



# Women in Agriculture in Afghanistan

Lena Ganesh

July 2017



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RESEARCH



Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit

Issues Paper

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## About the Author

**Dr Lena Ganesh** is an anthropologist researching and working on gender, including in conflict and post-conflict areas. An architect with professional experience in the media, her other areas of research experience and interest are violence against women and girls, gendered exclusion within traditional hierarchical social structures and the historical and extant gendered uses of space.

## About the Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit

The Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU) is an independent research institute based in Kabul. AREU's mission is to inform and influence policy and practice by conducting high-quality, policy-relevant research and actively disseminating the results, and by promoting a culture of research and learning. To achieve its mission AREU engages with policymakers, civil society, researchers and students to promote their use of AREU's research and its library, to strengthen their research capacity, and to create opportunities for analysis, reflection, and debate.

AREU was established in 2002 by the assistance community in Afghanistan and has a Board of Directors comprised of representatives from donor organisations, the United Nations and other multilateral agencies, and non-governmental organisations.

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## Foreword

Afghanistan has experienced some significant changes over the past decade and half—some encouraging and others challenging. For Afghan women and girls, especially, these changes have created increased opportunities. Nonetheless, many such advancements have been comparatively modest and difficult to sustain, particularly in rural areas of the country. Agriculture, as the backbone of Afghanistan’s rural economy, remains the foremost mechanism of poverty reduction. And while the participation of women in the agricultural labour force is significant, rural Afghan women are still among the most marginalised. This marginalisation manifests itself through lack of access to education, technology, equipment and other livelihood improving opportunities as well as limited access to decision-making.

This paper provides a succinct overview of women’s roles in the agriculture sector in Afghanistan. It also provides insight on government initiatives designed to train rural women in income-generating activities as well as an assessment on the limited success of many of these pursuits. Finally, the paper provides recommendations designed to ensure that women are not only recognised as strong economic actors, but also reap the returns of their labour.

Unless these pivotal paradigms can be shifted and policies can be implemented, this paper rightly argues that Afghanistan’s economy cannot reach its potential. Women are actively and substantially participating in the rural labour force, but their visibility in such capacities is largely unnoticed.

Therefore, efforts by the government, the private sector and the international community to achieve agricultural development goals and rural economic growth will be sustained and accelerated only if stakeholders acknowledge and build on the considerable contributions women are making.

We hope that reading this Issues Paper will serve as a springboard to increased dialogues that promote reform to this end.



Dr Orzala Nemat  
Director, Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit

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## Acronyms

ALCS	Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey
ANHDO	Afghanistan National Horticulture Development Organization
ASDEP II	Afghanistan Skills Development Project
CEDAW	Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women
CDC	Community Development Council
CSO	Central Statistics Organisation
EG	Enterprise group
GDP	Gross domestic product
ICT	Information Communication Technology
MAIL	Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation, and Livestock
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
NRVA	National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment
NSDP	National Skills Development Plan
PHDP	Perennial Horticulture Development Program
RAMP	Rebuilding Agricultural Markets Program
SG	Savings group
SHG	Self-help group
TVET	Technical Vocational Educational Training
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
VSLA	Village Savings and Loan Association

## Glossary

Baad:	A practice by which female family members (i.e., children, young girls, women) are given as brides to settle blood feuds. Such brides are considered to have a low status, and consequently, they are more susceptible to domestic violence. <i>Baad</i> is also practised and seen as socially legitimate when an engaged woman or girl runs away (or elopes) and her family cannot repay the groom's engagement expenses or return the <i>toyana</i> (bride price); in this case, another unmarried female relative of the family is given or taken away as restitution. Women and girls could also be given in <i>baad</i> in lieu of non-repayable loans. <i>Baad</i> is usually decided by the Jirga or condoned by the community as restorative justice to prevent further conflict. <i>Baad</i> is nevertheless a criminal offence in Afghanistan.
Gheirat:	Could be described as an amalgam of honour, self-respect, prestige, lineage, and status of the household or quam (tribe) of an individual man.
Mahram:	Husband or another close male relative with whom marriage is prohibited and who is responsible for the well-being and actions of a woman.
Mahr-e-moajal:	<i>Dower</i> given at the time of marriage by the groom to the bride.
Mahr-e-ma'ajal:	The amount determined at the finalisation of marriage; a contractual obligation to be later paid by the husband to the wife, including in the eventuality of marriage dissolution.
Miras:	Inheritance devolving on the female members of the family.
Nang:	Could be described as male-specific social capital that is honour-based and adds to the <i>gheirat</i> of a man and his family, household, and quam. <i>Nang</i> can be seen as a complex mixture of honour, courage, bravery, dignity, and shame.
Namus:	This could be seen as the private aspect of <i>nang</i> , dealing with inviolate and inviolable privacy, best personified in the women of the family, household, settlement, village, quam, or nation. It refers to the "integrity, modesty and respectability of women and to the absolute duty of men to protect them." <sup>1</sup> Preserving <i>namus</i> is a constitutive logic of <i>nang</i> ; it requires control over and protection of women.

<sup>1</sup> Karin Ask, "Tradition and Change: Afghan Women in an Era of War and Displacement," in *Gender, Religion and Change in the Middle East: Two Hundred Years of History*, ed. Inger Marie Okkenhaug and Ingvild Flakerud (Oxford, New York: Berg, 2005), 191.

## Executive Summary

The greater recognition of women's intensive participation in the agriculture and labour economies across the globe has been the subject of discussion and policy review in many countries around the world, including Afghanistan. This briefing paper looks at some of the issues that impede or enhance the recognition and enhancement of women's contributions to the agricultural economy of Afghanistan. It presents an overview of women's activities in farming, livestock, horticulture, and farming-related entrepreneurial activities before looking at some of the ways in which women's economic participation in agriculture has been targeted by specific projects and programmes. In doing so, this paper addresses five specific issues pertinent to women's participation in the agricultural economy: women's gendered solidarity and collectivisation, the need to target women for skills development, women as contributing family workers, women's lack of access to assets, and the need for gendered statistics.

Findings indicate that far greater attention needs to be paid to the activities to which women already contribute substantively in the household agricultural economy, particularly in the value chains around livestock, horticulture, and farming-related entrepreneurship, three subsectors where Afghanistan either imports or obtains only low-value export profits. Investing in women's skills development in these subsectors through gender accountability in the technical vocational educational training system and technology-reliant educational methods is urgently needed. In parallel, weightage is needed in policy to target specific communities and regions and channel women's occupational knowledge and labour with greater independence from men. The collectivisation and creation or widening of women's spaces through occupational grouping should be better targeted in institutional and financial government policy; gender-accountable projects and programmes targeting budgeting parity, localised and contextual financial inclusion, and programmatic outputs are needed, as is the gender-sensitive monitoring of outcomes. The inclusion of women's domestic labour, informal household activities, and unpaid family work in the calculation of the gross domestic product is also crucial. The paradox is that women's labour, despite making a crucial contribution to agricultural production and income as well as food and nutrition security, remains invisible. Women's access to and control over land and assets should be strengthened by reviewing customary law and practices around *miras* and *mahr*, backed by wider and positive acceptance as well as implementable legal mechanisms. Significant buttressing is needed for qualitative and quantitative research and data collection on women's individual and collective participation in the labour market and agricultural economy.

The enhancement of women's participation in the agricultural economy of Afghanistan could benefit positively through the convergence of policies, programmes, and projects on gender equity with a focus on the following:

- Women's substantive access to occupational knowledge and skills development, particularly in livestock, horticulture, and entrepreneurship;
- Institutional support for women's occupational collectivisation;
- Research and governmental recognition of women's unpaid and domestic work;
- Guarantee of women's financial inclusion, including the greater provision of credit and collateral as well as the emphasis of positive socio-religious provisions around inheritance.

Information on the labour supply and participation of women in agriculture is needed to establish whether the underemployment of women relates to stronger gendered boundaries, a deficit in market opportunities, or a combination of the two.

# 1. Introduction

The agricultural economy of Afghanistan faces a long road to recovery. The extended period of conflict (1979-2001) weakened by a period of drought (1998-2002) resulted in diminished human capacity and the disruption of natural resource management systems and economic structures, which Afghanistan is now rebuilding. Over the past decade and a half, the country's subscription to the free market economy,<sup>2</sup> its dependence on foreign aid, and the strength of the opium industry<sup>3</sup> among other factors have created hurdles in the country's quest for food security and agricultural productivity, even as it faces ongoing challenges from the insurgency and consequent instability.

