenges in ANSF's ability provide adequate security since the withdrawal of international military forces from their respective districts.

## Introduction

On March 22, 2011, the President of Afghanistan, Hamid Karzai, announced the first tranche of the security transition that will be completed by the end of 2014. After 2014, Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) will have the sole responsibility for Afghanistan's national security. The fourth transition tranche was announced on December 31, 2012 and, once completed, will mean that the ANSF will have taken over the security responsibility for 87 percent of Afghanistan's population, with 23 out of 34 of the provinces transitioning.<sup>2</sup> The rationale behind the transition is to allow the ANSF take charge of their own security, enabling Afghanistan to become a fully sovereign state. The assumption is that the ANSF is now ready to serve its country with an existing pool of qualified people and financial support provided by international military forces (IMF).

Contrary to this assumption, however, anecdotal evidence suggests that overall security conditions have deteriorated in the transitioned areas as a result of increased attacks on civilians and greater restrictions on civil society, particularly on those working on women's rights. Work conducted by APPRO reveals that women's rights groups in Afghanistan are anxious about the transition, thinking that the execution of the transition process is solely focused on military and security matters. Women's groups are concerned that there is minimal, if any, attention

being paid to ensuring that quality milestones are met for the rule of law, governance, access to justice, and security from a gender perspective. Critics are also worried that the security transition is being directed by domestic considerations in IMF and International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) countries rather than the actual needs of the Afghan people.

Since the fall of the Taliban in 2001, women have increasingly demanded – and received – significant improvements in their access to public services and treatment by their male peers. Some of the most visible signs of progress are the increased numbers of girls attending school and women working in public offices including schools, hospitals and government offices as civil servants. Despite these achievements, however, there are serious concerns regarding the sustainability of these achievements after the IMF/ISAF withdrawal and the security handover to the ANSF.

The purpose of this study is to examine whether there are grounds for concerns regarding a regression of women's rights in Afghanistan as a consequence of the security transition.

### Specific Objectives

1. To assess the likely impact of the security transition, along with the decreasing presence of international citizens, on the lives of Afghan women in the following areas:

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<sup>2</sup> NATO (February 2013)



- Overall Security and Access to Justice
- Access to Work and Public Life
- Mobility and Access to Services

2. To inform decision makers and other stakeholders – as well as policy – about the concerns of Afghan women related to the above areas that may have emerged or intensified as a direct or indirect result of the security transition.

## Methodology

The principal idea of this monitoring study is to visit and re-visit a number of selected districts across Afghanistan in four cycles to trace and observe any possible change in their individual security situation between the cycles, over a period of approximately 12 months. The same people, mostly women, interviewed in cycle one will also be interviewed in cycles two, three and four. The assumption is that interviewing the same individuals, to the extent that this is possible, will help with forming a consistency in the observation, and allow for tracking changes over time. This report forms the baseline for the three reports that will follow.

### Geographic Focus and District Selection Criteria

The selection of the districts and provinces were based on three main criteria:

1. **Tranche number:** districts from only tranches one and two were selected
2. **Rural or urban representation:** the second criterion was established to maintain a balance in the selection between urban and rural area representation. However, when visiting provincial capitals such as Herat City, Lashkargah or Mehtarlam, the researchers also examined – to the extent it was possible – what was happening in the surrounding districts.
3. **Security level:** only districts and provincial capitals that were deemed to be safe enough for the researchers to travel to were selected. Ensuring the personal security of researchers while in the field was a top priority.

**Table 1: Selected districts that will be revisited over four cycles**

#	District(s) selected	Tranche	Province	Type
1	Surobi	2	Kabul	Rural
2	Paghman	1	Kabul	Rural
3	Mehtarlam	1	Laghman	Capital
4	Jalalabad	2	Nangarhar	Capital
5	Dawlatabad	2	Balkh	Rural
6	Balkh	2	Balkh	Rural
7	Lashkargah	1	Helmand	Capital
8	Herat	1	Herat	Capital
9	Khuram Wa Sarbagh	2	Samangan	Rural

## Data Collection Tools

This is a qualitative study that focuses on exploring the qualitative changes women experience in their security in the aftermath of the security transition. However, the value of quantitative information and its capacity to support and verify qualitative analysis is recognized. Consequently, the collection of socio-economic profiles of women interviewed for this project helps outlining their mobility, and security concerns.

The methodology used to collect data for this study consists of four key tools:

1. Desk-based research on existing literature that is related to the Afghan security transition.
2. Interviews with a wide range of people from the visited districts, organized in categories (see Table 2).
3. Focus group discussions with three selected community groups: elders, working women and housewives (women that don't work in public).

4. Socio-economic profiles of working women and housewives.

To attain an illustrative understanding about women's overall security, mobility, and access to work and public life, informant categories (indicated in Table 2) were identified. In total, 176 individuals were interviewed and 27 focus groups discussions were held in nine districts in seven provinces across Afghanistan.

Quantitative figures from girls' schools and several governmental departments and family response units (FRUs) were also obtained in the districts visited. This was done to collect figures concerning girls' enrollment, women working as civil servants, and the number and type cases that reach the FRUs. The Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) was also helpful by providing data regarding the number of cases of violence against women in the provinces in the last two years.

**Table 2: Selected informant categories for each district**

#	Category	Type of interview	Targeted # of Informants
1	ANP/FRU	Individual	1
3	Prominent women	Individual	3
4	CSOs	Individual	3
5	Health clinics	Individual	3
6	Girls' high schools	Individual	3
7	Vocational training centers	Individual	3
8	Women working in gov. offices	Individual	3
9	Working women	Focus Group Discussion (7-8 individuals)	1
10	Housewives	Focus Group Discussion (7-8 individuals)	1
11	Community elders	Focus Group Discussion (7-8 individuals)	1
<b>Total</b>			<b>22</b>

## Working definitions

In each district, three overarching themes were identified in an attempt to trace possible change in women's security in the transitioned districts that were selected. The three subheadings that are assessed in the findings and analysis are defined in Table 3.

For each of the three central themes, four main markers were established (see Table 3) to be assessed in this report. These markers are evaluated for each district presented in the findings and analysis sections.

Overall security and access to justice are combined in this report because access to justice is a tool to measure women's overall security. Women's ability to access legal aid organizations, courts and other justice institutions such as the ANP and FRUs, is considered to be an important indicator for tracking changes to women's security in general.

Access to work and public life is coupled because the two themes are overlapping and one cannot be excluded from the other. Working women have automatic access to public life and vice versa.

Similarly, access to services in the third and final theme is viewed as a tool to measure women's mobility. Clinics and schools were interviewed to assess women's ability to reach them, especially in remote areas, and to establish an understanding about whether their ability to reach these services has changed since the completion of the security transition in their respective districts.

## Research Limitations

1. A lack of file keeping and documentation made it difficult to access reliable data from the government offices, clinics, ANP and civil society organizations (CSOs) that were interviewed. Therefore, the

**Table 3: Identified themes to monitor possible change in women's security in transition**

Overall Security and Access to Justice:	Access to Work and Public Life:	Mobility and Access to Services:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Women's sense of security and safety outside their homes</li><li>• How women currently perceive the ANSF when they have the responsibility of their safety</li><li>• The level of cooperation and trust between ANSF and the communities</li><li>• Women's ability to access legal assistance and justice</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Changes observed or reported regarding the ability of women to work in public outside their homes since the security transition without endangering their lives</li><li>• Attitudes shown by communities towards women that work in public</li><li>• Availability of employment and training opportunities for women</li><li>• Increase/decrease in the intensity of threats received by working women</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Women's ability to leave their homes and move from one location to another without male company and without fearing for their personal security</li><li>• The ability of women to access services such as health clinics and schools</li><li>• Women's ability to visit bazaars for shopping</li><li>• Women's perceived level of harassment in public places</li></ul>

graphs used in this study are provided for illustrative purposes only and not as verifiable evidence.

2. Increased insecurity in some of the districts and provinces made it difficult for the researchers to access some of the districts and also stick to tight deadlines as several of the trips had to be postponed due to security incidents.
3. Inability of the researchers to approach the ANA because of the unwillingness by officials to be interviewed, despite permission letters obtained from the Ministry of Defense.

## Overview of Recent Research<sup>3</sup>

### Women's Rights and Access to Justice

Several studies conducted in Afghanistan have been exclusively or partially concerned with progress in matters such as the elimination of violence against women, women's access to services, women's access to justice and women's political participation. "Still a Long Way to Go: Implementation of the Law on Elimination of Violence against Women in Afghanistan" by UNAMA is one such study that reviews the extent to which the Elimination of Violence Against Women (EVAW) law is being implemented by formal judicial and law enforcement institutions since its passing in 2009.<sup>4</sup> This evaluates the progress in EVAW's implementation between October 2011 and September 2012. EVAW is legislation that criminalizes brutal acts against women such as forced marriages, rape and forced self-immolation. The report finds that while there are some visible improvements in the implementation of the law by prosecutors and primary courts in their handling of cases of violence against women, the application of EVAW still remains inconsistent.

Another key finding by UNAMA is the increased number of women that report

violent crimes against them. It is assumed that this positive development is a result of the raising of legal awareness efforts by civil society, the government and the international community. The study also finds a significant surge in the registration of cases of violence against women by prosecutors. The majority of these registrations were completed in two of the more secure provinces, Herat and Kabul. However, the reporting of violence cases by women to police and the registration of these cases by the police remains low. The UNAMA report noted that only 470 out of 4010 cases of violence against women documented by the AIHRC are filed and registered by the ANP and the prosecutors. Most of the cases reported by women to the DOWAs and ANP never reach the prosecutors or the courts because they are dropped as a result of mediation. Likewise, women and families that cannot afford to bribe justice officials are, according to UNAMA, not able to have their cases dealt with in a just and impartial manner. These findings are strong suggestions of the low level of access women have to formal justice institutions.

The UNAMA study also notes hesitancy by the police to arrest people accused of harming women when they are influential individuals, members of the Arbaki<sup>5</sup>, AOG members, or people who are willing to pay bribes. Corruption, inefficiency,

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<sup>3</sup> As new reports/publications will be coming out between this report and the next, new related research that is not covered here will be included to the review in the report for cycle 2.

<sup>4</sup> UNAMA (December 2012)

<sup>5</sup> Local community militia, also known as Afghan Local Police (ALP)



lack of impartiality and discriminatory behavior by the ANP towards women together create a situation where the perpetrators of violence against women believe that they can escape justice. Many times, the ANP consider cases related to women as “family matters” and refer them back to the communities. According to the UNAMA report, institutions such as DoWA offices, AIHRC, prosecutors and the ANP sometimes consult traditional justice bodies, which often consist of powerful men in local communities. This in turn causes an augmentation of harmful practices against women. There are also indications of growing influence in the armed opposition to governance and the rule of law. The research notes that in some provinces, Taliban parallel courts and jirgas are the only authorities responsible for the delivery of justice.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, the UNAMA report confirms that the increased activities of the AOG hinder the mobility of women, especially in remote areas and districts, while impeding their ability to reach formal justice institutions.<sup>7</sup>

According to the 2012 biannual report of the AIHRC on violence against women in Afghanistan, the number of women reporting sexual violence cases has increased in the past year, despite the prevailing fear of being ostracized and being at risk of more violence. Cases of

sexual violence involve forced sexual intercourse, forced prostitution, forced pregnancy, forced abortion and sexual humiliation and insult. In 90 percent of the cases the perpetrator of violence is the husband, the father or another close male relative. The AIHRC names several factors that determine women’s ability to report violence cases. Women’s security, women’s awareness of their rights and the availability of AIHRC offices or other legal aid providing offices are mentioned as three important factors.<sup>8</sup>

### Developments and Security Challenges in Recent Years

Another recently released study relevant to Afghan women’s security in the transition is the Asia Foundation’s Annual Survey of 2012.<sup>9</sup> The Asia Foundation’s 2012 survey reports a wide range of positive developments in Afghanistan in terms of public attitudes towards national security, women’s rights and improved quality of education. According to the survey, the main challenges women face in Afghanistan are identified by the public as a lack of education/illiteracy, a lack of employment opportunities, and a lack of women’s rights. The perception of the lack of education being the main problem rose from 25 percent in 2011 to 29 percent in 2012, while the perception of unemployment being a major challenge had risen from 2 percent in

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<sup>6</sup> UNAMA (December 2012)

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> AIHRC (2012)

<sup>9</sup> The Asia Foundation (2012)

2011 to 14 percent 2012, a considerable increase in just one year and perhaps indicating a serious decline of employment opportunities for women in 2012. The perception that a lack of rights is a major challenge for women had, on the other hand, decreased from 14 percent in 2011 to 10 percent in 2012.<sup>10</sup> The study further states that according to public perception, the ANA is a more professional and honest security institution as compared to the ANP. A high proportion of the respondents (67 percent for ANP and 65 percent for ANA) agreed that both the ANP and the ANA still need foreign assistance and are not able to operate on their own. The ability of ANSF to perform their duties and public confidence in their abilities to provide security are two key factors in the security transition.

Another topical study called “Afghan Women Speak – Enhancing Security and Human Rights in Afghanistan” finds that the escalating violence in many of the provinces jeopardizes the rights and opportunities of women.<sup>11</sup> Women who pursue opportunities provided for them by the international community and the government, and women that speak up and demand their rights risk their lives as they are accused of being anti-Islamic or Western agents. Such women are often subjected to threats, attacks and assassinations, the study claims. Moreover, the study finds that there is an

evident lack of will and support by the government to safeguard vulnerable women in need of protection and support. For instance, there are now roughly 400 women imprisoned for so called “moral crimes” which means that these women are guilty of running away from home as a result of domestic violence, having an extra-marital relationship, or being sexually abused.<sup>12</sup> The courts consider running away as a crime and when women go to the police to seek protection, they either go to prison or are returned to their homes where they are likely to be punished severely for dishonoring the family. Similarly, government officials previously commissioned an investigation into women’s shelters kept by women’s rights organizations to protect abused women. The investigation was carried out based on false rumors about women being prostituted in these houses.<sup>13</sup> Such conduct by the government only boosts the already existing public prejudice against women’s shelters and further undermines the few safety nets defenseless women have when in need of support and protection.

The same study states that female participation and employment in the civil service, security sector and the judiciary has made modest progress since 2006. Women in civil service positions increased from 22 percent in 2006 to 25 percent in 2011 while women in the

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Cortright and Wall (August 2012)

<sup>12</sup> Human Rights Watch (March 2012)

<sup>13</sup> Cortright and Wall (August 2012)

judiciary reached 10 percent in 2011 compared to 4.7 percent in 2006. Women working in the security sector, judiciary and civil service face serious obstacles that make it difficult for them to continue working. Not only do they resist family pressure that disapproves of them working in such offices, they also have to deal with discrimination in work place. In the education sector, significant progress is found regarding girls' enrollment, the number of female teachers (the teaching force is now approximately 39 percent female), and the number of schools built across the country. Stronger support for girl's education in some communities has been detected despite some schools, particularly girls' schools, being attacked by the AOG and having to close due to increased insecurity. Schools built by NGOs with community participation, however, are considered as less vulnerable to attacks.<sup>14</sup>

Regarding security in recent years, it is reported that the armed opposition now controls a growing number of provincial districts where the government used to be in control, which is a strong indication of the geographical expansion of the opposition. Areas in the northern part of the country that were previously considered as peaceful are now subject to violence. Some claim that the opposition's growing strength is caused by the Afghan state's inability to spread

its authority and to provide services to the public.<sup>15</sup>

The increased insecurity and violence has a stronger impact on women as compared to men. For instance, not only are women more at risk for becoming victims of sexual assault, but insecurity has also reinforced their immobility and the control their families have over them. Likewise, the research shows that an escalation in violence also increases the number of child and forced marriages in communities. Families prefer to marry their daughters at a very early age rather than risking them getting raped or forcefully taken by militia commanders as their wives.<sup>16</sup>

### Studies Related to the Security Transition in Afghanistan

Although there are studies available that assess the progress and impact of the pre-2014 transition process from a security perspective, there is little attention paid to the impact of the security transition from a gender perspective.<sup>17</sup> Research about the transition process is mainly concerned with issues related to negotiations and the possibility of a political settlement between the Taliban and the Afghan government, the level of preparedness of the ANSF to assume the national security responsibility, the international community's increased interest in exiting Afghanistan, and the role and influence

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Rangelov and Theros (2012)

<sup>16</sup> Cortright and Wall (August 2012)

<sup>17</sup> See for example: Katzman, (January 2013), Stapleton, (May 2012) and International Crisis Group (March 2012)

of key regional actors in the outcome and potential success of the transition process. A major conclusion in some research related to the transition process is the inability of the Afghan government to respond to a rushed transition process and the incapacity of ANSF to take full responsibility of national security.<sup>18</sup>

Others argue that the potential failure of the ANSF to shoulder responsibility for Afghanistan's security would have devastating consequences, including a full-scale civil war. Challenges within the ANA include the prevalence of corruption, low literacy rates, drug addiction, high attrition rates, equipment and recruitment deficits, and a lack of training among personnel. Many ANA soldiers serve in the army without sufficient training. The recruitment policy favors quantity over quality, as the government is striving to achieve the targeted expansion of the ANA before the end of 2014.<sup>19</sup>

Newly published independent research regarding the transition confirms that insecurity in large parts of the country has increased, affecting women's mobility adversely, which, in turn, impedes their access to education, health care and participation in public life.<sup>20</sup>

A position paper by the Afghan Women's Network (AWN) concerned with the impact of the security transition on the women and children of Afghanistan

expresses serious concerns. 300 women leaders across eight provinces were interviewed to document the level of perceived involvement in security handover process and the impact of the security transition on women's security, ability to move and access to public spaces. The findings portray a very negative image of women's participation in the transition process and show a non-existent consideration of gender sensitivity in the process. In fact, the majority of women feel excluded from the consultations that have been shaping the planned steps and activities of the security handover. Furthermore, these women do not feel that the ANSF are sympathetic to the needs of women and children, or to human rights in general. They also believe that the ANSF have not been sufficiently trained to respond to issues regarding the safety of women and children in a professional manner.<sup>21</sup>

This existing literature notwithstanding, there is a lack of research available that focuses exclusively on the impact of the security transition on Afghan women. This study seeks to address this research gap by conducting a recurring monitoring and evaluation to examine in what ways the transition affects women's lives.

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<sup>18</sup> Stapleton (May 2012)

<sup>19</sup> Wood (2012)

<sup>20</sup> Wilkens (November 2012)

<sup>21</sup> The Afghan Women's Network (May 2012)

# Key Findings from Selected Districts

## Surobi, Kabul

Date of visit:  
September 2012

Transition period:  
January 2012 – July  
2012

Transition  
Tranche: 2

### Overall Security and Access to Justice

The conservative cultural environment of Surobi has continuously prevented women from accessing formal justice institutions. Family cases are solved within the families and do not reach the police or the formal justice system. Several of the most populated villages around the Surobi district center are under the control of the opposition where parallel justice systems with customary courts and judges provide traditional justice to communities. The ANP rarely visit these villages and most of the cases that reach them are from the district center.

The few women who work in Surobi claim that the district's security has deteriorated visibly in the second half of 2012. Several of the villages surrounding the district center that used to be accessible for community projects are no longer deemed safe. Since the transition of security to the ANSF, the adjoining areas of Surobi are reported as being increasingly controlled by the armed opposition.

"At night we feel unsafe. There are more Talib people in the area

now and during the night they come to the center of Surobi. We can't go outside of our homes [at night], and we will not open the door for anyone, not even for relatives or friends."

– Individual interview, working woman, Surobi

Some of the interviewed women voiced concerns about the ability of the ANSF to provide security in Surobi and protect it from AOG activities, on the grounds that ANSF are poorly equipped and badly trained.

Contrary to the comments by the working women, non-working women and community elders in Surobi expressed satisfaction about the departure of international forces. The international military presence was viewed by many as intimidating to women who felt frightened by the presence of heavy military arms and tanks in their neighborhoods. With the international forces now gone, women feel more comfortable when leaving their homes in Surobi center.

These sentiments are shared by officials in the ANP, who confirm that the community's attitude towards the ANSF has improved noticeably since the IMF/ ISAF presence diminished.

"When the foreign troops were present and there were fire exchange between them and the armed opposition, many times the civilians were killed. People were very unhappy about this. Hostility towards the government was also more during this time. The relationship between civilians and the Afghan police and ANA has

improved since the foreign troops left.”

– Individual interview, ANP, Surobi

## Access to Work and Public Life

In Surobi, it is not common for women to work outside the homes and women are generally not visible in the public sector. The few women encountered by the research team were school teachers, health clinic staff and female community council members. Women working in government offices in Surobi are practically non-existent. Only two women were working in the French Cooperation Office of Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Irrigation (FCOMAIL). According to these women, in the previous years they were able to come and go to work on their own, but nowadays this was no longer possible. Their mahram<sup>22</sup> now has to accompany them to and from work.

Since the departure of international forces, there appears to have been a winding down in reconstruction projects. For example, at the time of this research in September 2012, only one vocational training center for women was being run in the district center. All other courses had stopped due to lack of funding despite the demand by the women for vocational training. Projects related to women outside of the district center ceased due to the deterioration in

security conditions soon after the completion of the security transition process July 2012.

## Mobility and Access to Services

The very traditional and conservative context in Surobi has always made it difficult for women to move freely and openly in public spaces. The situation appears to remain unchanged since the fall of the Taliban more than a decade ago. It is therefore difficult to detect an obvious change with regard to women's mobility in Surobi due to the security transition. Nevertheless, the research indicated both positive and negative developments.

One positive development is that schools have become more accessible to girls now since mid 2012 as compared to previous year prior to the transition, as streets are perceived safer from potential armed clashes and surprise attacks by the AOG. According to elders, parents are more inclined to send their girls to school since the withdrawal of the foreign military. Culturally insensitive behavior by internationals such as the taking of photos of female students and teachers is considered unacceptable, and was mentioned as another reason behind the reluctance to send girls to school. Moreover, the ANP claimed that the girls' schools are being watched by the police to make sure that girls are not harassed or bothered by men on their way home from school.

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<sup>22</sup> A mahram is a close male relative such as the father or brother, who would not be permitted to marry or have any physical relationship with the woman in question.



Although parents appear more comfortable about sending girls to school now, women's mobility and access to health services seem to have decreased. Most of the women currently able to visit the district clinic are those living in the center or its immediate vicinity. Since the transition, the roads connecting the center to remote areas have become more insecure because of the AOG presence. It has also become difficult for community health workers to visit some of the villages due to increased AOG activity.

## Paghman, Kabul

<b>Date of visit:</b> October 2012	<b>Transition period:</b> IMF were never permanently present in Paghman	<b>Transition tranche:</b> 1
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### Overall Security and Access to Justice

The most common fears the women of Paghman have regarding their personal security and the security of their children are kidnappings, suicide attacks, explosions, and other armed opposition attacks. Women feel relatively safe in the district center and have no complaints of harassment. The ANSF is reported as behaving respectfully towards women. However, community members are often afraid of becoming unintended targets of attacks by AOGs on the ANP and ANA. Therefore, people generally try to avoid being physically close to the ANSF as much as possible.

As with the women in Surobi, women in Paghman also confirmed that they felt uncomfortable and intimidated by the presence of foreign military in their district. Since the transition of Paghman in early 2012, the IMF visits are less frequent and the women are happy about this. Although women and men in Paghman and Surobi seem happy about the non-visibility of international forces in their communities, they still express a high degree of worry and concern about what will happen in 2014:

“Most women in Paghman are worried about the foreign troops leaving [after 2014]. They are worried that things will go back to the old days. It is mainly

women who are concerned about this. Working men who work in government offices and in security forces are worried as well, just like women who work outside the homes, that the Talibs [the Taliban] will come back, but regular people like farmers, and women in the homes don't care as much.”

– FGD, working women, Paghman

Women who work outside the home or in offices, and men who work in government offices or for international organizations are more concerned about their personal security than farmers and women that stay home. Women who work outside the home and men who work in offices that are threatened by the opposition worry that once the IMF/ISAF have completely withdrawn, the AOG may very well come back to power and target them for treason.

During visits to Paghman in September and October 2012, the researchers were told that threat letters were distributed to the public demanding that girls must stop going to school, women must stay home and men must not work in any offices related to the government. The letter warned that the consequences would be severe if the demands were not obeyed.

Family violence cases in Paghman do not normally reach the FRU or the ANP. This is partially explained by cultural traditionalism but also by the fact that Paghman is a district that is located in the proximity of Kabul City. If families decide to approach justice institutions, they normally prefer to do so by traveling

to the capital, as this would keep the matter private. Only two cases were received by the FRU in 2012. Normally, family cases are referred to the district council where elders mediate to solve the family issues. Similar to the community council, the FRU also attempts to mediate between parties before referring the case to the formal justice system and legal aid organizations. This is a common procedure and has not changed in recent years.

The ANP in Paghman appear to be relatively active and have the cooperation and support of the district communities that call and report security incidents. It seems this was the case before the security transition took place. It was reported that the ANP has received comprehensive training by the Germans, and feel empowered to take over the security responsibility of Paghman.<sup>23</sup>

“Now our police have enough experience. We approve of the security transition because this is our hometown, and we have to provide our own security... The police is lacking proper equipment, but the people are helping out and informing us, which is helpful.”

– Individual interview, ANP, Paghman

## Access to Work and Public Life

No tangible change is observed in the communities regarding the situation of women working outside the homes in

Paghman. There were several comments by housewives, women working outside the home, health clinic staff and elders that suggested a positive change in the public attitude regarding working women. For example, it is generally acceptable for women to teach at girls' schools or work as health staff in clinics and hospitals. Professions where women work with women only and where they serve their communities while contributing to the household income is considered as respectable professions according to community elders in Paghman:

“We accept that women work in clinics and schools but not in NGOs. NGOs are completely non-Islamic, and women that work there cannot represent Muslim women. Clinics and schools are the best place for women to work in because they can teach Muslim daughters and earn money by serving their community and other women... We admire women that work in clinics, schools and hospitals, because they work with other women only and serve women and children.”

– Focus group discussion, elders in Paghman

Still, women in focus group discussions stated that most women working outside the home commute from Kabul City, and are not from Paghman.<sup>24</sup> It is not common for women to be working in government offices or in NGOs. Only one female government employee was encountered in Paghman, who was working as a monitoring officer at the

<sup>23</sup> This training was most likely provided by the German Police Project Team (GPPT)

<sup>24</sup> FGD, working women, Paghman

department of education. According to this monitoring officer, she was the only woman working at this department. On being asked about her working environment, she said she felt comfortable at work and was treated well by her male colleagues.<sup>25</sup>

## Mobility and Access to Services

Women do not seem to have increased problems regarding their mobility in Paghman. Working Women are able to continue coming and going to work without any harassment. Paghman is a relatively small community and families know each other well, which makes it difficult for men to harass women in public. Unlike in Surobi, the research team observed plenty of women in public and shopping in the district bazaar. Women were also present in Paghman's district center. It was also said that men understand more now compared to a few years ago that women need to visit the clinics for their health and it is not inappropriate for them to go there in the company of other women or alone.

"When the foreign people [IMF/ISAF] were here and when our wives and daughters needed to go to the clinic, to school or the bazaar, we had to leave work and accompany them. But now that the foreign troops are not here anymore, we don't mind letting them go out on their own."

– FGD, elders, Paghman

Girls' high schools in Paghman report that they have more female students enrolled in the second semester of 2012 compared to previous years but the problem of daily absenteeism among female students is still an issue. The main reason for girls being kept from school is parents' fear for their children's security. They are mainly worried that suicide bombers may attack the schools. It is reported that this fear of attacks among the population has increased since the withdrawal of IMF/ISAF was announced and the media has increased its attention on the transition process. Although no major incidents have occurred to confirm that security has indeed worsened since July 2012, fear in the minds of community members seem to have increased. As in Surobi, the community members in Paghman claim they are happy about the physical absence of international forces in their everyday lives. However, they still express concerns about the IMF/ISAF leaving Afghanistan altogether and what this may lead to in terms of peace and security.

Harassment of girls on the way to school and home has decreased over the years and is not common according to school staff. Still, the roads are monitored to ensure no boys or men bother the girls. The schools in Paghman do not think that it is a good idea to have an ANP guard the schools in their immediate proximity because they feel that this

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<sup>25</sup> Her husband was the head of the education department, however, which is likely to have an impact on how men behave towards her at work.

would only increase the worry among parents and also increase the risk of attack, since police are direct AOG targets. It is, however, very likely that the decrease in schoolgirls' harassment could be a result of the increased efforts by ANP and the school staff to patrol the roads and ensure that girls are not bothered on their way home.

According to health clinic staff in central Paghman, women in remote areas are not permitted by their husbands to visit or give birth in the clinics because "their husbands don't like their women to be seen in public." Nevertheless, this finding is not related to the transition but is a general observation of the more restricted conditions women in the remote villages live in in contrast to the center of Paghman.

## Mehtarlam, Laghman

<b>Date of visit:</b>	<b>Transition period:</b>	<b>Transition</b>
December 2012	June, 2011 – January, 2012	<b>tranche:</b> 1

### Overall Security and Access to Justice

“Every night the Taliban attack the police or security forces in the center of Laghman province. Before people used to talk about the insecurity in Helmand, Kandahar, and Zabul but right now the security situation of Laghman is worse than those provinces.”

– FGD, working women, Laghman

Among the seven provinces visited for this study, Laghman was the one that had experienced the most dramatic security deterioration since the completion of its security transition in January 2012, including the AOG assassination of two female Department of Women Affairs (DoWA) heads between July and December 2012. The two murders strongly indicate that women are direct targets of the AOG and are being used in their intimidation strategy to send other women a clear message about the cost of being in public.

Women and community elders believe that the security situation in the province has worsened considerably in the past year and that this has happened as a result of the transition and the departure of IMF/ISAF forces. Targeted killings of civilians and security officials have increased along with public fear for personal safety. Local citizens believe the ANSF do not have the capacity,

appropriate training, or equipment to maintain peace and public security.