Afghanistan's population is estimated at 26.5 million with around 12.9 million females and 13.5 million males. The non-working-age population is 50 percent of the total population, with around 47 percent aged under 15 years and 3 percent over 65 years, which results in an estimated dependency ratio of 99.<sup>4</sup> About 23 percent of the population is estimated to be food insecure, while 36 percent is borderline insecure;<sup>5</sup> the country shows an imputed poverty rate of 39.1 percent<sup>6</sup> and a Multi-Dimensional Poverty Index of 0.51.<sup>7</sup> The country's agricultural economy remains central to its economic well-being.<sup>8</sup> Agriculture in Afghanistan, including the processing of agricultural and livestock products, is the main sector of employment for 44 percent of the working population and contributes 25 percent to the country's gross domestic product (GDP). This sector is a source of income for 61 percent of households and the most important income source for 28 percent households.<sup>9</sup>

In the context of the above information, studies point to the need for Afghanistan to make greater and better use of women's economic potential in ways that can contribute to poverty alleviation, better nutrition, food security, and increased productivity.<sup>10</sup> In parallel, developmental paradigms also posit women's equal economic participation as a basic human right and see a country's economic progress as being dependent on women's equal contribution to the labour economy.<sup>11</sup>

However, a point with direct relevance on women's participation in the labour force of Afghanistan, particularly in the rural agrarian economy, is that the private and public domains in Afghanistan

2 With its largely informal and importing economy, liberal trade regime, and low tariffs, Afghanistan cannot compete in many sectors with neighbouring countries whose raw materials and finished goods dominate the Afghan market.

3 For example, in 2015, the farm gate value of opium production in Afghanistan amounted to 3 percent of gross domestic product (GDP), while the potential gross value of opiates amounted to 7.4 percent of GDP; United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, "Afghanistan Opium Survey 2015: Socio-economic Analysis" (Report, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, March 2016), 3.

4 Central Statistics Organisation, Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, "Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2014: Mid-term Results (Preliminary Figures)" (Kabul: Central Statistics Organisation, 2014), 5.

5 CSO, "Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2014: Mid-term Results," 8.

6 Central Statistics Organisation, Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, "Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2013-14" (Kabul: Central Statistics Organisation, 2016), 110, Table 7.2.

7 Overall, 84 percent of Afghan households are multi-dimensionally poor; see Centre for Policy and Human Development, "Afghanistan Human Development Report 2011: The Forgotten Front: Water Security and the Crisis in Sanitation" (Kabul: Centre for Policy and Human Development, 2011), 36-38.

8 Only 12 percent of the country's land is arable, with almost 16 percent being *lalmi* or rain-fed and nearly 22 percent irrigated. Central Statistics Organisation, Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, "Afghanistan Statistical Yearbook 2013-14" (Kabul: Central Statistics Organisation, 2014), 137, Table 8.1 Accessible farm holdings (owned, leased, sharecropped, or mortgaged) vary in mean size from 6 *jeribs* (irrigated) to 13 *jeribs* (rain-fed). CSO, "Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2013-14," iii.

9 CSO, "Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2013-14," 91.

10 World Bank, "Agricultural Sector Review: Revitalizing Agriculture for Economic Growth, Job Creation and Food Security" (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2014); Food and Agriculture Organisation, "Food and Agriculture Organisation in Afghanistan" (Rome: Food and Agriculture Organisation, 2011).

11 A. Brody, A. Spieldoch and G. Aboud, "Gender and Food Security: Towards Gender-Just Food and Nutrition Security" (BRIDGE Overview Report, Institute of Development Studies UK, 2014); Food and Agriculture Organisation, "Gender Dimensions of Agricultural and Rural Employment: Differentiated Pathways out of Poverty Status, Trends and Gaps, 2010" (Rome: Food and Agriculture Organisation, 2010); Food and Agriculture Organisation, "The State of Food and Agriculture 2010-11: Women in Agriculture Closing the Gender Gap for Development" (Rome: Food and Agriculture Organisation, 2011); Preet Rustagi, Dev Nathan, Amrita Datta and Ann George, "Women and Work in South Asia: Changes and Challenges" (New Delhi: Institute for Human Development, 2013).

are highly gendered. Socio-cultural practices around gender roles contribute strongly to what work is perceived as suitable for women and men. This includes women's gendered roles, duties, and participation in paid, unpaid, care, and domestic work. Gendered boundaries are seen as particularly important in preserving *nan*, *namus*, and *gheirat* (loosely, male and community honour and social status, respectively; see the Glossary for a fuller definition), and there are strong restrictions on female physical mobility.<sup>12</sup> Existing socio-religious power structures could translate into economic opportunities for rural women that are only viable if located within or near the village; as research shows,<sup>13</sup> women may not be allowed to access economic opportunities or training if located in another's home, even within the same village. Similarly, socio-cultural norms, which do not allow women to interact with men, travel without a *mahram*, or own land, among many other restrictions, curtail women's access to a host of resources and services.<sup>14</sup> Importantly, however, in communities in some provinces, women are directly engaged in what are otherwise considered to be "male" activities.<sup>15</sup> Similarly, variations and synergies between ethnic communities and locations could play an important role in altering normative behaviour around women's visibility in economic and labour participation paradigms.

In the context of the above points, this briefing paper looks at some issues that impede or enhance the recognition and enhancement of women's contributions to the agricultural economy of Afghanistan. Section 2 presents an overview of women's activities in farming, livestock, horticulture, and farming-related entrepreneurial activities. It then looks at some of the ways in which women's economic participation in agriculture has been targeted by projects and programmes. Section 3 addresses five specific issues pertinent to women's participation in the agricultural economy: women's gendered solidarity and collectivisation, the need to target women in skills development, women as contributing family workers, women's lack of access to assets, and the need for gendered statistics.<sup>16</sup> Section 4 concludes by identifying some areas in which research could contribute to the enhancement of women's participation in the agricultural economy of Afghanistan.

<sup>12</sup> Under the Shari'ah as followed in Afghanistan, a *mahram* is a male relative with whom a woman can be in close proximity; in the presence of *namahram* (non-related) males, there must be either gender segregation or the chaperoning of women, especially in public.

<sup>13</sup> Lena Ganesh, Massouda Kohistani and Rahim Azami, "Women's Economic Empowerment in Afghanistan, 2002-12: Information Mapping and Situation Analysis" (Kabul: Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, 2013).

<sup>14</sup> It may be suggested that these socio-cultural norms, practices, and ideologies contribute to the invisibility of women's labour. This issue is explored in Section 3.3 below.

<sup>15</sup> Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation, and Livestock (MAIL), Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, "Social Assessment of the National Horticulture and Livestock Project" (Kabul: Samuel Hall Consulting 2012), Annex 1, 23 Provincial Profiles.

<sup>16</sup> Other key issues in Afghanistan such as irrigation and women's access to water, community rights as framed in natural resource management policies, women's participation in the opium economy, social protection needs, labour legislation, public sexual harassment, gender wage gap, transportation, and security are not examined here. Space constraints also prevent the inclusion of other important issues that impede women's labour participation such as care work, fertility, domestic work, child marriage and the consequent early motherhood responsibilities, multiple pregnancies and health issues, domestic violence, and so on.

## 2. Overview of Women in Agriculture

According to the Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey (ALCS) 2013-14, female labour force participation stands at 28.9 percent.<sup>17</sup> About 50 percent of women are not gainfully employed (either unemployed and looking for work, or underemployed and working less than 40 hours a week, but available and willing to work additional hours); 37 percent cannot find employment, while about 14 percent are underemployed. Two-thirds of the female labour force is involved in agriculture, with 21 percent engaged in farming or crop growing including fisheries and forest-related occupations, and 42 percent engaged in livestock production.<sup>18</sup> In addition, 25 percent of all economically active women contribute to craft and related trades. However, women account for 33 percent of all workers in agriculture, fisheries, and forestry-related occupations, and for nearly half the total employment in craft and related occupations.<sup>19</sup> Women's labour is informed by both occupational and vertical segregation, and they "have hardly any representation in the sectors that have experienced higher economic growth rates in recent years, such as construction, mining and quarrying, wholesale and retail trade and restaurants, transport, storage and communication, and financing, insurance and real estate."<sup>20</sup>

In farming (i.e., cotton, cereal, sugarcane, potato), women's activities are mostly in weeding, harvesting, hauling, and threshing. Most other crop-related activities (i.e., seed buying and preparation, fertiliser and chemical buying and use, sale of produce) are seen as male domains, even though 70 percent of rural women are involved in farming and directly or indirectly interact with agricultural input services.<sup>21</sup> In Baghlan, Daykundi, and Panjshir, women are more involved in cultivation.<sup>22</sup> In share-cropping households, women may work in their family fields alongside non-family members if the woman's husband is also among the group, while among the better-off families, women's labour is substituted by hired help. Women's paid engagement is higher among poorer households, as women may also work as hired farm help<sup>23</sup> alongside a *mahram*, according to seasonal labour demand and highly correlated to household needs. Very few women have land/ access to land or control over its produce. Most farmlands have some fruit trees and livestock for self-consumption and/or sale at local markets. However, most aspects of the farm economy show the interdependence between women and men in economic and household activities.<sup>24</sup>

In horticulture, women manage small orchards (i.e., grapes, almonds, plums, apricots, pomegranates, walnuts, and other stone fruit and nuts), beehives, and vegetable gardens (mean size of 2 *jeribs*), including spices (cloves, cumin, saffron, etc.) and medicinal plants (mint, white behman, yarlung, etc.) inside their homesteads, at small-holding farms adjoining the homestead, or in forests/community land, particularly in the case of pistachios. Women in some regions participate in the lower end of the commercial farming value chains as day labour by picking saffron and grapes/raisins in contract farming (drying *afjabi*, storing *kishmish*, manual sorting) and hand shelling/sorting almonds, apricots, peanuts, pine nuts, and walnuts in their homes for contract farmers;<sup>25</sup> they are paid per kilogram. The market linkage for produce is generally through men.<sup>26</sup> However, in Badakshan, Baghlan, Daykundi, and Bamyan, women are involved

17 CSO, "Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2013-14," 64, Table 5.9. Note that only 11 percent of women work in "decent" employment as salaried workers in the public and private sectors or as employers.