“If there are 40–50 police officers in a district, 10 of them will be absent, 5 of them will have problems at home and some will be bodyguards to commanders while others will have addiction problems. We cannot call these people police. People are trying to provide their own security because the police and security forces cannot provide us security...ANSF must be properly trained and be given proper equipment.”

– FGD, elders, Laghman

The ALP in Laghman seem to be relatively active in fighting against the AOG and although some view them with suspicion, none of the key informants or focus group participants had heard anything negative about their conduct towards women and civilians. Not all areas in Laghman have the ALP forces, but those that do seem relatively satisfied because the ALP in these communities consists of individuals from the communities and no harmful practices or misconduct by the ALP have been heard of. The good behavior of the ALP and the ANSF was also confirmed by legal aid organizations that have received no cases related to abuse or inappropriate behavior towards women. However, it was also mentioned that fewer women are approaching the legal aid organizations to file a complaint or seek legal assistance because of the increased insecurity.



## Access to Work and Public Life

“My son is a student and he keeps asking me not to go to work [because of poor security]. He says he will quit school to find work and money for family expenses. But I said to him that he has to continue his studies and that I will be more careful about my security.”

– FGD, a workingwoman, Laghman

As the above quote suggests, even children seem to be aware of the many risks women take by continuing to work in order to provide for their families. Before the assassinations of the two DoWA heads, women used to visit the DoWA office and participate in workshops organized for them. The DoWA staff reported that this was no longer possible since women were too intimidated come to the office. According to the DoWA staff, women in Laghman are convinced that any woman that works outside the home or in an office is likely to suffer the same fate as the two assassinated DoWA heads. The intimidation campaigns to scare women from participating in public life, along with an increased level of conflict, have had a very negative impact on women’s willingness to participate in public life. Many educated women, including women working in government offices, teachers and midwives, have reportedly quit their jobs in the past three months, especially in the districts around the center, after receiving threats.<sup>26</sup> Similarly, young women that finish high school and that

would normally have been able to look for work opportunities now seem reluctant to do so and prefer to stay home instead because they fear for their personal safety.

There are also anecdotal indications that the increased aggression towards women by the armed opposition has also influenced the men in the communities who are now more openly expressing a dislike for working women. Women-related projects and vocational trainings that used to be available in the province have now stopped.

## Mobility and Access to Services

“In the first years of Karzai’s presidency foreign women used to come here without bodyguards and with foreign clothes but right now Afghan women cannot walk outside without male company and Burqa.”

– FGD, working women, Laghman

The districts surrounding Mehtarlam, especially Alinegar and Alisheng that previously used to have an international presence and were considered peaceful, are now inaccessible to the residents of Mehtarlam. They are unable to visit family and friends outside the provincial capital. The AOG is reported to be more active in the districts, which prevents women and men from being able to travel in the province as a whole. The freedom of movement among civilians in Mehtarlam is currently limited to a four kilometer radius around the city center because the roads to the districts are

<sup>26</sup> FGD, working women, Laghman.

insecure. Several days prior to APPRO's researchers' visit to Laghman, the AOG had allegedly killed a young tailor on his way to Alinegar. The members of the armed opposition had apparently mistaken him for being in the police on discovering his business cards.

Girls' education especially has suffered from the security deterioration in Laghman. Working women as well as housewives confirmed that, although they would like their daughters to attend school and have an education, the fear of retribution by the armed opposition is preventing them from sending their girls to school. Most of the schools in the province, except for a few in Mehtarlam, appear to be closed and some have been turned into police checkpoints. Women also complained about not being able to visit the clinics as often as they would want to because of the increased insecurity of the roads. Women from the rural areas no longer travel alone but in the company of their husbands or mahrams because they feel intimidated by the presence of the ANA, ANP and the opposition. Also, a number of the women interviewed stated that before the major deterioration in security around March 2012, women were still comfortable traveling alone by taxi but that this was no longer possible.

## Jalalabad, Nangarhar

Date of visit:  
November 2012

Transition period:  
January 2012 – July  
2012

Transition  
tranche: 2

### Overall Security and Access to Justice

“Our fear has increased. When we join seminars, we hear from women that work in remote clinics, we hear stories about midwives being killed in the remote areas. These stories have increased in the past six months. Compared to the districts Jalalabad is better but working women are now more afraid of somebody hurting them.”

– Individual interview, midwife, Jalalabad

General apprehension, especially among women, appears to have increased since spring 2012 in Nangarhar. Many of the interviewed women confirmed that this is partly due to suicide attacks, explosions and kidnappings that occur more frequently in the province compared to previous years, but also because of the ambiguity regarding the country after 2014 and what will follow after the withdrawal of international forces.

“When the media report about the suicide attacks, all families get worried about their children going out. We are also worried about the foreign troops, because when they leave Afghanistan the conflict will increase. In the past months we feel that the suicide attacks have increased and we have more fears for our security.”

– FGD, housewives, Jalalabad

Although more women are approaching legal aid organizations and women’s safe houses because they are more informed about their legal rights, there are some indications that justice institutions, including the police and courts, are becoming less responsive to family cases.<sup>27</sup> It was suggested that these institutions have become less cooperative towards legal aid organizations that defend the rights of women. For example, it is common for police to blame women for mishaps that happen them by questioning why they leave their homes to begin with. The lack of sensitivity of the police regarding cases that involve violence against women is partially explained by the perceived increase in corruption in the justice institutions. According to some legal aid NGOs that assist women, the police and courts expect money in exchange for their services, and, if not paid, they tend to delay cases or keep them pending for longer than necessary. There is also anecdotal confirmation of evidence being distorted in exchange for bribes from defendants according to a legal aid providing women’s rights organization.

“When we have assault cases [of women] and bring them to the police, the police do not help. Instead they question why the woman [in question] left her home alone. This has become worse in recent times.”

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<sup>27</sup> This information was provided by legal aid providing organizations in Jalalabad, including Women for Afghan Women and the Afghan Women’s Network.

– FGD, a woman working in a legal aid organization, Jalalabad

The ANP in particular has earned the mistrust and suspicion of those communities that view the police as a corrupt and symbolic security establishment rather than a legitimate and competent entity. Although there were no clear incidents of police harassment of women, or any strong indications of women fearing the police, women displayed an overall suspicion of the ANP and their activities.

### Access to Work and Public Life

The availability of employment opportunities for women in Jalalabad appears to be significantly reduced since the completion of the security transition in July 2012. Along with the military presence in Nangarhar, development work and projects have also been reduced, eliminating income and training opportunities for women. Similar to other provinces that have been through the transition process, NGOs in Nangarhar have diminished their presence with the IMF/ISAF withdrawal. The departure of development agencies from Nangarhar in conjunction with the security responsibility handover to the ANSF seems to be interpreted by Afghan women as an acknowledgement of an imminent deterioration of security.

“We are worried about the foreign troops leaving and the Talib people coming back and preventing women from working. Women will have to stay home and women who have no husbands [with no one to support

them financially] will not be able to work outside. We all fear the Talibs coming back. They will first target the women that work outside the homes.”

– FGD, working women, Jalalabad

Discussions with working women in Jalalabad also indicated that the fear of being physically targeted for not obeying the AOG demands to stay home has become a part of their everyday lives. This fear is a result of a combination of factors. One reason is the perceived increased AOG presence in districts that are located in close proximity of the city, which heightens the sense of being surrounded by people that are openly posing a threat to the personal safety of these women. Another major worry is the corruption and inability of the ANP to provide public security in the face of a purported increase in criminal activity including the kidnappings of ordinary citizens in exchange for ransoms.

“It is more acceptable in the society to have women work outside the homes, although NGO workers are still regarded as bad women. But there are not many work opportunities. This is the main problem. Before women used to work in the remote districts but now there is no work for them so they stay home. As the work become less, less women are able to work outside the homes.”

– FGD, housewives, Jalalabad

Correspondingly, it has not escaped the notice of housewives in Jalalabad that women that used to work and contribute to the household income are now unemployed and stay home. Two reasons

can be identified for the decrease in the number of women working in public offices. First, a deteriorating security situation and the fear of being punished by the AOG appears to have affected the psyche of women, who are now more reluctant to work in public and instead choose to stay home. According to several key informants in Jalalabad, the number of threat letters and threat calls received by women working outside the home and legal aid organizations has increased dramatically in 2012. Second, for those women that want to work, despite the intensified perception of danger, there is an increased lack of employment opportunities due to a decrease in development work and a poor economy.<sup>28</sup> Despite these obstacles in female access to work, the level of tolerance and consent of communities for women working in public offices, especially in the education and health sectors, appears to have increased in Jalalabad proper.

### Mobility and Access to Services

Similar to women's overall security, access to work and public life, women's mobility has also been negatively affected and is currently limited to the city of Jalalabad. Women have said that they are able to visit the bazaar, clinics and send their daughters to school without male company, but not without discomfort and worry that they themselves or their children will be in harm's way when outside the home.

"We are able to move in the city when going to the bazaar, clinic, schools and work, but only in the center, not in the districts. In the districts there is insecurity. There are robberies, kidnappings and Talib people. It is not safe for women to move outside in the districts."

– FGD, working women, Jalalabad

Importantly, the transition does not seem to have a visible impact on girls' access to schools. The high schools that were visited claimed that they were satisfied with the withdrawal of international forces because they were causing practical inconveniences with their presence such as blocking the roads. Because of these road blockages, teachers and students were sometimes not able to reach schools on time. Also, the awareness of the IMF/ISAF convoys being priority AOG targets intimidated students and school staff when they were passing by. According to school principals and elders, the parents in Jalalabad, like the parents in Surobi and Paghman, were more reluctant to send their children to school because of their fear of possible AOG attacks on the way. Since the IMF withdrawal, families are more at ease with sending their children to school, which has increased girls' access to education.

The clinics that were visited to determine whether women's ability to reach health services had been affected due to a relapse in security were all located in Jalalabad proper. The health staff in

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<sup>28</sup> Projects related to development work often provide employment opportunities for women in Afghanistan. With the reduction in development projects, employment opportunities for women and vocational trainings have also diminished.

these clinics confirmed that women are comfortable walking to the clinics and the majority of them either come alone or in the company of their children or other female relatives. When asked about women's ability to reach the clinics in the districts, some of the clinic staff indicated they were uncertain because they do not go to those districts due to insecurity. It is unclear how consistently the clinics in remote areas are monitored or whether the women in the districts are able to reach them.

Harassment in public is very common in Jalalabad. Some of the women that participated in the FDGs felt that harassment has increased noticeably in the past six months (since June 2012) as men are increasingly attempting to grab women in public. Verbal harassment is also somewhat common. Nevertheless, whether the increase in harassment is a perception or if harassment has indeed increased is difficult to establish as Nangarhar's conservative cultural environment has always made it difficult for women to be active in public without being subjected to a high degree of harassment, either physical or verbal.



## Dawlatabad, Balkh

Date of visit: November 2012    Transition period: January 2012 – July 2012    Transition tranche: 2

### Overall Security and Access to Justice

Many women interviewed in Dawlatabad voiced a strong concern regarding the IMF/ISAF withdrawal from Afghanistan by the end of 2014, and claimed that their fears for their personal security and the security of their children has increased since the announcement of the security transition and the departure of foreign troops.

In Dawlatabad, citizens have high regard for their local ANP and ANA forces and expressed a strong level of trust in them. The school shuras, which include teachers, parents and community elders, are in regular contact with ANP and coordinate with them directly to share security information by inviting them to shura meetings. The same cannot be said about the ALP. The communities in Dawlatabad generally view the ALP as groups of criminals which use public intimidation as a tool to extend their power at the expense of public order.

“All women are afraid of what will happen after 2014 and most of them think that the time after the Russian withdrawal will come back...We have a lot of Arbaki<sup>29</sup> police in our area, but unfortunately, I cannot see the difference between the Arbaki and the Taliban.”

– Individual interview, prominent woman, Dawlatabad

Individual informants that were interviewed regarding their view of the ALP repeatedly asked: “Why does the government not reinforce the ANP instead? We have the ANP and ANA, why do we need the ALP?” The public confusion about the purpose and role of the ALP is apparent in Dawlatabad. Many women admitted being intimidated by the ALP because the ALP do not wear uniforms and it is difficult for the communities to distinguish whether they are ALP or members of the AOG. The ANP in Dawlatabad are also under-resourced, with only 30 police officers responsible for the security of a district with 62 villages, and local citizens exhibited a strong need to understand who is a member of the ANP and who is not:

“Our district has 62 villages and in these 62 villages the people are against the Arbaki. We know that the Arbaki was established by the MOI, but unfortunately, they use the name of the police and they work for their own benefit, they abuse their power.”

– Individual interview, ANP, Dawlatabad

Without exception, all of the women that participated in the interviews and FGDs stated that they were intimidated by the ALP and were very uncomfortable with being in the same public space with them. Although no incidents were mentioned in which ALP harmed women

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<sup>29</sup> Arbaki is a local name for Afghan Local Police (ALP).

in Dawlatabad, they were accused of disturbing the public peace through nuisances such as extortion and intimidation. ANP security officials also noted that the ALP is not controlled by the ANP in Dawlatabad, which causes problems. They indicated that the national police simply do not have the personnel or resources to monitor and control the ALP.

The majority of cases of violence against women take place in the homes, and the perpetrator is normally either the husband or another close family member. Ignorance and poverty were frequently mentioned as two main causes behind violent acts against women. Often, family cases never reach the ANP, and if they do, they often reach them too late because people frequently choose to first go to the community shuras where elders act as judges. Cases related to family violence normally reach the FRU and ANP five to ten days after the case has been discussed in the village shuras because the elders prefer to solve the cases among themselves.<sup>30</sup> This procedure seriously impedes women's access to justice as perpetrators of violence often escape punishment. On occasions where a case reaches the FRU, the responsible officer first attempts to solve the issue through mediation and a warning. However, if the issue remains unresolved and violence continues, the case is referred to Mazar-e Sharif's ANP investigation office, where women are

often placed in safe houses for protection and receive legal representation.

Forced marriages are described as another form of violence caused by poverty and a weak economy. Families that live in destitution often marry their under-aged girls to men in exchange for dowry money. Many girls have no choice but to accept the marriages, according to an ANP officer in Dawlatabad.

"In 1390 [2011], we had a case about a 13 year old girl that was married off to a 65 year old man. After the wedding, the girl ran away. I asked the family, why did you do this to your own daughter? They said they needed the money because they are poor. Then I asked the elder: why did you permit this 13-year-old girl to marry a 65-year-old man? Why did you not tell the man to marry someone his own age? I told the elders that this is a crime. Right now this case is in the court and under investigation."

– Individual interview, ANP, Dawlatabad

## Access to Work and Public Life

Several negative developments have affected women's access to work and public life in Dawlatabad since the summer of 2012. For example, women and men working as civil servants in government offices have started receiving an increased number of threats by the AOG since the security transition in Dawlatabad was completed.<sup>31</sup> There

<sup>30</sup> Individual interview, ANP, Dawlatabad.

<sup>31</sup> FGD, working women, Dawlatabad

are also cases of women resigning from their work because of the threats. In general, working women have become more uncomfortable and concerned about their personal security in the months that followed the security transition.

The number of female students at vocational training centers have decreased in Dawlatabad's villages in the past five months [since July 2012], because the husbands tell the women they [the husbands] will be killed by the Taliban at night if their wives go to courses. Women who go to courses go in secret from nearby areas, but from further areas women cannot go.

– FGD, working women, Dawlatabad

Similar to some of the other districts that were visited for this study, except for NGO offices, the communities in Dawlatabad do not have major qualms about women working in schools, clinics or even in government offices. Citizens indicated that the public attitude regarding the appropriateness of women working outside the home varies depending on the values of each family and their level of education.

### **Mobility and Access to Services**

The ANP in Dawlatabad has taken several key measures to increase the mobility and safety of women and girls in the district. For example, police officers regularly patrol the roads used by school girls to walk to and from school, and provide them safe passage.

"In our district we have two mullahs, one is educated and has a lot of information about women. He says a woman must be able to move freely and go to the bazaar, that a woman must be educated and that she has rights. Then we have an uneducated mullah who has a dark mind. He says we should not allow women to go to clinics. If she is sick, just give her tablets, if she becomes good that is good, if not please let her die, because they should remain home, he says."

– Individual interview, ANP, Dawlatabad

The content of the messages and teachings that mullahs and elders convey to the people are extremely important with regards to promoting women's rights at the community level. The restrictive attitude of men towards women's rights, mobility and access to work is often influenced by influential men who preach their moral convictions to the communities, expecting them to be followed. It appears, as a rule, in areas where mullahs or the elders are more moderate, women's rights are more likely to be respected.

Although women face fewer restrictions regarding their mobility and access to education and healthcare in Dawlatabad's district center, several informants stated that the situation was different in remote villages. In the center, school and vocational training staff claimed that their number of female students has increased mainly due to people's increased appreciation of the value of education and their improved understanding regarding the benefits for

the family if they have educated children, regardless of gender. In several of the more remote villages, however, anecdotal evidence suggests that families are told by the ALP not to send their girls to schools while vocational training centers are prevented from providing literacy courses for women. It is said that the ALP is banning girls from accessing schools and vocational training centers, by using insecurity as an excuse, instructing communities that girls must remain at home because it is not safe for them to be outside.

The clinic in central Dawlatabad indicated that women do not face major security concerns when they are accessing the clinic or the bazaar in the center because the roads are considered reasonably secure. The majority of the clinic's patients are female and most of them are able to walk without male family members accompanying them. Women do not complain about insecurity on the way to the health clinic. It is more difficult for pregnant women to access healthcare since they are not in a condition to walk, and finding transportation is often a problem in the area.

According to working women , harassment in public has decreased considerably and is almost non-existent in Dawlatabad. This could partly be a result of the special efforts made by the ANP in Dawlatabad that has attempted to reduce harassment in public by engaging the community elders and advising them

to instruct the men in their communities about not harassing women.

## Balkh (district), Balkh

Date of visit:  
December 2012

Transition period:  
January 2012 – July  
2012

Transition  
tranche: 2

### Overall Security and Access to Justice

Though the security transition of Balkh province was completed in July 2012, negative developments in several of the provincial districts have already been noticed by some CSOs based in Mazar-e-Sharif. According to CCA<sup>32</sup>, a visible regression in the security situation is being observed in districts like Sholgara, Chimtal, Charbolak and Balkh because of increased AOG activity.

Similar to Dawlatabad, the communities and women in Balkh district stated that they were pleased with the conduct and work of the ANSF, claiming that the ANP in particular is responsive to the security needs of women. The intimidation felt by the women in Dawlatabad regarding the ALP forces, however, was also observed in Balkh district. Unlike the trust felt towards the ANSF, most of the women that were interviewed in Balkh voiced concerns about crossing paths with the ALP. Women repeatedly confirmed that they were convinced the ALP had links to the AOG. Schools and clinics also expressed uneasiness with having the ALP in their proximity. As in Dawlatabad, women, schools and clinics complained about the ALP not wearing uniforms for identification purposes. There are clear indications that suggest a strong

disapproval of the ALP in the communities where they operate, which consequently also has a negative impact on people's trust in their government.

"We don't want local police and ever since they took security responsibility, people have lost their trust in the government because these guys are people who misused their power in the past. They are local police during the day and Talib at night."

– FGD, working women, Balkh

Some prominent women stressed that they feel more exposed to threats from the AOG in 2012 as compared to previous years, which could be interpreted as a decline in their sense of personal security. Similar to other districts, women in Balkh are very conscious about the possibility of being targeted by the AOG in their attempt to limit women's participation and presence in public:

"Our district is not very secure and I am getting more and more worried about someone following and harming me because the Taliban is always proud to kill women like me. They take pride in killing active women."

– Individual interview, prominent woman (1), Balkh

According to the FRU in Balkh, the number of women that contact them to report abuse and violence cases has increased. This increase was explained by the FRU as a result of improved awareness among women regarding their

<sup>32</sup> Cooperation Center for Afghanistan (CCA), a human rights organization based in Mazar-e-Sharif

legal rights. It could also be an indication of women having a higher comfort level when approaching security entities such as the ANP or the FRU. The number of “run-away” cases have also increased in 2012, Balkh’s FRU claims. Women in districts like Balkh and Dawlatabad do not have access to formal justice institutions or legal aid organizations that can offer them support or advice when they are in need of protection from violence or family ill-treatment.<sup>33</sup> The only way for women to obtain assistance is to find a way to reach one of the few women’s safe houses available in the city of Mazar-e-Sharif.

Several CSOs providing legal aid based in Mazar-e-Sharif reported that their programs and activities to raise legal awareness and help women access justice in the districts have been reduced significantly or are currently non-existent. Insecurity and a lack of donor funding were mentioned as two main reasons for this recession in CSO activity beyond the provincial capital.

## Access to Work and Public Life

“When we are going to work we are worried that people will point their fingers and say, look that is a woman who works and we are worried that someone might shoot us and kills us because we are working.”

– Individual interview, prominent woman (2), Balkh

Testimonies by working women imply that the stigmatization of women that work in public may have increased in 2012 and that men increasingly prefer women to remain home. It is possible that the objection to women working outside the home is intensified as a result of increased insecurity. However, it is equally possible that the community acceptance of women’s participation in public life is suffering a downturn as a result of increased AOG presence.

## Mobility and Access to Services

Women in Balkh claimed that harassment is uncommon in the district. Many of the women explicitly stated that they were pleased with the work of the ANP especially because they have been active in trying to prevent the harassment of girls and women in public.

Schools in particular are happy with the attentiveness of the police to their security needs. All of the schools that were interviewed claimed that women and girls do not face any difficulties with regard to their mobility. It was also confirmed by several sources, including FGDs with women, that the harassment of women in Balkh is minimal and women do not feel bothered when they are walking to the bazaar or the clinic. They are able to leave their homes to visit the clinics or the bazaar without the company of a mahram.

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<sup>33</sup> Interview with CCA, in Mazar-e-Sharif

## Lashkargah, Helmand

Date of visit:  
December 2012

Transition period:  
January 2012 – July  
2012

Transition  
tranche: 1

### Overall Security and Access to Justice

Positive as well as negative developments were found in Lashkargah, the provincial capital of Helmand province, with regard to women's overall security and access to justice.

The handing over of security responsibilities in Lashkargah to the ANSF by the IMF since the security transition in July 2012 has been met with mainly positive reactions. The community elders stated that they were happy about not having their homes searched by foreign soldiers and that the people are more cooperative with the ANSF than ever since they assumed the lead responsibility for public security.

“Compared to past years we have less number of [drug] addicted people in the police. Before, they had no awareness about laws but now they know about laws and they show more respect to the people. Before, foreigners used to shoot innocent people and for this people were against them and since the Afghan security forces don't do this, people like them.

- FGD, elders, Lashkargah

The elders in Lashkargah believe that the conduct and abilities of the ANP has improved. Information sharing and consultation between community elders and the ANSF occurs on a regular basis.

The elders claimed that cooperation between ANSF and community shuras in the districts is also common.

The public perception of the ALP, on the other hand, is entirely negative. The ALP is mainly accused of being uneducated and are known as “bad people” that cultivate opium. People feel that they do nothing other than cause public disorder and nuisance. The elders believe that the government must be very careful about how they select ALP members and they should consult with the community elders and carry out a thorough background check before recruiting and arming people.

In comparison to elders, women in Lashkargah feel differently about the conduct of the ANSF towards them. On several occasions, the researchers were informed by women that it is very common for the Afghan security officers to follow and harass women in public. Women are often intimidated and do their best to avoid men in uniform. It was further reported by some teachers that the ANSF also harass teachers and school girls on their way to and from schools. Mothers participating in FDGs also complained about the harassment of their daughters on their way to and from school by the ANP.

According to legal aid organizations, however, some improvements regarding the handling of women's cases by the courts and the police are noticeable. More women are approaching these organizations to seek legal counsel and assistance. This development is



explained as a result of the media's attention to cases of violence against women that has been effective in raising women's awareness about their legal rights.

Many of the women that participated in the FDGs in Lashkargah claimed that the security in the province has worsened since the security transition. While they did not complain about explosions and suicide attacks, they claimed that criminal activity such as kidnappings has increased drastically since July 2012.

The speeches of mullahs were also reported as becoming increasingly conservative. They are now conveying a stronger message against the rights of women, especially in the Nawzad, Marja and Garmsir districts, compared to when there were more internationals present in the province. Some believe that these mullahs preaching against women's rights are, since the transition, are feeling less monitored and have become fearless with the absence of the foreigners that used to hold them accountable. It is said that these mullahs do not feel that the Afghan authorities have the will or interest in chastising them.

### Access to Work and Public Life

It is claimed that after the security transition, many of the women-related development programs and vocational training centers stopped operating. According to the DoWA in Lashkargah, they had 11 women's projects running in 2011 and zero in 2012. This is mainly

because they have stopped receiving financial support for implementing development projects for women. Before the transition, development and reconstruction organizations such as the International Relief and Development (IRD) and the Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) present in Helmand had programs for women, but now they have closed their offices.

Work opportunities for women that are not restricted to their houses have diminished. This is considered mainly a result of the international NGOs leaving the city. As the existence of NGOs and their programs also provided people with job opportunities, the departure of such organizations since the security transition has led to a higher rate of unemployment among men and women.

"Last year the work was more. The men and women were busy. After the leaving of the foreigners the work became less for women and men. Before the women were busy with tailoring but now they don't have any work because the majority of the NGOs have stopped their work...before the transition, even housewives were occupied. We used to participate in workshops and literacy courses but right now all courses have stopped."

– FGD, housewives, Lashkargah

The DoWA in Lashkargah, before the security transition, had 27 women working in their office. Seven remain.



“When the foreigners were here they wanted us to be active and work and improve things [for women], but the [Afghan] men in the government here don’t want the women present in meetings because they don’t want them to be empowered.”

– Individual interview, woman working in a government office, Lashkargah

Women that work in government offices, schools, clinics and NGOs have furthermore voiced serious concerns regarding the increased number of threats that they receive for being working women . Also, women that were able to visit the districts for work are no longer able to travel given the increased insecurity outside the city limits.

### **Mobility and Access to Services**

According to the researchers that had visited Lashkargah in previous years, more women were seen in public in late 2012 compared to the past years. Although women are visible in the central Lashkargah, they are still more confined and restricted in their movements compared to other parts of Afghanistan because of the culturally conservative environment they live in.

Many of the districts surrounding Lashkargah lack schools for girls, and those that have schools only offer education up to grade six. However in the city itself, the access of girls to schools has remained the same. Some teachers even said that they were now more comfortable when walking to and from the schools because, like in Surobi

and Jalalabad, the women and girls in Lashkargah were often intimidated and frightened by the tanks and weapons of the international military forces when they were passing by in the city.

With regard to accessing clinics and bazaars in central Lashkargah, the women in the city are able to visit them on their own and people in the city do not consider this culturally inappropriate, although harassment by men is perceived as very common. The women in the districts on the other hand, are more restricted in their movements, as they cannot leave their houses, even to visit the clinics, without a mahram accompanying them.

“We are able to visit the bazaar and clinic as long as we wear the chadory, and despite this men look at us with bad eyes. From young guys to elders, they are all looking at us with bad eyes and laughing.”

– FGD, housewives, Lashkargah

## Herat City, Herat

**Date of visit:**  
November 2012

**Transition period:**  
July 2011 – January  
2012

**Transition  
tranche:** 1

### Overall Security and Access to Justice

Community elders in Herat expressed their approval concerning the departure of IMF/ISAF troops from Herat City. During discussions, the majority of the elders agreed that the ANSF had the support of the Afghan people and that they should be strengthened to further ensure the national security of Afghanistan as the country's own national security force. In the discussions, the elders declared that they were happier with the ANA as compared to the ANP, since they have been better trained and behave more professionally towards the people, whereas many of the ANP officers have drug habits. It was suggested that before recruiting new ANSF officers, thorough health checks should be carried out to avoid recruiting people with drug addictions. It is also believed that with increased security responsibilities, the ANSF will have a better chance to improve their skills and become more professional through practice.

“Since the transition in Herat, there are a lot of positive changes. The people are more relaxed and have increased cooperation with the Afghan security forces. ANSF are more familiar with the districts and they know the people. Also, they treat the people well and the people trust them more. The cooperation and trust is increasing

day by day. Before the transition no operation happened without the presence of foreign troops. They [ANSF] were more limited in their ability to act on their own. But now the ANSF can act immediately as soon as an incident is reported. The people are happy with this development.”

– FGD, elders, Herat

The elders reported no known assaults or harassment of women by the ANSF. They did, however, indicate that they were worried about the ANSF not being strong enough to maintain security throughout the province. They also complained about the poor equipment the ANSF are provided with, stating that this is not adequate for providing security or for defending the country.

The two female elders that participated in the discussion had different thoughts concerning the security situation. According to these women, security in the districts has deteriorated, violence against women has increased, and more women have been murdered by their husbands or families in the past ten months since the completion of the security transition. Many women are also more worried about the post 2014 Afghanistan and what will become of the rights women have gained in the past decade.

“We are afraid and we have fears of the government making secret negotiations with the opposition people that might compromise women’s rights and force women to go back to staying at home. We are worried that the rights women have gained may reverse.”

– Individual interview, prominent woman, Herat

Interviewed women, including working women, housewives and prominent women, note an increase in violence against women.

Several informants, in addition to the women in the FGDs, suggested that one main reason for why women are continuously being harmed is because men do not fear being punished by the Afghan legal system. They insist that few men are aware of the laws that protect women in Afghanistan and that men do not receive severe punishments for crimes against women even when they caught. Many times they get away with a warning or they can bribe their way free from conviction. Mediation between the victims of violence and their offenders is the main method to solve a case when women approach the FRUs, ANP or even legal aid organizations. The courts are approached as a last resort, only after mediation fails. This is because there are no institutions available for women that can offer them security and safety. The only shelter women are able to access is one of the few overcrowded women’s safe houses managed by CSOs. The mediation of cases along with the corruption of courts and other justice entities are two major barriers to

women’s access to justice and security from violence.