18 CSO, "Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2013-14," 69-70.

19 CSO, "Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2013-14," 71.

20 CSO, "Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2013-14," 69.

21 Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation, and Livestock, Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, "Environmental and Social Management Framework (ESMF) for the Afghanistan Agricultural Inputs Project (AAIP)," Directorate for Programs, Afghanistan Agricultural Inputs Project (Kabul: Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation, and Livestock, 2012), 78.

22 MAIL, "Social Assessment of the National Horticulture and Livestock Project," Annex 1, 23 Provincial Profiles.

23 "[W]age ratios (women/men) are 51 per cent for planting, 61 per cent for harvesting, 50 per cent in other farm work": Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, Martyrs, and Disabled, Government of the Islamic Republic Afghanistan, "National Labour Policy" (Kabul: Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, Martyrs, and Disabled, 2012), 18.

24 For example, regarding carpet weaving, men head and shear the sheep, women spin the wool into yarn, men dye this yarn, and then women weave the yarn into carpets. The final product is marketed by men.

25 According to the World Bank, enhancing economic opportunities in livestock and horticulture can help compete with the opium economy. See World Bank, "Agricultural Sector Review," xvi.

26 MAIL, "Social Assessment of the National Horticulture and Livestock Project," Annex 1, 23 Provincial Profiles.



in selling vegetables. In Daykundi, women also engage in harvesting orchards. There are also some female village-level traders or sales agents in the almond value chain. In Panjshir, women are involved in the sale of cereals and grains, fruits, nuts, and vegetables.<sup>27</sup> The contribution of horticulture (fresh and dried fruits, medicinal herbs, spices, and seeds) to domestic sales and exports has consistently been high; in 2013-14, its export value amounted to US\$224 million or 43 percent of the total export value.<sup>28</sup>

Around 25 to 43 percent of households have livestock, which is one asset that Afghan women are likely to own, although whether or not they are able to exercise control over its sale or produce is uncertain; traditionally, *pi-wasi* consisting of livestock is given to women upon marriage by their natal families. The 2008 drought had a detrimental effect on the livestock population, and as a national average, households own 1-5 chickens, 1-2 dairy cows, 1-6 sheep, and 1-6 goats; some households also have ducks, horses, and donkeys. The ownership of cows is especially associated with the access to or ownership of land for fodder or crop residue. With cattle, women are involved in breeding, caring for new-born and sick animals, collecting fodder and feeding (and dung for fuel and manure), and milking and making dairy produce such as *qurut* (dried yoghurt balls), ghee, *chakka*, buttermilk, and butter. Men participate more in the rearing of larger animals and butchering. The buying/selling of feed, and sale or trade of produce and livestock is also seen as male domain. However, the income derived from milk and milk-based products in particular is culturally and traditionally seen in many regions and communities as a woman's right. Further, women are the main or equal caretakers of cattle in Badakshan, Farah, Faryab, Herat, Kandahar, and Panjshir. In Daykundi, women also engage in the selling of livestock produce and butchering.<sup>29</sup> Fishery and poultry are mostly scavenger-type activities in the family and village-based production systems in which women engage. Livestock sales—eggs, meat, dairy products, wool, and hide—are frequently for domestic and local consumption, although some is exported. Afghanistan imports livestock produce for consumption (eggs, poultry, milk, chicken, meat, and beef) to the value of US\$139 million annually;<sup>30</sup> day-old hatchlings, live chickens, and cows are also imported.

**Table 1: Women and men's responsibilities and control over livestock<sup>31</sup>**

	CATTLE		SHEEP		GOAT	
	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men
<b>Work Responsibility</b>						
Feeding	69.14	19.46	59.70	26.60	63.86	23.37
Grazing	11.14	21.89	07.67	32.17	10.74	27.72
Watering	63.32	17.20	51.22	26.36	51.81	23.80
Tending young	81.86	04.86	58.54	16.49	70.68	13.50
Milking	84.13	01.87	57.49	04.88	77.94	04.93
Treating	22.73	74.44	38.21	56.91	33.82	59.22

27 MAIL, "Social Assessment of the National Horticulture and Livestock Project," Annex 1, 23 Provincial Profiles.

28 CSO, "Afghanistan Statistical Yearbook 2013-14," 224. Dried fruits alone had a total supply value of more than US\$7,000 million in 2015. Afghanistan's estimated production of the world share in 2015 was as follows: 1 percent of in-shell pistachios (40 percent for Iran and 28 percent for Turkey), 15 percent of pine nuts (identical for North Korea and Pakistan), 2 percent of dried apricots (53 percent for Turkey and 16 percent for Iran), and 5 percent of dried figs (56 percent for Turkey and 15 percent for Iran). See International Nut and Dried Fruit Council, "Nuts & Dried Fruits: Global Statistical Review 2015/2016" (Reus, Spain: International Nut and Dried Fruit Council, 2016), 12, 38-62.

29 MAIL, "Social Assessment of the National Horticulture and Livestock Project," Annex 1, 23 Provincial Profiles.

30 CSO, "Afghanistan Statistical Yearbook 2013-14."

31 Nadia Hashimi, Asta Olesen and Jennifer Solotaroff, "Gender in Developing the Agriculture and Livestock Sectors: Increasing Women's Opportunities along Value Chains of Farm Products," Afghanistan Gender Mainstreaming Implementation Note Series, no. 2 (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2012).

Decision Making						
Purchasing animals	33.65	65.63	28.69	68.76	33.96	60.23
Purchasing feed	28.95	70.37	24.39	73.05	27.29	66.91
Selling animals	37.60	61.64	35.31	61.56	42.96	51.09
Selling milk	52.31	19.06	35.89	17.65	47.96	18.58
Selling wool			34.03	25.90		
Selling fiber					40.35	21.92
Treating	34.09	64.63	46.23	50.41	38.61	54.57

Washing, sorting, carding, and spinning sheep and goat wool into yarn and then knitting is done by women across the country; women dehair by hand the small amount of spring cashmere that is exported.<sup>32</sup> Women are employed both off-farm and on-farm as contract labour in some regions for these activities and paid per kilogram. Afghanistan exports raw wool, cashmere, and hide. In the absence of in-country value addition, products like wool and cashmere, which have a strong women's labour component, are exported raw and derive a base profit. With the recent introduction of combing and other processing technology along with better quality control and institutional environments, expanding the trade in raw cashmere can offer great potential to women's work as small farmers across Afghanistan, especially in terms of production and harvesting. Similarly, exported wool and hide is value-added in other countries, while this subsector could be better exploited nationally. Beekeeping and honey collection is also a source of income; the produce mostly caters to local and domestic markets.

Enterprise opportunities for women in farm-related activities are through work such as making jam, weaving wool, and selling honey, dairy products, eggs, and chicken. Much of the produce is generally sold by the women through their families at the weekly local village market. Women also engage in spinning wool and using sheep wool to fill cushions and pillows for domestic or local/village consumption. The weaving of *namad* (felt carpet/rug), *qalee* (pile carpet), and *geeleeem* (rug), embroidery, and some leatherwork (saddlebags and pads) are done by women and girls in their homes. With an average of 18 square metres of carpet woven annually,<sup>33</sup> the economic impact of women's income generation is strongly felt at the household level. The value of these products amounts to US\$86 million and formed 17 percent of the total export value in 2013-14.<sup>34</sup>

From the above information on women's engagement in the different agricultural subsectors, some initial points can be made. First, despite women's overall recorded labour force participation being low, they are, in reality, engaged in some high-value subsectors (i.e., fruit, nuts, wool/cashmere, hide, carpets) that earn substantial profits and foreign exchange through exports. Similarly, women's subsistence-based farm production/vegetable garden and livestock production is crucial for household food security and nutrition. Second, there is a considerable domestic market need in livestock that should be given attention in women's labour participation. Third, while the socio-cultural gendering of spaces in many regions of Afghanistan makes it possible for women to interact only with other women, weightage is needed in policy to target specific communities and regions and channel women's occupational knowledge and labour with greater independence from men.

32 The global cashmere market is worth US\$1 billion. Afghanistan's market share in 2007 was about 7 percent despite an estimated 90-95 percent of Afghan goats being cashmere-producing. Reports indicate that farmers' poor knowledge of cashmere's value and shearing process contributes to its low production. Cashmere is not the main reason for goat-keeping, as only around 30 percent of the cashmere from goats is harvested. See Frauke de Weijer, "Cashmere Value Chain Analysis Afghanistan" (Washington, DC: United States Agency for International Development, 2007), 16.

33 Roots of Peace, "Rural Business Support Program: Afghanistan Prefeasibility Study of Balkh Carpet Value Chain" (Kabul: Asian Development Bank: 2008), 6.

34 CSO, "Afghanistan Statistical Yearbook 2013-14," 216.



## 2.1 Government initiatives

In the past decade, numerous projects funded by multilateral agencies and implemented through government agencies have trained women in income-generating activities around livestock, dairy processing, cashmere production and processing, handicrafts, and carpet and felt making. Many of these programmes were time-bound and had limited success. More importantly, the training imparted skills that had limited to no market outlet for the product; the programming in such projects did not take into account women's lesser access to general knowledge and networks outside of their immediate family or community domain.<sup>35</sup> At other times, when a project targeting or including women's traditional occupations had a clear vision, including for marketing and business development, problems arose around regulations or finding collateral for credit depending on the acquiescence of the male family members of the women participants; such examples are the Rebuilding Agricultural Markets Programme (RAMP)<sup>36</sup> and the Horticulture and Livestock Project's National Horticulture and Livelihood Project implemented by the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation, and Livestock (MAIL).<sup>37</sup>

An example of a government initiative seen to have had better success is the Food and Agriculture Organisation-funded Integrated Dairy Schemes Project implemented in Balkh, Herat, Kabul, Kunduz, and Jalalabad through MAIL.<sup>38</sup> The project has created regular weekly income for female milk producers by integrating them into the milk value chain and has simultaneously organised women into cooperatives, which have had a strong impact on gendered economic empowerment in the household and community units.<sup>39</sup> Despite the percentage of female milk producers in the Integrated Dairy Schemes being low (one-third overall), the project can be seen as a viable way of securing regular reliable income for women using culturally approved occupational skills from within their family or community domains.

The following table presents some of the recent programmes and projects in agriculture across Afghanistan funded by bilateral and multilateral agencies and implemented through the government.

35 For some illustrative examples, see Ganesh et al., "Women's Economic Empowerment in Afghanistan." There have also been some adverse repercussions relating to cultural insensitivity in the programming of projects. See also Saba Gul Khattak, "Adversarial Discourses, Analogous Objectives Afghan Women's Control," *Cultural Dynamics* 16, no. 2-3 (2004): 213-36; Javed Bahri, "Western Gender Policies in Afghanistan Failing Women and Provoking Men," *Gender Technology and Development* 18, no. 2 (2014): 163-85; Lina Abirafeh, "An Opportunity Lost? Engaging Men in Gendered Interventions: Voices from Afghanistan," *Journal of Peacebuilding and Development* 3, no. 3 (2007): 82-87.

36 Under the Ministry of Reconstruction and Rural Development with United States Agency for International Development (USAID) funding, the RAMP project for poultry was implemented between 2003 and 2006. For details, see Antonio Rota and Haroon Nessar, "Final Report: Development of Rural Poultry Production" (Kabul: Rebuilding Agricultural Markets Program, 2006); Chemonics International, "Case Study of the Poultry and Grape/Raisin Subsectors in Afghanistan: Guided Case Studies in Value Chain Development for Conflict-Affected Environments" (microREPORT no. 106, United States Agency for International Development, 2008). Note that RAMP developed a gender strategy.

37 World Bank, "Afghanistan—Understanding Gender in Agricultural Value Chains: The Cases of Grapes/Raisins, Almonds and Saffron in Afghanistan" (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2011), 19.

38 Ruxandra Boros and Anni McLeod, "Empowering Women in Afghanistan: Reducing Gender Gaps through Integrated Dairy Schemes" (Rome: Food and Agriculture Organisation, 2015).

39 Besides the main positive effects (i.e., increase in household assets, nutrition, health, education access for children), the ability to move within the village to other women's homes for training, receive training from a female teacher (an "outsider"), or occasionally make an exchange visit to other provinces for training is indicative of a settlement or community's acceptance of women's greater mobility.

Table 2: Some recent programmes and projects in agriculture

Programme/project; Time span; Donor	Objective	Women's component within the programme/project
National Horticulture and Livestock Project (NHLP); 2013-20; World Bank	Improving production practices, including for fisheries; supporting services and investment	Gender mainstreaming implementation strategy; gender awareness and mainstreaming activities
Afghanistan Agricultural Inputs Project (AAIP); 2013-18; World Bank	Strengthening institutional capacity for safety; reliability of agricultural inputs; sustainable production of certified wheat seed	Environmental and social assessment conducted; 296 staff and female farmers trained, but no evidence of gender disaggregated statistics <sup>1</sup>
Comprehensive Agriculture and Rural Development Facility (CARD-F); 2014-19; Department for International Development (DfID) and Danish Fund (DANIDA)	Under an inter-ministerial committee, increasing employment, income, and business opportunities by primarily targeting rural masses through the design, facilitation, and implementation of commercially viable value chains supplemented with rural infrastructure projects in five provinces	Framework: Ministry of Reconstruction and Rural Development's Draft Gender Policy (2011) and Draft Strategic Implementation Plan; MAIL's Gender Mainstreaming in Agriculture
Rural Microfinance and Livestock Support Programme (RMLSP); 2009-14; International Fund for Agricultural Development	Providing sustainable access to appropriate microfinance services, technical livestock packages, and skills to smallholders, existing livestock owners, and those aspiring to have livestock	Focus on women, female-headed households, the un-creditworthy, and Kuchis
Integrated Dairy Scheme Project (IDSP); 2005-10; International Fund for Agricultural Development	Increasing cattle production; developing processing and marketing structures for milk and dairy products; helping create cooperative organisational structures	Benefits female milk producers; greater participation of women as union members and cooperative shareholders
Agriculture Support for Peace & Reintegration Programme (ASPRP); 2012-13; United Nations Development Programme	Promoting peace, reconciliation, and security in Afghan communities through outreach, reintegration, and community recovery	Gender-responsive budgeting; inclusion of women in the peace process
Beekeeping Development Project (BDP); 2012-15; Agence Française de Développement	Increasing commercialised honey production	Inclusion of women beekeepers and cooperatives
Perennial Horticulture Development Programme (PHDP-II); 2010-15; European Union	Supporting six research farms in orchard rehabilitation; developing the nursery industry with greenhouse technology; helping create producer-level organisations; leading the formation of the Afghanistan National Horticulture Development Organisation (ANHDO); <sup>2</sup> supporting the Afghanistan National Nursery Growers' Organisation; <sup>3</sup> establishing the Plant Biotechnology Laboratory	No particular or substantive focus, reference, or output on women in PHDP's 2013 narrative progress report <sup>4</sup>

Afghanistan Agricultural Extension Programme (AAEP II); 2014-17); United States Agency for International Development (USAID)	Delivering effective services to rural clientele by strengthening cooperation among other government agencies working in the agricultural sector; training in extension services and post-harvest techniques, including online training	Involvement of women in ensuring livestock health and production
Afghanistan Agricultural Research and Extension Development (AGRED); 2012-16; USAID	Developing and deploying technology and knowledge-based solutions; providing extension and advisory services to farmers and herders; training in extension services, including online training	Addresses female farmers' needs through mechanisms such as Women in Agriculture Working Groups
Commercial Horticulture and Agricultural Marketing Programme (CHAMP); 2010-16; USAID	Developing post-harvest systems and establishing export trade networks for high value crops; value chain analysis	Inclusion of women in agricultural training and community-based farmer schools; kitchen gardens and poultry programmes
Regional Agriculture Development Programme (RADP); 2013-19; USAID	Strengthening farmers' knowledge and skills regarding wheat, high value crops, and livestock production techniques; reducing post-harvest losses and increasing value addition for producers, traders, and exporters	Training women in production and post-harvest storage, packaging, and other methods as well as marketing techniques to sell outside their home; increasing women's awareness of diversified diets and balanced nutrition

1 Amanullah Alamzai, "Afghanistan Agricultural Inputs Project (AAIP) (P120397): Implementation Status & Results Report" (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2015).

2 With partner organisations at the (private) producer and trader levels such as the Afghanistan Almond Industry Development Organisation, Export Promotion Agency, and Citrus Promotion Group. See the website of Afghanistan National Horticulture Development Organisation, "Home," <http://afghanistanhorticulture.org/> (accessed 7 March 2016).

3 The Afghanistan National Nursery Growers' Organisation is an umbrella organisation with 32 sub-nursery associations and more than 1,000 individual nursery members in 22 provinces. It reintroduces native Afghan saplings and seedlings certified for quality production to meet international export standards. See Afghanistan National Nursery Growers' Organisation, "Home," <http://anngo.org.af/> (accessed 7 March 2016).

4 Agriconsulting S.p.A, "PHDP II Technical Assistance to MAIL to Strengthen the Planting Material and Horticulture Industry in Afghanistan (Europe Aid/129-320/C/SER/AF/2): 6-Monthly Progress Report November 2012–April 2013" (Kabul: Afghanistan National Horticulture Development Organisation, 2013).