It was also suggested that the violence in families has increased significantly due to a lack of employment opportunities. This, it was argued, creates tension and frustration in families, causing men to use more violence against women. Another explanation is the unawareness of men about the rights of women.

“Unfortunately, while awareness raising for women has been done in the past years, nothing has been done to educate men about women’s rights. This is a mistake. Men should have been educated as well. When women ask for their rights their husbands beat them because nothing has been done to raise the awareness of men together with women.”

– Individual interview, prominent woman, Herat

According to the DoWA in Herat, the number of “run-away” cases among women has increased in the past year, along with the number of murder cases of women. Some of the cases DoWA had received in 2012 were related to killings of women that were condemned to death by community shuras.

Women’s and legal rights organizations have received more cases in 2012 compared to previous years, but, according to them, this is not related to the security transition or the increased level of violence. They say it is a matter of women knowing more about their legal rights.

## Access to Work and Public Life

Besides the health and education sectors, it is generally accepted that women in the city of Herat also work as civil servants in public offices. It is said that an increasing number of women are working in government offices instead of NGOs. Although many people in all over Afghanistan dislike the idea of a woman working in an NGO, men in Herat expressed a particular displeasure regarding Afghan women working with internationals. Afghan women that work with foreign men are considered as prostitutes in the eyes of the general public, it was claimed. It is possible that fewer women work in NGOs partly as a cautionary measure against increased insecurity, but it is equally probable that women simply have less work opportunities within NGOs because development agencies are not as prevalent in Herat as they were in previous years.

Compared to before the security transition, development projects have decreased, along with workshops and seminars that used to be organized for women. However, despite the perceived worsening of the economy and increased unemployment, it was believed that more women were working outside the homes in 2012 compared to the past. It was also supposed that more housewives work in other households as cooks and cleaners.

Women that were asked about the behavior of their male colleagues in their work environment all claimed that they

were treated with respect and that this has not changed since the security transition in early 2012.

## Mobility and Access to Services

Women have freedom of movement in the city, but, as in other provinces that were visited for this study, some of the districts are reported to have an increased AOG presence and are considered too dangerous to visit. No clear statements were made that indicate any change in the security situation of Herat's districts since the completion of the transition. Follow up monitoring is required to establish whether insecurity is increasing, and whether there are any additional repercussions that would impede women's mobility and access to services in the surroundings of Herat City.

None of the clinics visited had experienced any change in their ability to care for women. They had the same number of female patients in 2012 as they had in 2011. Most women that live near the clinics are able to visit the clinics on their own. Only women that live in remote areas travel with a mahram. According to clinic and hospital doctors in Herat, the communities understand that women go to clinics to seek help for health ailments and do not consider it inappropriate for women to walk on their own to clinics. The mobility of women that want to access health clinics in Herat City has, therefore, not changed in the year that followed the security transition. Likewise, women do

not find it difficult to access the bazaars, where they can do their shopping until the sun sets.

Harassment of women in public is very common in Herat. However, harassment has always been a nuisance and has not increased. Schoolgirls do get followed by boys on their way to school and home sometimes, but the ANP has been very responsive to the need of girls to be protected from harassment. According to school staff, public announcements have been made by ANP commanders that denounce harassment and declare that anyone caught with bothering a schoolgirl will be taken into custody. These efforts seem to have improved the free movement of school girls and women in Herat, but also the public opinion of the ANP in general as providers of security.

“We have good relations with the high schools and their principals and teachers. We have not received any complaints about their movement. If there were any problems we would know about it. Compared to a year ago [late 2011], the police are trying harder to pay attention to the needs of schools.”

– Individual interview, ANP, Herat

“Harassment of women is common but these days the police work more seriously. They deal seriously with people that harass or create problems for women. Also people that create problems for girls’ high schools get arrested.”

– Individual interview, prominent woman, Herat

## Khuram Wa Sarbagh, Samangan

Date of visit:  
December 2012

Transition period:  
January 2012 – July  
2012

Transition  
tranche: 2

### Overall Security and Access to Justice

Housewives as well as women working outside the homes in the Khuram Wa Sarbagh district of Samangan stated that they felt comfortable about their safety when in public and do not have security concerns. Some women expressed a worry about possible suicide attacks, but the majority of informants in Khuram Wa Sarbagh insisted that their district does not have an AOG presence and the people are pleased with the performance and conduct of the ANSF forces towards civilians in Samangan.

“Sometimes the daughters come late and the mothers are then afraid that the foreigners have raped them. In the past six months [since summer 2012] the passing of the foreigners in this area has decreased. They still come but not as often. After the foreign troops have gone women are less worried about their security...We don’t have ALP, but we have ANP and they help us.”

– FGD, working women, Khuram Wa Sarbagh

Further, the elders in Khuram Wa Sarbagh also confirmed that Samangan has not been affected by instability and conflict as other provinces have been. The elders stated that the transition has not had an impact in their district or province. The AOG that existed before

have all joined the Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) program and as a result, they do not have an AOG present in their surroundings or in their communities. Women and elders appear to be in favor of the ANSF and consider Afghan forces as capable enough to provide security to the people of Samangan as long as they are provided with sufficient training and military equipment.

“We are happy about the transition and ANSF taking over more security [responsibility], because IMF should not be staying here forever, and they will sooner or later leave. For this reason, people are more willing to cooperate with the police to give them support.”

– FGD, elders, Khuram Wa Sarbagh

Elders and women also explained that they do not have the ALP in Samangan because the people consider the province to be safe and in no need of local police. Instead, people want their ANP to be reinforced and trained to become more effective and coordinated. Legal aid organizations based in Aiybak, the provincial capital, confirmed that the police and other justice institutions in the province treat people well. They also shared the view that women have been more able to access legal aid and representation in 2012 compared to previous years because they have an improved awareness regarding their rights. Poverty and ignorance are identified as two main reasons for violence against women. Like in other

provinces, family cases are normally solved through mediation.

### Access to Work and Public Life

No changes regarding women's access to work or public life were found in Samangan since the completion of the security transition in July 2012. Working women that were interviewed in Samangan and the district of Khuram Wa Sarbagh did not mention any concerns regarding their ability to work in public. It appears the majority of women feel safe when they are in public and do not receive any threats, nor do they perceive negative attitudes by community members with regard to their presence in public.

### Mobility and Access to Services

Women's mobility has improved considerably since the departure of internationals from Samangan. Women report that their families are less strict about their movement in public as most people seem to have been intimidated by the presence of non-Afghans in Khuram Wa Sarbagh.

"In the past six months we feel safe, the police are from our area. Since they [internationals] have left, we have been able to access the bazaar, schools and clinics easier because they were blocking our ways...Whenever we see ANP we are happy, because they are one of us and they are kind towards us."

– FGD, housewives, Khuram Wa Sarbagh

Clinics, schools, and the ANP all agree that the women have become more mobile and present in public since the complete withdrawal of IMF/ISAF forces and the PRT. People also complained about the reconstruction efforts of the PRT in Samangan claiming that the communities have not been able to see any tangible infrastructural improvements in their province. Consequently, the presence of PRT seemed unnecessary to the communities.

According to school officials, some students from the remote villages face difficulties accessing the schools, but it is important to note that this is not because of insecurity. Parents complain about the schools' low education quality caused by lack of teachers and books, considering it a waste of their children's time to go to school and keeping the children at home doing household chores instead. Likewise, the clinics report that no harassment of women on the roads is known of. Clinic staff explained that the people in Khuram Wa Sarbagh know each other and women are respected. The men are busy farming during the day, so women often visit the clinics alone, in the company of other women, or with their children.

Unlike some of the other districts examined in this study, Samangan appears to be relatively unaffected by AOG activity, insecurity, and ultimately the entire security transition. Definitive research on the lack of violence across the province is unavailable. However, more focus on Samangan as a relatively

peaceful and unaffected province should be given in the coming cycles of this monitoring project. It should be treated as an exceptional case that can be learned from.



# Analysis of Women's Security in Transition

## Overall Security and Access to Justice

Numerous unfavorable developments with regard to women's overall security were discovered in the course of this study. Similar to other recent research findings, a strong correlation was found between increased AOG activity and the withdrawal of IMF/ISAF forces, especially in the rural districts in eastern and southern Afghanistan.<sup>34</sup> In several of the provincial capitals and district centers, such as Jalalabad in Nangarhar, Lashkargah in Helmand and Mehtarlam in Laghman, the AOG has geographically expanded its activities and appears to be controlling areas that previously were under the government's control.

The increased activity of the AOG since the security transition has certain noteworthy implications for the overall security of women. An increased AOG influence and regulation of communities decreases not only women's freedom of movement outside the homes, but also their ability to access formal justice institutions and educational and employment opportunities. Indications of imposed movement restrictions were found in areas where the AOG has intensified their activities, including Surobi in Kabul, Jalalabad in Nangarhar

and Mehtarlam in Laghman. In those areas, the ANSF and government institutions have a very limited presence, and the AOG may have their own parallel justice and rule of law systems in place.<sup>35</sup> In places where the AOG has reasserted itself and where such parallel systems are fully functional, it is highly likely that the women's situation has worsened significantly and now resembles the pre-2001 period.

Increased insecurity also prevents CSOs from reaching out to communities outside the urban zones and to implement gender related projects. As stated by the AIHRC, for women to be able to report violence cases, legal aid organizations must be accessible and the security situation should be stable.<sup>36</sup> In addition, in areas where the AOG is more prevalent, a surge in ALP deployment also tends to increase in reaction to AOG activity. The arming of men, who on numerous occasions have been accused of being associated with the AOG, without consultation with communities and without a thorough background check, is dangerous. The communities, and women in particular, do not look upon the ALP favorably.

Unlike the ALP, the ANSF has gained increased support from the communities, especially from the elders who consider the ANA and ANP to be serving their communities well. Elders and women often claim that if given proper

<sup>34</sup> Cortright and Wall (August 2012)

<sup>35</sup> UNAMA (December 2012), Giustozzi et al. (2012)

<sup>36</sup> AIHRC (2012)

equipment and training, the ANP and ANA can become legitimate security institutions that can protect people against the insurgency. In Paghman especially, the people have high regard for their police, which could partly be due to the comprehensive training that the ANP has received as compared to other districts. The majority of the interviewees stated that there should be more emphasis put on strengthening the ANA and ANP through better training with improved equipment. Other research has also underlined that, next to corruption and drug addiction, the lack of equipment and proper professional training are two major challenges confronting the ANSF's ability to assert itself as the national security establishment.<sup>37</sup>

These two major obstacles impede the ANSF's ability to maintain security and control over areas that are increasingly under the influence of AOG elements. It appears the ANSF has not been fully successful in filling the power vacuum that was left behind by IMF/ISAF forces, mainly due to technical shortcomings. Interviewed elders and women were under the impression that, if provided with adequate equipment, technical support and training, the ANSF would be capable of filling the power vacuum instead of losing ground to AOG elements.

Intimidation is sometimes used to prevent girls from being sent to school.

In Paghman, threat letters were posted in visible locations, demanding that people keep their girls at home and stop working at government offices. In Dawlatabad, it was claimed that ALP commanders prevent girls from going to school, order villagers in the remote areas to keep their girls at home, and justify this by blaming increased insecurity. There are clear indications of intimidation being used as a tool to restrict the freedom of movement and access to education of women and girls. Besides intimidation through threats, assassinations of high profile individuals, including the two DoWA heads in Laghman, have had an adverse impact on women's sense of security, forcing many women to leave their jobs and stay at home.

According to several key informants, forced early marriages are happening more frequently, which has led to an increase in "run-away" cases as more young women attempt to escape unwanted marriages. Although increased poverty and the need for dowry money was mentioned as the main cause behind early marriages of young girls, it is also possible that the re-emergence of militias in the form of the ALP is related to the surge of early marriages. Other research has shown that forced early marriages can be a sign of families trying to protect their young daughters from being raped or forcefully taken by militias, as during the years of civil war.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Wood (2012)

<sup>38</sup> Cortright and Wall (August 2012).

The increase in early marriages was particularly noted in the two districts of Balkh and Dawlatabad in Balkh province, where the ALP presence has increased drastically in the past year.

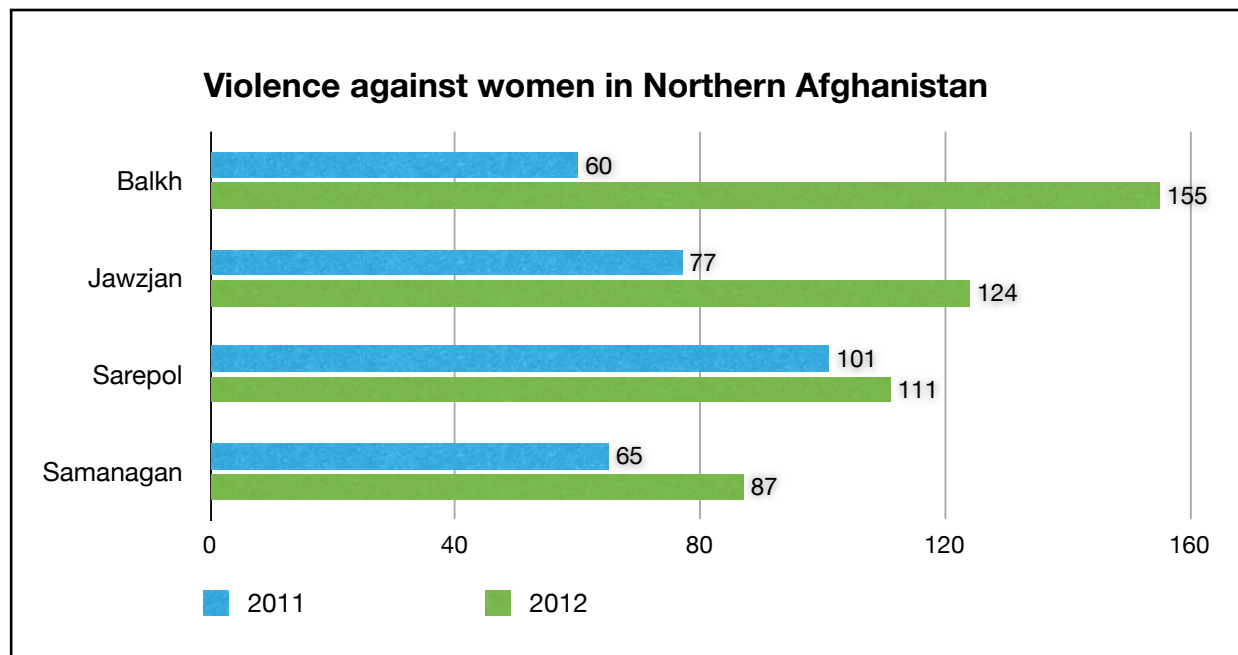
According to the information gathered by the AIHRC (Graph 1), cases of violence against women in Balkh province had more than doubled by November 2012 compared to 2011.<sup>39</sup> Other provinces have experienced similar trends. However, it was suggested by the AIHRC that the increased number of cases are likely to be a result of improved awareness among women about their rights and not an indication of increased violence against women in society. The most common forms of violence are beating, abuse, threatening, and forced

marriage/engagement, which can lead to separation requests and suicide.