It may be noted that gender as a component is addressed to a limited extent in most projects listed in Table 2, but there is not much evidence in the public domain in terms of targets, outputs, and results-based monitoring or impact evaluations to indicate that women benefit in substantive or equitable ways from these initiatives. The impacts of the above projects on women engaged in agricultural activities are still to be assessed, but it can be said that expanding the programmatic focus to include women in a (far more) substantive manner will be in line with the National Action Plan for Women in Afghanistan (2008) and the Afghanistan National Development Strategy (2008).

The National Strategy on Women in Agriculture Development (2015-20)<sup>40</sup> considers specific institutional action points in the MAIL for women across agricultural projects and programmes. It presents a strategy framework for women's empowerment in the agricultural sector, provides guidance on the implementation and monitoring of the strategy, and aims, among other objectives, to address the productivity constraints of women engaged in the agricultural sector and bridge productivity differentials between female and male farmers.

The earlier Economic Regeneration Programme of the National Agriculture Development Framework provides support to producer, retailer, and trade organisations; financial services for agricultural development; value addition; quality control and food safety of agricultural inputs and products; marketing and market linkages; and agricultural land leasing. In this way, it also provides for the creation and support of women's producer organisations, including access to credit and developing women's home-based food production and processing cooperatives. Similarly, the Agricultural Production and Productivity Programme, also part of the National Agriculture Development Framework, addresses constraints to the higher productivity of Afghanistan's subsistence, semi-commercial, and commercial farming systems. It gives women support in backyard poultry production, home gardening projects, vegetable cooperatives, and enterprises for vegetable storage, packing, and processing, and promotes their participation in agricultural production and service delivery.

In parallel, connectivity for rural women is a very important aspect of women in agriculture. Thus, projects such as the Afghanistan Rural Access Project (under the National Rural Access Project) would do well to implement the gender component of their Environmental and Social Management Plan, substantiate the objectives of their gender inclusion plan, and provide suggestions for the study of gender-sensitive rural access.<sup>41</sup>

40 "National Strategy on Women in Agriculture (2015-2020)" (Kabul: Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation, and Livestock and Food and Agriculture Organisation).

41 Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Public Works, and Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development, Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, "National Rural Access Program (NRAP): Annual Report, March 2015–March 2016" (Kabul: National Rural Access Program, 2016).

### 3. Enhancing Women's Participation in Agriculture

While there has been greater interest in women's economic participation in the past decade, the accent is still missing from national policy narratives in terms of gender as an unequal power structure and women as equal citizens with equal and unequivocal rights over their labour and its due benefits. Women's participation in specific agricultural subsectors reveals many desirable attributes for policy attention, but unless state policies are fully geared toward investing in Afghanistan's women—by both recognising women as strong economic actors and rendering to them the fruits or returns of their labour—the economy is unlikely to realise its potential. Moreover, the economic opportunities available to women, their position within the value chain, and their status and rights as workers within any work category are linked to the ways in which regional, national, and global production networks organise themselves. A greater response in inter-ministerial coordinative mechanisms is needed to enhance women's participation in agriculture in order to compete with neighbouring economies in horticulture (Iran) and livestock importation (Pakistan and India), for example. The following subsections look at certain points relevant to women's greater economic participation that also make visible equitable opportunities and benefits and that can even the odds, if only slightly, for women.

#### 3.1 Women's groups

Self-help groups (SHGs) have (re)gained ground in Afghanistan since the early 2000s. More recently, the Afghanistan Rural Enterprise Development Programme (2010-15) of the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development has provided avenues for women to set up or expand their SHG and micro-enterprise efforts. Under the Small and Medium Enterprise Development Component, village facilitators (one female and one male) are tasked with developing enterprise groups (EGs, between 5-15 members) and savings groups (SGs, 10-20 members). Ten SGs coalesce to form a village savings and loan association (VSLA) that can then avail of larger loans. Although women and men have separate EGs and SGs, the two merge for the VSLA. This process could be problematic for Afghan women in particular (as for South Asian women in general), as they have little voice in the presence of male family members. The merging of male and female SGs to form the VSLA means that women's savings through EGs and SGs, thus far under their control, are likely to be overrun by male preferences and choices for the subsector of any further enterprise (crops, cash-crops, etc.). Once men enter the picture, as evidence shows from the CDCs of the National Solidarity Programme in Afghanistan, women are in all likelihood left with no voice or visibility.<sup>42</sup> However, the Afghanistan Rural Enterprise Development Programme's robust implementation (directed by Ministry of Reconstruction and Rural Development's gender policy) has been successful in the inclusion of women and Kuchis in its coverage area of 733 villages in 24 districts of 5 provinces (Parwan, Bamiyan, Nangarhar, Balkh, and Herat). The number of female SGs stands at 52 percent, with 14 percent of small and medium enterprises being women-owned.<sup>43</sup>

Apart from larger-scale, time-bound, donor-funded projects implemented through the government, smaller all-women non-governmental organisations (NGOs), women's self-help groups (SHGs), and women's associations have begun to emerge.<sup>44</sup> For example, a network of 36 women's village food processing centres employing a total of 700 workers in the western province of Herat produces a variety of basic sauces, relishes and chutneys, jams, and dried foods

42 Socio-cultural norms make it almost impossible for women to speak, make their preferences known, opine differently, or be out of purdah in the presence of males, especially male family members. See Sippi Azarbaijani-Moghaddam, "A Study of Gender Equity through National Solidarity Programme's Community Development Councils: 'If Anyone Listens I Have a Lot of Plans'" (Kabul: DACAAR, 2010). The Rural Livelihoods Project in Bangladesh also organises women and men from the same households into SGs, but it encourages this horizontal division to develop into vertical ones, since women's and men's groups are separately provided access to microcredit and training for innovation and expansion.

43 Akbar Kamran, "Afghanistan—AF Rural Enterprise Development Program: P110407—Implementation Status Results Report: Sequence 11" (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2015).

44 To name but a few, Afghan Women Agriculture Association, Afghan Pride Association, Afghan Women Engineering and Design Foundation, Afghan Mother Association, Women Handicraft Association of Leather Products, Afghan Women Business Association, Afghan Women Art and Handicrafts Association, Bakhtar Association, Madina Association, Afghan Women Carpet Association, and Parwan Women's Social Services Development Association.



for Herati markets.<sup>45</sup> In Helmand and Herat, the GIA Women's Programme has created women's and widows' associations and leveraged donated land from the respective regional government offices to allow these associations to work on potato chip processing, dairy processing, and carpet weaving. In Logar, the Global Partnership for Afghanistan's **Women Working Together Initiative**, "helps widows and female heads of household establish or revitalize their orchards, nurseries and farms, as well as provide opportunities to increase their income and food supplies through initiatives such as food preservation, underground fruit storage facilities, greenhouses, vegetable and strawberry production, beekeeping, and poultry."<sup>46</sup>

Afghan Pride Association,<sup>47</sup> a women's organisation registered with Afghanistan Investment Support Agency, provides female farmers across the country with guidance in the production, packaging, and marketing of dried fruits and nuts. It also set up a dried fruit production and processing company in Kabul operating with the produce of female farmers. The Ghoriyani Women Saffron Association "provides various types of services to its members including training facilities, equipment, advance payments for poor farmers and assisting them in saffron production and processing."<sup>48</sup> The Herat Empowered Women Social Association helps female farmers in agribusiness to make jams, juices, pickles, and tomato paste, and process vegetables and dried fruits.<sup>49</sup> Both the Afghan Women Saffron Growers Association and Herat Empowered Women Social Association are supported by the Afghanistan New Market Development (2011-16) through the Ministry of Commerce and Industry and funded by the World Bank for the "provision of business development technical assistance to support private firms initiatives to gain market knowledge, improve product quality and processing technologies, and increase their presence in the domestic and export markets."<sup>50</sup> In handicrafts, the Product-Based Handicraft Training, Production, and Marketing for Women's Groups in Bamyan, a 10-month initiative, provided training to 90 women in 3 villages of Bamyan Province in *qalee* and *gileem* making with the aim to develop a monthly income of US\$35 per woman.<sup>51</sup> In bee-keeping, 8 of the 58 beekeeping cooperatives supported by the Agence Francaise de Developpement involve only women.

All-women SHGs, NGOs, projects, cooperatives,<sup>52</sup> and associations are highly relevant in developing countries, but more so in Afghanistan for three reasons: 1) they operate on the basis of gendered solidarity, which permits an alignment with key socio-cultural norms; 2) the initial investment required is minimal, often servicing only the immediate local markets but still influencing household economics; 3) the women's collectives offer spaces for acquiring knowledge and networking with the world beyond the home and compound. Such female-only groups make a substantial contribution to self-sustenance, poverty alleviation, and savings, and are strongly linked to microfinance. Moreover, the strong presence of women's groups can act as pressure points to ensure gender-responsive legislation and policies.

45 Holly Ritchie, "A Quiet Revolution through the Vehicle of Enterprise: A Women's Food Processing Business in Afghanistan" (Research Brief No. 2, IS Academy, Human Security in Fragile States, 2012).

46 The Khaled Hosseini Foundation, "Grantees," <http://www.khaledhosseinifoundation.org/grantees-gpfa-what.php> (accessed 8 May 2016).

47 Lauryn Oates, "Manufacturing Hope: An Afghan Woman Entrepreneur Brings Jobs and Change to Women Farmers," Canadian Women for Women in Afghanistan, 28 March 2011, <http://www.cw4wafghan.ca/article/news/manufacturing-hope-afghan-woman-entrepreneur-brings-jobs-and-change-women-farmers> (accessed 8 May 2016).

48 Juan Estrada-Valla, "Sowing Seeds of Empowerment: Small Loans to Afghan Women Growers," USAID Frontlines, November/December 2014, <https://www.usaid.gov/news-information/frontlines/afghanistan/sowing-seeds-empowerment-small-loans-afghan-women-growers> (accessed 7 May 2016).

49 See the website of the Herat Empowered Women Social Association, "What We Do?," <http://www.hewsabano.com/#> (accessed 12 March 2016).

50 Khaleda Atta, "Afghanistan—Afghanistan New Market Development: P118053—Implementation Status Results Report: Sequence 07" (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2015). This project is being implemented in Herat, Jalalabad, Mazhar-e-Sharif, and Kabul.

51 Bamyan Women's Business Association, "Technical Assistance Consultant's Report" (Asian Development Bank, 2012).

52 In Afghanistan, there are currently 2,420 active agricultural cooperatives with a total of 324,000 members; 398 cooperatives were dissolved in 2015. Central Statistics Organisation, Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, "Afghanistan Statistical Yearbook 2014-15" (Kabul: Central Statistics Organisation, 2014), 154, Table 8-10. The figures are not gender-disaggregated.

Currently in Afghanistan, most women's collectives face obstacles in two very important ways. First, the nature of women's knowledge and skills is significantly lower than men's. This derives from women's socially normative isolation and disenfranchisement, their lack of education and occupational training, and their minimal interaction with qualified and trained women. By contrast, men with a primary/secondary level of literacy as well as greater mobility and networking opportunities are advantaged in all three aspects, and as a result, they can understand and put to far better use the capacity-building, knowledge, equipment, technology, and networks offered by development projects. It would therefore not be wrong to estimate that a three-year project targeting a male population could be far more efficient in terms of output, outcome, and impact than a project of the same time span and investment that addresses or includes women. In other words, women's projects need more time. Second, when women's income does increase with the emergence of more viable opportunities, women's groups are unable to secure capital and seek institutional help, as there is little by way of support (legal, financial, skills development, and market linkages) from the government.

The Secured Transactions Law (2007), which allows for credit against movable assets, has not been disseminated widely; further, women's lack of access to movable assets remains problematic for the majority of Afghan women.<sup>53</sup> The government launched the Agricultural Development Fund in 2010, a stand-alone government institution providing farmers and agribusinesses with access to financial services. As part of this fund, Zahra, a Shari'ah-compliant financial product line, was established to cater specifically to female farmers and agribusiness entrepreneurs who operate medium-scale enterprises individually or in groups. However, loans are collateral-dependent and not likely to be useful to the small female farmers who need to be incentivised into greater economic participation. The 2008 Cooperatives Act does not provide for a national policy to encourage and incentivise women's SHGs and cooperatives through national institutional commitment and investment.<sup>54</sup>

Overall, as shown by the many examples above, women's groups have been active in income generation and show good results. However, they have been grouped into occupational collectives at the discretion of foreign-funded agencies and are small-scale endeavours. Given the socio-cultural gendered dynamics, there is currently probably not enough gendered solidarity or critical mass to propel women into self-mobilisation and seek the continuation of income generation without external, large-scale governmental interventions. If the government (and donors/international community) aim to turn the tide and increase Afghan women's economic participation in the agricultural economy by transforming producers groups/cooperatives into effective business units, the National Agriculture Development Policy should 1) ensure a minimum funding time span of at least 5 years for such projects,<sup>55</sup> 2) develop an institutionalised central strategy to create and nurture women's SHGs and cooperatives, provide women with training,

53 In South Asia, Bangladesh was one of the first countries to institutionalise women's SHGs and cooperatives. For example, "the Assetless Women's Cooperative Association in Bhugroil village, Rajshahi region, was one of many set up under the Rural Livelihood Project run by the Bangladesh Rural Development Board, with financial support from ADB [Asian Development Bank]": Alex Arnall, Katy Oswald, Mark Davies, Tom Mitchell and Cristina Coirolo, "Adaptive Social Protection: Mapping the Evidence and Policy Context in the Agriculture Sector in South Asia" (IDS Working Paper 345, Institute of Development Studies, 2010), 49. The BRAC Development Programme in Bangladesh provides microcredit for women who have less than 30 decimals of land, female-headed households, women with a disabled husband, widowed, deserted, separated, or divorced women, and households depending on seasonal wage employment. In India, the government recognised the value of SHGs in enhancing women's economic opportunities and created the Support to Training & Employment Programme for Women (1986-87), a central sector scheme to upgrade the skills of poor and assetless women and provide employment on a sustainable basis by mobilizing them in viable cooperative groups, strengthening marketing linkages, and supporting services and access to credit. The ten traditional sectors initially identified for project funding are agriculture, animal husbandry, dairy, fisheries, handlooms, handicrafts, khadi and village industries, sericulture, waste land development, and social forestry. The scope and coverage have since included female-dominated, locally appropriate subsectors. In Bhutan, women have independent access to bank loans and other forms of credit through the Loan Act of 1981.

54 India's SHG linkage programme enables commercial banks to engage with micro clients. Similarly, female credit officers operate in Sindh, Pakistan, as part of the Orangi Charitable Trust. Under the Microfinance Innovation and Outreach Programme of the government's Pakistan Poverty Alleviation Fund (a public-private partnership), the trust runs a Women's Livestock Cooperative Project and provides women with microfinance without guarantors.

55 This is aligned with the gestation period seen as optimum for women's SHGs in terms of capacity-building, skills development, and entrepreneurship development in line with the forming, storming, norming, and performing stages of SHG development.

and create spaces in which to meet and exchange information, and 3) link the women's SHGs and micro-enterprises to credit, input, extension, technology, research, business development and marketing. The use of gendered solidarity to seek greater income-generating opportunities may be the missing link that can help transform women's access to institutional and social resources.

In parallel, a convergence of such organisations toward common goals such as occupational/sectoral betterment, labour and legislation around labour reform and implementation, greater social protection including a campaign for the Right to Food that encompasses food security, nutrition security, livelihood, women farmers' rights, and so on is needed. In the wake of the deteriorating security situation (2016-17), it is all the more important for women from the agrarian and informal sector to become more involved in the civil and rights movements.

### 3.2 Skills training

The framework for women's skills enhancement, adult education/occupational learning, and vocational training in Afghanistan is improving but at a very slow pace.<sup>56</sup> The National Skills Development Plan (2004) was framed as a labour supply strategy to provide skills and knowledge through the technical vocational educational training (TVET) system.<sup>57</sup> TVET is given in agriculture, livestock and veterinary, business education, construction and engineering, fine arts, and special and inclusive education sectors. The plan's strategy funded short-term vocational training for building the TVET system, developed the national occupation skills standards, assisted with the development of a national qualifications framework, and built the capacity of trainers and training providers. The Ministry of Education provides two- to five-year TVET courses for those who have passed grade nine, while the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, Martyrs, and Disabled offers one-year courses.<sup>58</sup> However, this acts as an exclusion factor for many girls and young women who rarely qualify for training, since their retention rate in the secondary and higher secondary levels is low.<sup>59</sup>

The TVET system is also limited in view of the huge needs of the country's unskilled population,<sup>60</sup> although in 2009 it counted 500 centres, with some exclusively for women.<sup>61</sup> In 2014-15, private vocational and technical training institutions had a total of 2,399 students including 557 female students and a total of 217 teachers including 37 women.<sup>62</sup> In 2014-15, there were 164 boys' and 4 girls' professional and vocational high schools, with a total of 28,470 boys and 4,287 girls and a total of 1,284 male teachers and 153 female teachers.<sup>63</sup> In government technical and vocational institutions, for 2014-15, there were 344 female teachers out of a total number of 1,635, while 7,869 out of 46,469 students currently enrolled were female.<sup>64</sup> The low number of female trainers and teachers remains a barrier to enrolling girls and women in TVET courses, as is the lack of women-only centres for TVET. This has a domino effect on female apprenticeship (male mentors are culturally unacceptable), which further restricts female TVET enrolment.

56 It should be noted that despite its importance in developing countries and particular relevance to large numbers of people unable to access formal training and education, the Technical Vocational Educational Training (TVET) system is not mentioned in the framework of the Millennium Development Goals.

57 United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation, "World TVET Database—Country Profiles: Afghanistan," <http://www.unevoc.unesco.org/go.php?q=World+TVET+Database&ct=AFG>, 22 February 2017 (accessed 21 January 2016).

58 United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation, "World TVET Database."

59 The net secondary attendance ratio for males and females is 47.3 and 27.1, respectively. See CSO, "Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2014: Mid-term Results," 7, Table 4.