In almost every district that was visited, legal aid organizations confirmed that they were able to register more cases related to violence against women and women's rights in 2012 compared to previous years.

Similar to the AIHRC, the majority of CSOs did not believe that the actual level of violence against women had increased, but rather that women had more awareness about their rights and knowledge about where to seek help. Though women seem more aware of their rights and have increased access to formal justice institutions, the majority of cases are still resolved through mediation, and victims of violence often

**Graph 1**



Source: AIHRC

<sup>39</sup> AIHRC in Mazar-e-Sharif was visited for an interview before the end of the year, in November 2012, which means that the actual number of violence cases for 2012 is likely to have increased.

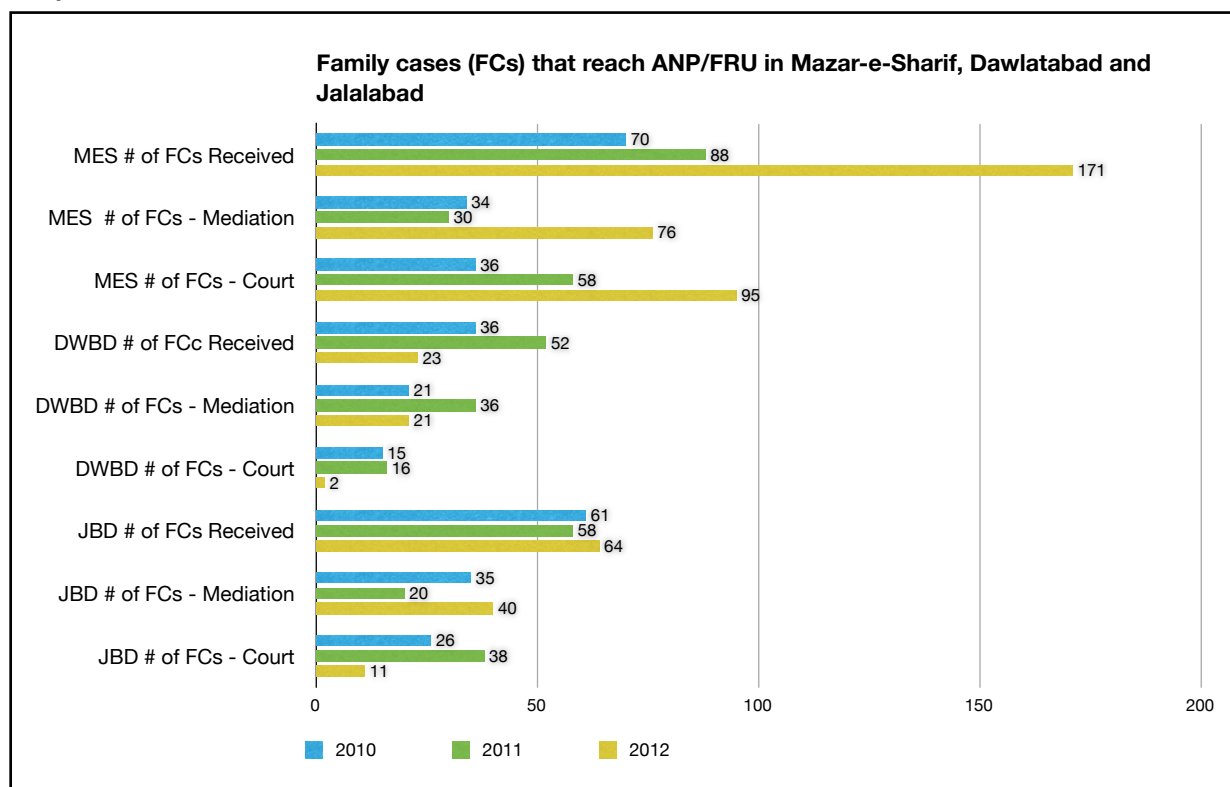
end up going back to families were they continue to face abuse.<sup>40</sup> FRUs and legal aid organizations alike prefer to solve cases through mediation first, mainly because there is insufficient capacity for sheltering and protecting women.

The figures attained from the FRU in Mazar-e-Sharif (Balkh province) show that the number of cases received at their station has doubled in 2012 compared to 2011 and 2010 (Graph 2). Women's access to courts seem to have increased drastically in Mazar-e-Sharif as more cases appear to be solved through formal justice mechanisms in 2012. However, mediation still remains the main method to solve a conflict in all three locations in the graph.

This suggests that women remain vulnerable against a recurrence of violence since no systematic monitoring and follow-up work of mediated cases seems to be in place.

While no major change is seen in Jalalabad, where women's access to justice has remained relatively low, Dawlatabad shows a visible decline in their numbers between 2011 and 2012. The number of women that approached the FRU in Dawlatabad seems to have increased between 2010 and 2011 and then declined in 2012. This could be an indication of heightened insecurity, despite the fact that women repeatedly confirmed that they were happy with the conduct and work of the ANP.

**Graph 2**



Source: ANP/FRU in Mazar-e-Sharif, Dawlatabad and Jalalabad

<sup>40</sup> UNAMA (December 2012)

One explanation could be that women feel less comfortable approaching the police, on account of the increased visibility of the ALP in their communities in conjunction with the strong distrust and fear that communities have expressed about the local police.

With the exception of Mehtarlam, the DoWAs based in the other four cities listed in the Graphs 3 and 4 all confirmed that they had an increased number of women clients approach them to seek legal support in 2012. Mehtarlam is an exception because the security situation in general has deteriorated substantially since the completion of its security transition. Women in Laghman province are afraid to be seen near the DoWA office since the assassination of the two DoWA heads.

Unlike DoWA's in other cities, the DoWA in Mazar-e-Sharif offered less legal representation to women in 2012 (until November) compared to 2011. This could be due to the fact that public offices in Afghanistan use a solar calendar, starting in March every year instead of January. This means that the 2012 figures provided by the DoWAs are not for the whole year, and the actual numbers for 2012 is likely to be higher than indicated in the graphs. It could also be that the DoWA in Mazar-e-Sharif focuses more on solving issues through mediation rather than taking cases to court.

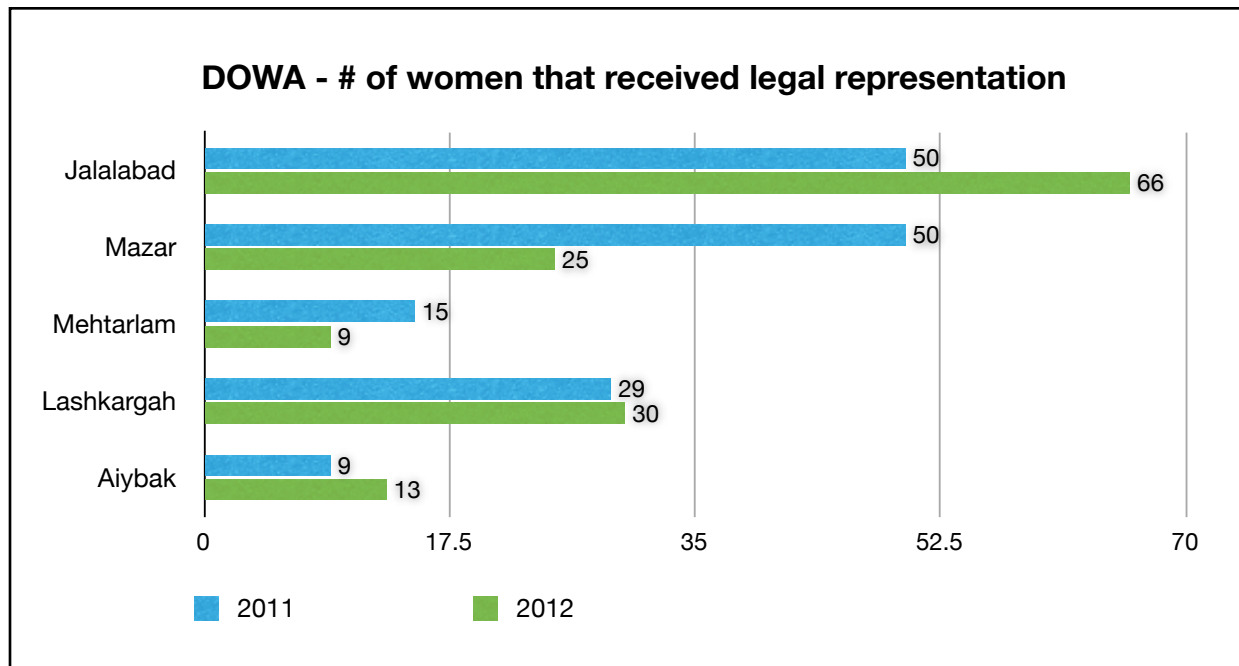
The majority of women indicated that they were comfortable approaching institutions of justice (Graph 5). However, when comparing the responses of women from the rural districts with

Graph 3



Source: DoWAs in Jalalabad, Mazar-e-Sharif, Lashkargah and Aiybak

Graph 4



Source: DOWAs in Jalalabad, Mazar-e-Sharif, Lashkargah and Aiybak

the responses of women in the cities, it appears that women in the cities feel considerably more uncomfortable. This could partially be explained by the fact that most of the rural districts that were visited for this study had good community-ANP relations. Also, in small communities, community members and security officials are more likely to know each other on a personal level, which might reduce the feeling of intimidation.

Graph 6 illustrates a substantial difference between urban and rural women in terms of their sense of security in public. The graph suggests that urban women tend to feel less safe in public in comparison to rural women. Still, the majority of women (urban and rural) that were asked the question: "How would you rank your personal safety/security compared to three months ago?" replied that they feel more or less the same.

The most common fears of the women interviewed for this study were anxieties about explosions, suicide attacks and kidnappings of themselves or their children. Women often expressed a relief over the reduced visibility of IMF/ISAF forces because the decrease in the number of attacks was considered to be a result of this. Mehtarlam, Jalalabad and Lashkargah are exceptions, as women in these cities claimed that suicide attacks and targeted killing of people had increased. Still, the same women who stated that there was a decrease in attacks and explosions also expressed apprehension about the uncertainty of what would happen after 2014, and whether the achievements regarding their rights would be lost. Conversations with women suggested that they would favor IMF/ISAF forces to remain in the country and have a presence beyond 2014, albeit with a low profile and

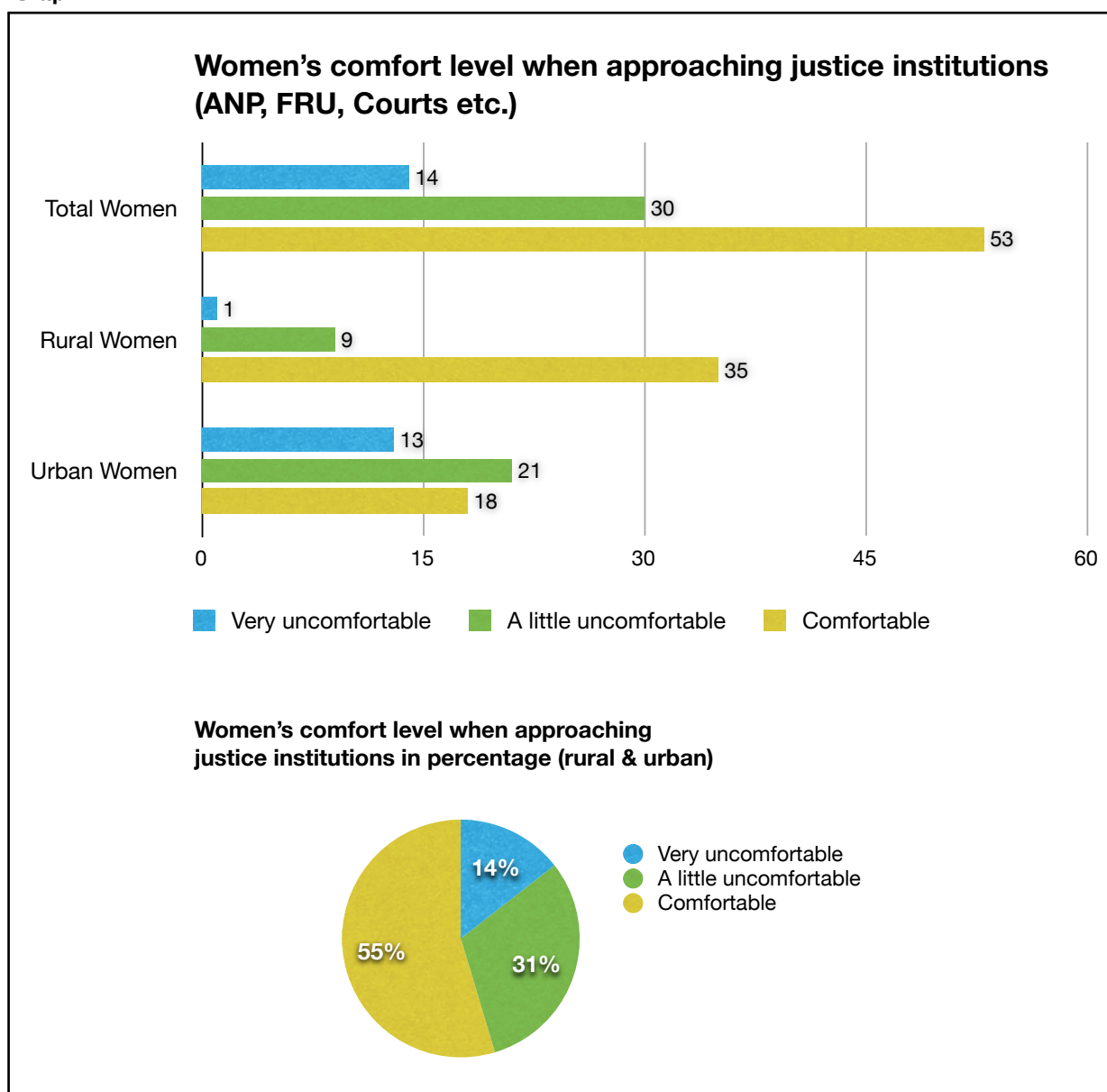
limited visibility. It is likely that people feel comforted by even the symbolic presence of internationals, including IMF/ISAF forces.

## Access to Work and Public Life

Despite the significant progresses made since 2001 in women's rights, indications of a decline in women's ability to exercise these rights were found in several districts across the

country. This was mainly the result of deteriorating security. In Dawlatabad, Balkh and in provincial capitals such as Jalalabad, Mehtarlam and Lashkargah, there are strong suggestions of a rise in family and community disapproval of women working in public. It is possible that similar developments may emerge in other provinces and districts experiencing a comparable decline in security. This pattern is consistent with

Graph 5

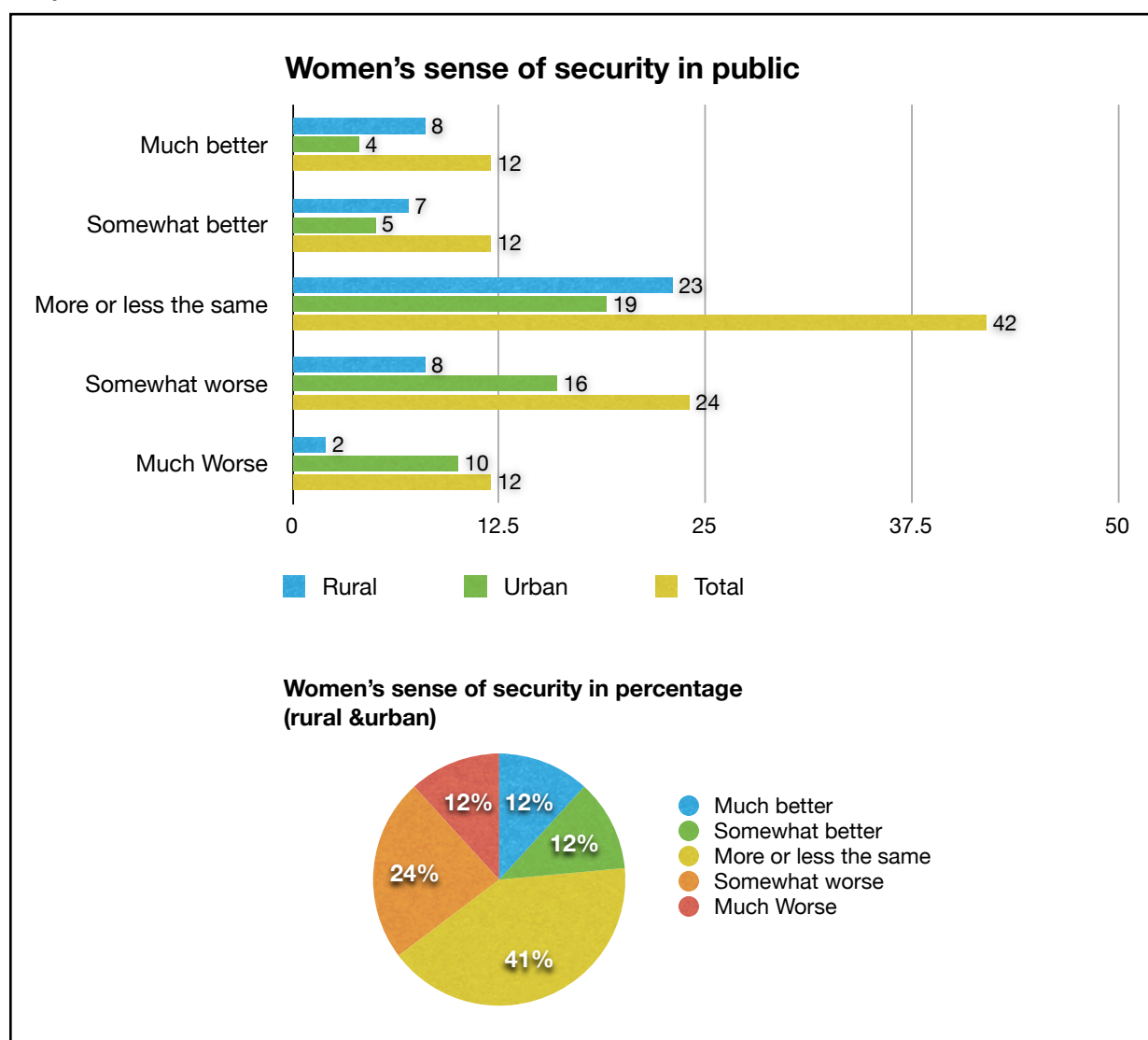


findings from other research, suggesting that the intensification of violence in a society not only increases the risk of being raped or assaulted, but it also reinforces women's immobility and the restrictions that families impose on them.<sup>41</sup>

Community perception of working women seems to be improving in areas where there is relative security. Community elders and housewives in

several districts across the country especially emphasized support for women that worked in the education and health sectors. Women working in offices where only other women work and where they do not share common spaces with men are, in general, accepted by communities and elders. Further, women that support their communities through their work as teachers or health workers, while contributing to their family incomes, seem to be highly appreciated.

Graph 6



<sup>41</sup> Cortright and Wall (August 2012)



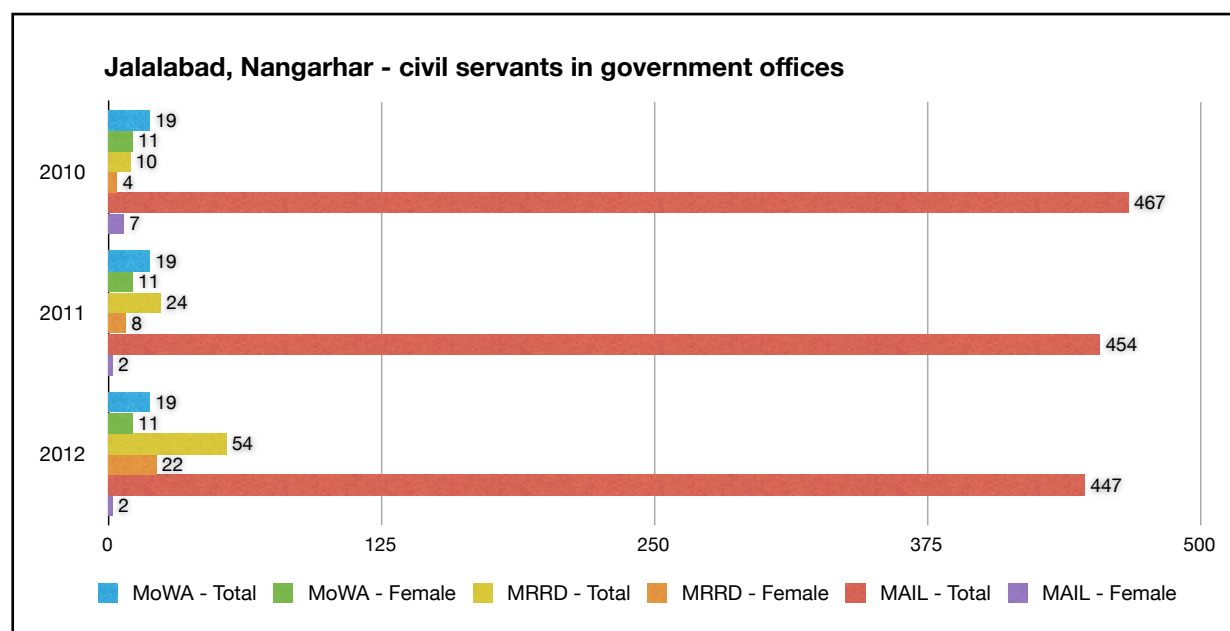
Even government offices appear to have improved their reputations, as respectable workplaces for women. However, NGOs continue having a poor standing among communities as a workplace for women since they are often associated with foreign men and are viewed as immoral. None of the working women interviewed spoke of maltreatment by male colleagues in their work places. Most of them claimed that the behavior of male colleagues was respectful.

The MoWA and Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development (MRRD) have maintained a relatively positive gender balance among their staff in Nangarhar (Graph 7), while Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock (MAIL) has been less successful in achieving this. Also, the MRRD office in

Balkh (Graph 8) seems less successful in their recruitment of women in comparison to the MRRD office in Nangarhar. Similar to MAIL in Nangarhar, the MAIL department in Samangan (Graph 9) has also shown a very poor gender balance among their staff. The lack of female civil servants at the ministries is a well-known problem in Afghanistan. Nevertheless, it should be restated that the graphs in this report are displayed for illustrative purposes only, and cannot be considered as representative evidence.

There was a general unhappiness among women about the decreased work and training opportunities available to them after the transition. Many development projects that used to offer work opportunities to women, along with vocational training, literacy courses and

**Graph 7**



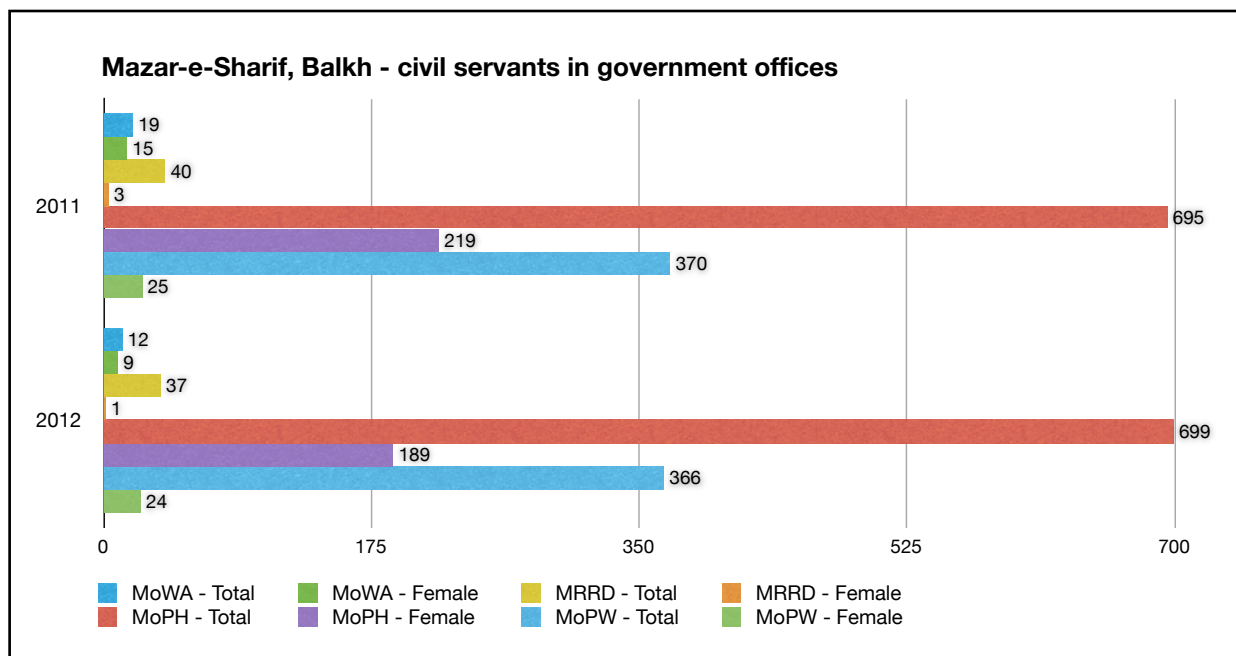
Source: Provincial ministry departments of Nangarhar.

women-focused development projects have stopped their activities. It appears the international NGOs and development agencies have withdrawn from transitioned provinces alongside IMF/ ISAF forces. It also seems that the development projects were heavily dependent on the presence of international forces for their security and protection from AOG elements. The absence of NGOs and development workers could also be interpreted as a result of the worsening security situation in the transitioned provinces and districts.

A large number of employees from legal aid organizations, government entities and CSOs complained about the increased insecurity in the districts, which prevented them from implementing development projects. The inaccessibility of remote areas has

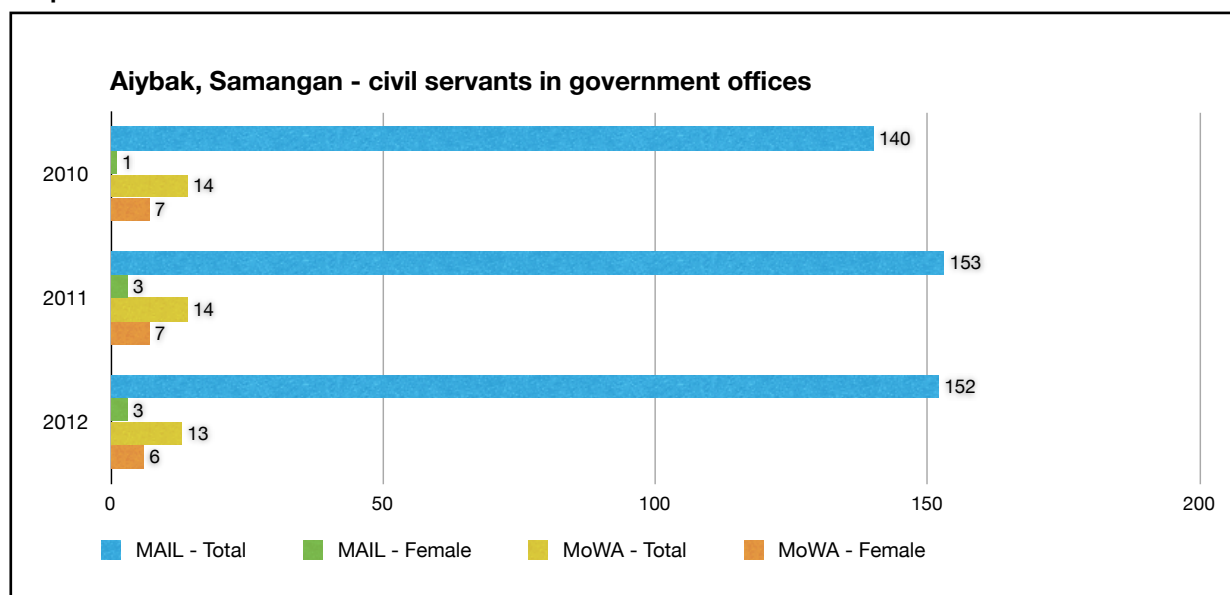
resulted in a drop in rural women's access to work opportunities and participation in public life, as they are no longer able to access projects related to education and literacy. Increased AOG activity has also led to higher risks and threats for women. In districts and cities such as Dawlatabad, Mehtarlam and Lashkargah, it was found that the receipt of threat letters and threatening calls have intensified considerably since their security transitions were completed. Working women often believe that they would be the first target of the AOG if they ever came back to power. Some of the women also claimed that it is common for women to give in to threats and family pressure and resign from work.

**Graph 8**



Source: Provincial ministry departments of Balkh.

Graph 9



Source: Provincial ministry departments of Samangan.

## Mobility and Access to Services

Despite the many worries that parents have about the personal security of their daughters traveling between school and home, including suicide attacks, explosions and kidnappings, there are clear indications of an increase in girls' enrollment in several of the communities covered in this study. The majority of the schools visited claimed that their enrollment had increased in the 2012 school year compared to previous year. School principals, teachers and parents confirmed that the mobility of young girls between schools and their homes had improved. One main reason for these positive developments was explained as the absence of IMF/ISAF forces and vehicles that kept blocking the roads and intimidated women and schoolgirls. The communities also stated that the IMF/ISAF troops are the main targets of AOG attacks, which makes people wary of being in their proximity.

In other districts, including the ones surrounding Mehtarlam and Lashkargah, the researchers found that girls' ability to reach the schools and access education had diminished significantly. Since the transition of these areas, the mobility of people has been significantly reduced as a result of a surge in insecurity and the targeting of civilians. Parents keep their children at home, especially the girls, for fear of AOG attacks, although the cities themselves appear somewhat less affected by this change.