60 Committee on Education and Skills Policy, Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan. "Technical—Vocational Education and Training in Afghanistan, An Overview," [http://www.cesp.gov.af/anqa/Documents/TVET\\_Overview.pdf](http://www.cesp.gov.af/anqa/Documents/TVET_Overview.pdf), n.d. (accessed 25 February 2016).

61 Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, Martyrs, and Disabled, Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, "National Skills Development Program Baseline Data for the Quality of TVET Provision in Afghanistan" (Kabul: Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, Martyrs, and Disabled, 2009), Annex 2, TVET Centres and Data. A more recent study makes a similar point: World Education Forum, "Afghanistan National EFA 2015 Review Report" (Incheon, Republic of Korea, 19-22 May 2015).

62 CSO, "Afghanistan Statistical Yearbook 2014-15," 75.

63 CSO, "Afghanistan Statistical Yearbook 2014-15," 80.

64 CSO, "Afghanistan Statistical Yearbook 2014-15," 70.



The National TVET Strategy for Afghanistan (2013-18) recognises the importance of agriculture, and gender equity “is a main principle of the National TVET Strategy, especially in providing equitable educational opportunities and service delivery to women and girls.”<sup>65</sup> However, no information is yet available on projects or programmes for its implementation, particularly in national agricultural education and training, with gendered access to enrolment and opportunities (i.e., scholarships, dormitories, and safe transport) and gender parity in female trainers, teachers, and staff in TVET agricultural courses. “The gender balance in TVET has improved from 0.03 in 2002 to 0.15 in 2013, but it was and still is poor.”<sup>66</sup>

The Afghan-Dutch Agricultural TVET Project (2011-16) aims to improve the quality of education in Afghanistan's agricultural high schools. The recent Afghanistan Skills Development Project (ASDP II, 2008-14) seems to have had substantial positive outcomes, although, like most other World Bank projects, it does not provide gender-disaggregated figures.<sup>67</sup> In addition, projects such as the Non-formal Approach to Training, Education, and Jobs in Afghanistan (2014-18) aim “to increase the potential for employment and higher earnings of [44,500] targeted young Afghan women and men in rural and semi-urban areas through non-formal skills training.”<sup>68</sup>

Other smaller-scale efforts in agricultural training and education include the following: upgrading the curriculum, teacher training, and physical infrastructure of schools and equipment by People In Need in collaboration with Purdue University, Mercy Corps, and Kabul University's College of Agriculture; advancing Afghan Agriculture Alliance to develop agriculture and veterinary programmes at the universities of Kabul, Herat, Balkh, Nangarhar, and Kandahar and create partnerships between MAIL, local economic development organisations, and universities; improving agricultural education in Afghanistan through the Wageningen Centre for Development Innovation funded by the Netherlands' Ministry of Economic Affairs and Ministry of Foreign Affairs in partnership with Afghanistan's Deputy Ministry of Technical Vocational Educational Training. These programmes, however, do not provide information on gender policy or outputs designed to target female enrolment.

Apart from education and training, Afghanistan could benefit from various forms of technology that have had a good impact in other agriculture-reliant countries. For example, Farm Radio International, a Canadian NGO:

*partners with 360 radio stations in 39 African countries and reaches more than 200 million smallholders in more than 100 African languages. It offers a number of services but primarily develops Participatory Radio Campaigns, theme-based radio programmes that continue for four to six months. Themes range from livestock husbandry to farmer innovation, soil conservation, and issues specific to rural women (such as maternal health, farm implements designed for women, and women's land rights).*<sup>69</sup>

Afghanistan has good mobile phone outreach and has launched a major national initiative to accelerate broadband deployment. The World Bank's Afghanistan ICT Sector Development Project (2011-17) also aims to “expand connectivity, mainstream use of mobile applications in strategic sectors in the government and support development of the local IT industry”; its target is to reach 10 percent of women.<sup>70</sup> Innovative low-cost e-learning technologies can be put to use to circumvent gendered physical seclusion/segregation patterns and geographical barriers, while helping women to connect as occupational groups across the country and internationally. This form of information dissemination can help offset the inadequate numbers of qualified female extension workers, teachers, and trainers.

65 World Education Forum, “Afghanistan National EFA 2015 Review Report,” 55.

66 World Education Forum, “Afghanistan National EFA 2015 Review Report,” 31.

67 World Bank, “Afghanistan—Skills Development Project: Implementation Completion Report Review ICRR14732” (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2015).

68 Leopold Remi Sarr, “Afghanistan—Non-Formal Approach to Training Education and Jobs in Afghanistan Project (P146015)—Implementation Status Results Report: Sequence 05” (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2015).

69 World Bank, “ICT in Agriculture: Connecting Smallholders to Knowledge, Networks, and Institutions” (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2011), 141.

70 World Bank, “Afghanistan—Afghanistan ICT Sector Development Project: P121755—Implementation Status Results Report: Sequence 08” (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2015).

As an example, established female producer groups could potentially access MAIL's planting, production, and pest management research and videos available on the e-Afghan Agriculture online repository through knowledge delivery systems that are non-dependent on the internet if smart phones or computers could be made available; such systems also provide unlimited e-library access without the internet and at low costs. These could feasibly be linked to various commodity/occupation-based technical information and reports on bulletin retail/wholesale market prices, market briefs, trade, crop calendars, investment and export promotion, business plans, methods of demand estimation, bookkeeping, country-specific export standards, and reports available in Dari, Pashtu, and English on the websites of various projects.<sup>71</sup> Information on some of the above can also be obtained through interactive voice response systems or text messaging. Courses, classroom tools, and study aids are available as free apps on the Central Statistics Organisation (CSO) website.

Overall, skills development is not only required for women's on-farm activities but also for off-farm economic opportunities and migration-related survival needs.

### 3.3 Contributing family workers

As in other developing countries, much of Afghan women's contribution to the economy is unpaid and forms part of family labour. In Afghanistan, 73 percent of women are unpaid family workers<sup>72</sup> and much of women's economic participation remains in the informal economy in agriculture. Their activities are not quantified (monetarily or in terms of time use), and their participation is subsumed under "women's work," especially in farming, horticulture, home-based handicrafts, and livestock, activities in which the subsectors show high interdependence with men. Women's isolation from the public sphere of the market further means that their labour is converted into currency in an arena that they have no entry into or control over in terms of negotiation. In this socio-economic paradigm, women's work effectively remains unpaid and unrecognised. In this sense, it could be said that women are economically engaged but not economically empowered.

Recognising that the quantification of women's unpaid work is not only required in the interests of fairness, but also to recalibrate the economy and address policy implications (around labour, investment, sectoral foci, social protection measures, etc.), a number of labour market surveys in developing countries attempt to use follow-up questions to obtain an augmented labour force participation rate. For example, when women classify themselves as being engaged in domestic duties, follow-up questions are then asked to try to determine whether the women carry out gainful, but unpaid economic activities more or less regularly. These activities include, but are not restricted to, the care of animals, tending vegetables, and collecting firewood for domestic consumption. Such an augmented definition gives a much more realistic picture of women's labour force participation in developing countries.<sup>73</sup>

The National Risk and Vulnerability Assessment (NRVA) and ALCS are conducted annually, while the Socio-Economic and Demographic Surveys are currently being conducted at the provincial level in lieu of a census. These address the issues of labour force participation. Given the gendered socio-economic boundaries in Afghanistan, as outlined in the Introduction above, there could well be a cultural bias in both the reporting and recording of women's work outside the home or their involvement in non-home-based income-generating activities. Further, the multitasking of women when they perform several small tasks in the course of a day or when tasks are performed simultaneously—for example, child-minding while tending to livestock—could also make it difficult to classify one main activity. Moreover, most women are involved in the non-monetised stages of value chains, while the interdependence of women's work with men's activities in agriculture, livestock, and home-based enterprises may contribute to under-reporting. As a result, the

71 To name but a few, the Afghan Raisins, Fruits, and Vegetables Promotion Administration, the Food, Agriculture and Animal Husbandry Information Management and Policy Unit, Roshan's Malumat National Price Information System, World Food Programme, MAIL, CSO, Afghanistan Livestock Marketing Information System, and ACE's Paywand.

72 CSO, "Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey 2013-14," 65.

73 See also United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, "Integrating Unpaid Work into National Policies" (New York: United Nations Development Programme, 2003). Information from Pakistan's Labour Force Survey could be particularly useful for Afghanistan in terms of the questions used to determine women's activities and their economic contributions to the household unit.

questionnaire design process itself has to be highly sensitive to the gendered contexts that it addresses. The NRVA, for example, includes a set of questions to be asked under “agriculture” as part of the questionnaire for men, yet there is no set of corresponding questions for women in agriculture. The ALCS 2013-14 does seem to have augmented questions to better capture women's work, which is seen in its increased percentages for female labour force participation. National time-use studies have not been conducted, while market replacement (generalist/specialist<sup>74</sup>) cost or opportunity cost<sup>75</sup> approaches have not been used to quantify women's unaccounted or “invisible” labour.