Women living close to their local health clinics have not experienced any major changes in their ability to access healthcare services since the security transition of their districts. Most of the women are able to walk on their own to the clinics without a mahram to accompany them. Correspondingly, the majority of health clinic staff reported no incidents related to their ability to deliver health services. Women from remote

areas, however, tend to visit clinics in the company of a male family member given the distance. When asked about the situation in the remote areas, clinic staff in several of the districts stated that they did not have information because they do not travel to the remote areas given the security situation. It appears there is a strong disconnect between the centers and their peripheries. There are indications of restrictions on women's mobility having increased in remote areas as a result of heightened road insecurity and AOG activity. Similarly, women's ability to access the bazaars from remote areas also seems to have become more limited.

There were, however, some positive findings regarding the mobility of women and girls in public space in Herat, Dawlatabad, Balkh and Paghman. Informants in these areas claimed that harassment of schoolgirls by men and boys in public has decreased significantly since the ANP assumed the responsibility for security. The police in these areas have established close ties with the schools and education departments and have shown a high degree of responsiveness to the security needs of schoolgirls. It has become a common procedure to, for example, arrest and detain boys that follow and molest girls after school hours when they are walking home. It appears that this strategy has paid off as harassment of women and girls in public, in areas where police has shown more sensitivity, has decreased. No signs of police or military harassment of women were found in any of the

districts selected for this study, except in Lashkargah, Helmand. Women and school girls reported that sexual harassment in public by police officers is common in Lashkargah and women do their best to avoid crossing paths with men in uniforms.

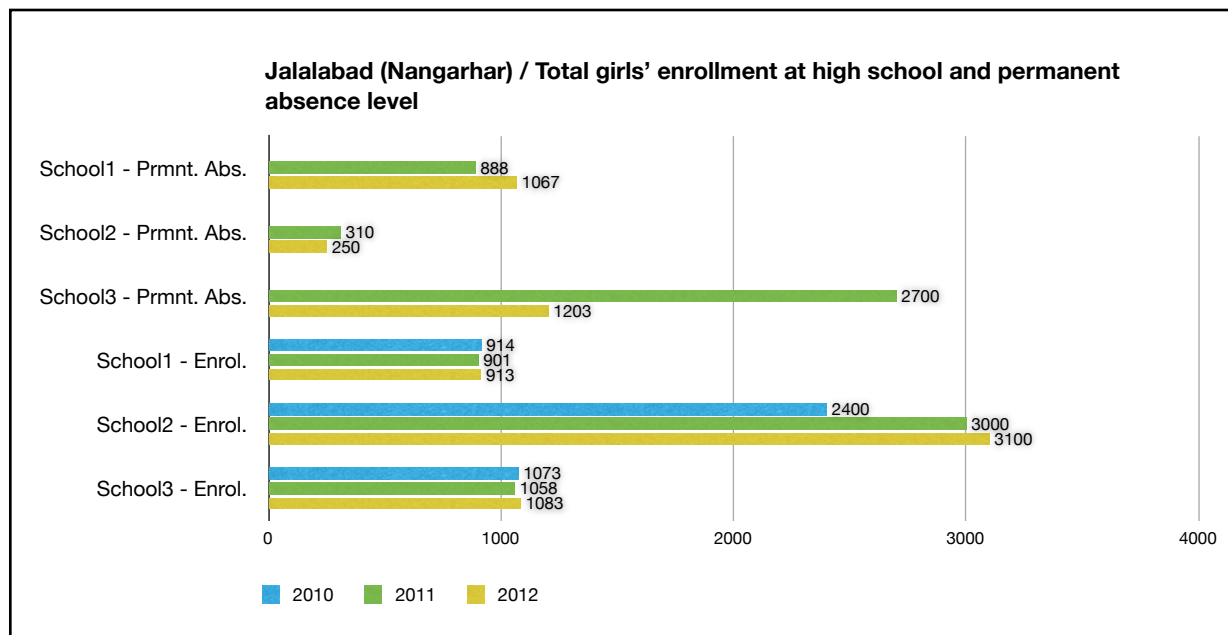
The three girls' high schools visited in Jalalabad provided figures that confirm an increased presence of female students with a significant decrease in permanent absence in 2012. It also seems the number of girls that reach the high school level have increased, especially in one of the schools (School3 in Graph 10).

Although female enrollment at high schools in Balkh and Dawlatabad districts seems to have increased over the past two to three years, permanent absence seems to have increased along with it. However, the increase in enrollment is more evident compared to the increased permanent absence. The improved access to education and enrollment in the two districts demonstrates an increased support and approval of girls' education in the communities of Balkh and Dawlatabad (Graph 11).

The schools selected for this study were all located in the district centers, which were mainly considered as safe and secure and under the ANP's protection. The schools in the remote communities where the ALP is present were more likely to display a more negative image with regard to girls' access to education.

Unlike Graphs 10 and 11 that represent Jalalabad, Balkh and Dawlatabad

Graph 10



Source: Schools in Jalalabad

(districts), Graph 12 shows a drastic decline in the number of enrollment of girls in one of the high schools of Lashkargah, especially between 2011 and 2012. The poor security situation that currently exists in Helmand province was mentioned by the women in Lashkargah as the main cause behind the decline in female enrollment and increased permanent absenteeism among female students.

## Conclusion

The findings of this study have revealed that security in several parts of Afghanistan have been badly affected since the announcement of the security transition two years ago in March, 2011. There are strong indications of rural districts, especially surrounding some of the provincial capitals, becoming

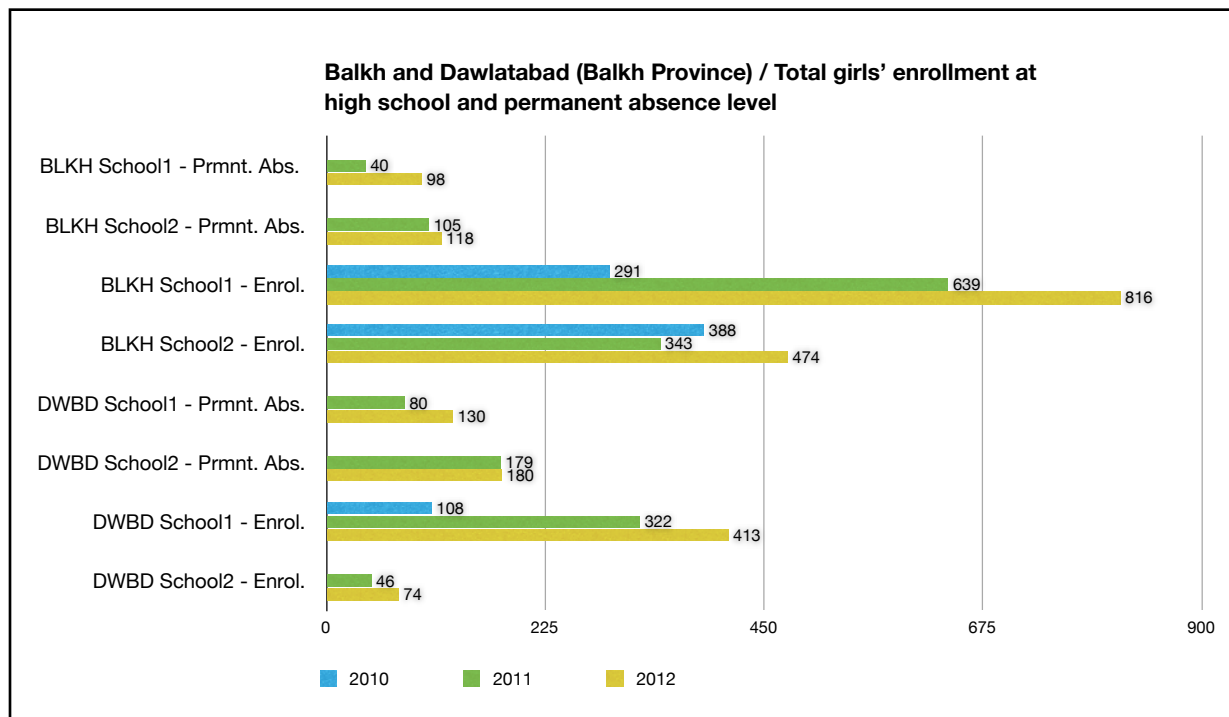
increasingly inaccessible to not only the ANSF, but also to government employees, civil society organizations and civilians. Development workers and CSO staff have repeatedly confirmed that, since the completion of the security transition of the their districts, their freedom of movement in remote areas has become increasingly restricted. This has several implications for women. Not only are women in rural areas increasingly deprived of opportunities to empower them, including education, literacy courses and vocational trainings, but their access to justice and other services appears to be increasingly limited.

Despite strong indications of security deterioration in several of the provinces included in this study, most Afghan men and women that were interviewed claimed that they were happy about the security responsibility being handed over

to the ANSF and that IMF/ISAF forces were less visible in their communities.

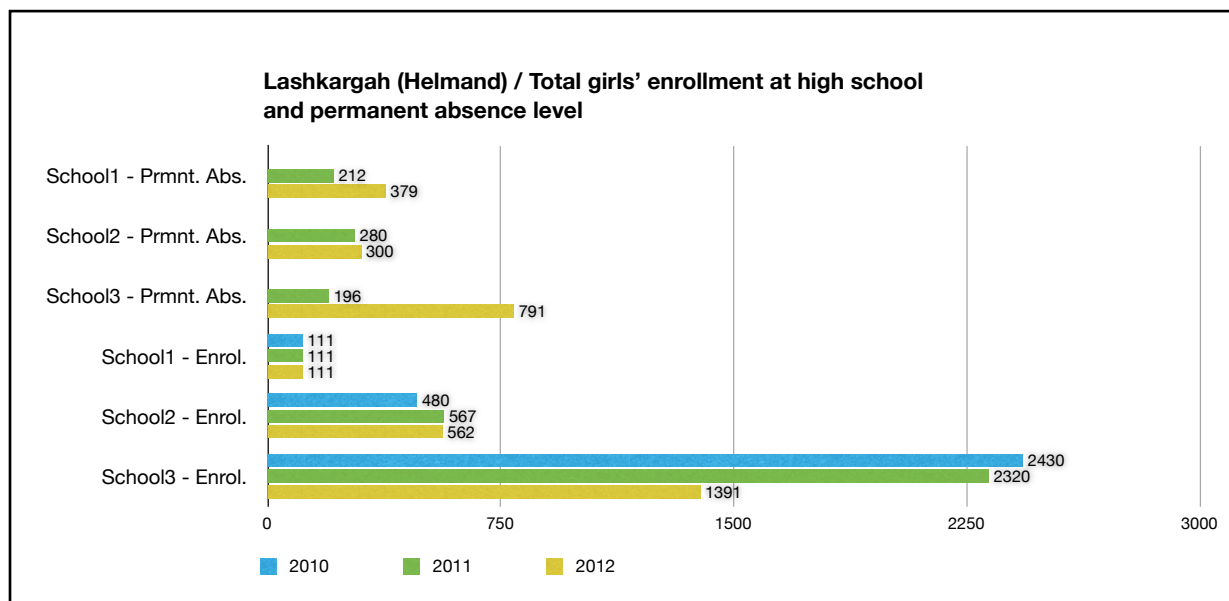
Women and elders maintained that they felt intimidated by the presence and movements of the military convoys in

**Graph 11**



Source: Schools in Balkh and Dawlatabad districts

**Graph 12**



Source: Schools in Lashkargah

public, which also discouraged them from sending their daughters to school or allowing them to move in public. However, women also expressed a high degree of worry about what will happen after 2014 once the international forces have fully withdrawn from the country.

Working women clearly indicated that they feel less secure and more worried regarding their personal safety since the announcement of the transition, and fear that they will be targeted by the AOG should they ever come back to power. Some of the districts have shown examples of women resigning from work, or having to put up with growing family pressure to remain home as a result of increased threats and intimidations, direct and indirect.

The public's view of the ANSF is a key discovery. With the exception of Helmand, most communities included in this study voiced confidence in their military and police forces. It was repeatedly confirmed that communities were pleased with the ANSF assuming greater responsibility. Specifically, the communities indicated that they much prefer having their houses searched by other Afghans rather than by foreign troops. Also, it was believed that civilian casualties have decreased significantly since the ANSF was given responsibility for the nation's security. Despite the positive image the ANSF seems to have gained in the communities, their limitations were also well known. Many of the interviewees frequently suggested that the ANP and ANA should be given

more support in terms of technical equipment along with appropriate training. It seems there is strong public support for the ANSF and confidence in their ability to deliver security, provided that the necessary assistance is delivered.

Although both encouraging and discouraging findings were discovered in this initial baseline study, additional research and examination is needed to offer a more comprehensive and in-depth insight about the full impact of the security transition. The coming cycles and following reports will shed more light on the ways in which the transition process has affected the lives of women in Afghanistan.

## Recommendations

### ADDRESSED TO:

#### NATO

1. Provide the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) with long-term support, training and military equipment.
2. Provide ANSF with comprehensive training on women's rights and the Elimination of Violence Against Women (EVAW) law with inputs from women's and other civil society organizations.
3. Support the establishment of a mechanism for civilian participation in oversight and monitoring of security at the community level.
4. Facilitate dialogue between civil society organizations with national and international security forces to discuss the findings from the "Monitoring Women's Security in Transition" initiative led by the Afghan Women's Network (AWN), in collaboration with Cordaid and APPRO.

#### THE GOVERNMENT OF AFGHANISTAN

##### a) The Afghan Local Police (ALP)

1. Select ALP commanders and officers with care and in consultation with communities to minimize the extortive behavior and intimidation of communities.
2. Institutionalize and incorporate ALP into the Afghan National Police (ANP), with clear oversight mechanisms and responsibilities.
3. Assign formal uniforms to the ALP so civilians can identify them as security personnel.
4. Develop a proper recording and filing systems of cases of violence against women at Family Response Unit (FRU) and ANP stations, including a monitoring mechanism of cases that have been mediated.

##### b) Protection of Women

1. Provide more institutional as well as moral support to women's shelters to increase women's access to justice and protection from violence.
2. Establish a dynamic civilian oversight mechanism to institute the rule of law and organize the protection of women.
3. Systematically enforce the cooperation and joint coordination between Ministry Of Education and Ministry Of Interior Affairs in all districts of Afghanistan to increase the safety and mobility of school girls.



### **c) Women's Political Participation**

1. Ensure that all Afghan ministries have an active policy in place to ensure a higher percentage of women in all level of positions.
2. Conduct a regular dialogue with women organizations regarding their security needs and concerns.

### **CIVIL SOCIETY**

1. The Afghan media should continue to address women's rights issues including cases of violence against women.
2. Initiate awareness program for men concerning the EVAW law and the negative impacts of violence in families on society as a whole.
3. Academics and journalists need to conduct research on speeches by religious leaders to identify ways in which religious institutions could champion against violence against women.

### **INTERNATIONAL AND DONOR COMMUNITY**

1. Intensify development programs in areas where international security forces are no longer present.
2. Provide financial and technical supports to civil society, especially women's organizations, to implement programs on women's empowerment and protection.

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