### 3.4 Assets

Statutory law in Afghanistan grants women the right to own, buy, sell, donate, and inherit property. The Shari'ah mandates that property and inheritance as *miras* shall devolve to daughters, wives, and mothers. Although inheritance rights in the Sunni and Shi'a sects are respectively governed by the codified Hanafi and Jaffar'i schools of the Shari'ah, the state defers to customary law on women's inheritance rights.<sup>76</sup> Across Afghanistan, land, inheritance, and assets are seen to be a son's right; in practice, a daughter is likely to renounce any rights to patrimony in favour of her brother(s), a widespread practice across South Asia that reflects the patriarchal construct of the father, brother, husband, or son being the woman's caretaker. Equally, the Shari'ah mandates and provides for a woman's financial security on marriage through *mahr*. While *mahr-e-moajal* is given at the time of marriage, the amount determined at the finalisation of marriage is, under Islamic jurisprudence, a contractual obligation to be later paid by the husband to the wife, including in the eventuality of the dissolution of the marriage. Both types are observed more in their breach than by observance, primarily because the marriage is not registered, but also because of social pressures that prevent women's informal, formal, or legal recourse to enforcement. Any land owned by a woman is likely to be titled in her husband's name, as part of the social contract in the patriarchal society.

Afghan women are severely affected by these practices, because land and movable or immovable assets are critical for any economic growth. Land rights (whether customary, tenure, leasehold, or formal possession), immovable assets (house, buildings), and movable assets (livestock, equipment, and vehicles) offer economic and social capital through sustainable income generation. They are used as collateral during times of crises or need and to secure loans in both agriculture and agribusiness. Control over resources is the fulcrum that determines women's control over labour and livelihood, not to mention affecting intra-household and intra-community decision-making, bargaining power, income pooling, and women's economic agency in the household economy; without rights over patrimony or joint rights in the marital household, women remain susceptible to economic shocks.<sup>77</sup> Farmers and micro-entrepreneurs across sectors can find seed capital from credit institutions at reasonable or regulated rates of interest when collateral can be offered, while informal credit too requires such collateral.

The situation in much of Afghanistan remains grim for land and assets acquisition by women. For example, a 2012 report for the Afghanistan Agricultural Inputs Project states that women continue to be given as *baad* in conflicts over land issues, i.e., women are treated as property and symbolise honour as contextualised within *namos*, *nang*, and *gheirat*. The report adds that “most of women's lands are registered in the name of men, women's complaints are handled by men, [there is] no specific help for women by judiciary.”<sup>78</sup> The 2013 Observations of the Committee on

74 For example, see European Parliament, “Women and Unpaid Family Care Work in the EU” (Brussels: European Parliament, 2009).

75 For example, see United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, “Integrating Unpaid Work into National Policies,” and United Nations, “Guide to Producing Statistics on Time Use: Measuring Paid and Unpaid Work” (New York: United Nations, 2005).

76 Indeed, there are exceptions. Some communities in provinces such as Faryab, Bamyān, Laghman, and Badakhshan have instances of traditional female inheritance and land ownership, although their control over the inheritance is debatable and numbers are very small.

77 Widows, single women, divorcees, abandoned wives, and older women who face the brunt of being left without sustenance either become dependent on natal or marital families or destitute since they lack independent property rights. Women in domestic violence situations are trapped when they do not have independent economic means.

78 MAIL, “Environmental and Social Management Framework,” 81.

the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women recommend that Afghanistan should “(e)nsure that the draft family law provides equal rights for women and men in all matters relating to marriage and family relations, in particular with regard to their responsibilities within the family, property and inheritance, divorce and custody of children.”<sup>79</sup> Other studies too have called for a review of family law in Afghanistan.<sup>80</sup>

There is a need, firstly, to develop an approach that avoids the global “rights-based” approach to gender equality and integrate Shari’ah-informed routes as a first step to review the implementation of both *mahr* and *miras*, which are mandated but remain controversial. One major socio-religious question that needs to be addressed for this integration is to conceptualise the issue as interfaced with customary ethnic as well as regional/provincial practices, in which the identities of Afghan women and men are deeply rooted. The status quo in a highly patriarchal society is unlikely to change without major investments of time, effort, and political will. Yet the centrality of the Shari’ah in Afghan society means that customary law can be challenged, and that both *miras* and *mahr* can be given wider and positive acceptance<sup>81</sup> as well as implementable legal backing.

Second, in view of the strong social strictures that bar women’s access to land, inheritance, and assets in a context where the majority of the rural population is landless, the important issue for women’s livelihood security in agriculture remains access to land/livestock and its produce.

A high number of women lack personal identity documentation, which further restricts their rights to secure land and property.<sup>82</sup> According to an International Monetary Fund release, “the government will launch a national programme to survey informal settlements and provide 100 percent coverage of land tenure certificates in main cities by the end of December 2015.”<sup>83</sup> Moreover, the gender strategy of Afghanistan’s Independent Land Authority situated in MAIL is to “provide specific capacity building to women...and facilitate better access of women to land.” The Land Reform in Afghanistan project has set up a civil society organisation, the Women’s Land Rights Task Force, to enable it to mainstream gender into Afghanistan’s Independent Land Authority and encourage female entrepreneurs and farmers to lease government land.

Overall, gender relations and household dynamics need to be addressed in tandem with *miras*, *mahr*, and access to land. Some important questions that should be considered include the following:

- How do families understand land and its inheritance vis-à-vis the Shari’ah and customary laws?
- Does this understanding vary or differ between sects, *quams*, and regions?
- What effects do differentiated land rights have on gender equity and women’s capabilities?
- What are the specific problems encountered around land rights by women, especially migrant returnees, female-headed households, and widows, in terms of documentation, location of registration, access to credit, etc.?

79 United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), “Concluding Observations on the Combined Initial and Second Periodic Reports of Afghanistan,” CEDAW/C/AFG/CO/1-2, [http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/\\_layouts/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CEDAW%2fC%2fAFG%2fCO%2f1-2&Lang=en](http://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CEDAW%2fC%2fAFG%2fCO%2f1-2&Lang=en), 30 July 2013 (accessed 15 February 2016), 13.

80 The 2008 agreement between the Ministry of Women’s Affairs and the Rights and Democracy on Family Law reform does not include *miras* and *mehar*. For the components of the draft, see Rights and Democracy, “3rd International Conference Family Law Reform and Women’s Rights in Muslim Countries: Perspectives and Lessons Learned” (Seminar Report, Rights and Democracy, 2010). See also Qara Consulting, “Women’s Access to Property in Afghanistan: Law, Enforcement and Barriers” (Kabul: Harakat AICFO, 2011), and Elisa Scalise, “Women’s Inheritance Rights to Land and Property in South Asia: A Study of Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka” (Seattle, WA: Rural Development Institute, 2009).

81 A 2014 survey reports that 83.7 percent of a large sample comprising 9,271 people indicated that a daughter should receive *miras*. Asia Foundation, “Afghanistan in 2014: A Survey of the Afghan People” (San Francisco, CA: The Asia Foundation, 2014), 149.

82 United Nations CEDAW, “Concluding Observations,” 9.

83 International Monetary Fund, “Islamic Republic of Afghanistan: 2015 Article IV Consultation and First Review under the Staff-Monitored Program-Press Release; Staff Report; and Statement by the Executive Director for the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan” (Country Report No. 15/324, International Monetary Fund, 2015), 24.

- How much is a woman's access to land tenure and/or grazing rights dependent on her husband/father/son's agreement?
- What are the repercussions for female-headed households?
- How many women own land or have access to land and its produce? Is it individual or group-based access?
- What role does the access to water play in women's continued access to employment in agriculture, including horticulture and livestock?
- How many marriages (*nikahkhat*) are registered?
- How many district-level offices are available and functioning to register marriages?
- Are the mullahs who conduct marriages aware of this obligation?
- How can the state enforce the mullah/mufti's adherence to the Shari'ah around *mahr*?
- To what extent are mullahs versed in the Sunnah and the body of Hanafi law?
- Can the women's *shuras* in the CDCs be used as channels to spread awareness of the need to register marriages?
- How much does the curriculum in Islamic schools reflect women's rights under the Shari'ah?

In parallel, continued and greater focus on interpreting and disseminating women's rights through the lens of Islamic jurisprudence is needed, particularly through the Ministry of Hajj and Religious Affairs in collaboration with the Ministry of Women's Affairs.

### 3.5 Evidence to aid policy

Agricultural data is collected by the Directorate of Statistics and Marketing Information within the MAIL and CSO, with the help of development partners such as multilateral agencies. CSO has had a gender department and gender policy since 2013; the policy is a vision statement and is directed to internal gender parity and inclusion.<sup>84</sup> Capacity-building in statistical collection in the CSO is implemented through projects such as the World Bank's AFGHANSTAT (2011-16)<sup>85</sup> and CountrySTAT launched in 2013. Further, the Gender Equality Project II "worked with MOWA [Ministry of Women's Affairs] to establish the first harmonized technical advisory committee to guide the development of the NAPWA [National Action Plan for Women in Afghanistan] monitoring database."<sup>86</sup> Nevertheless, it must be said that there is a lack of data and information to study the current and evolving roles of women in agriculture at the district, provincial, and national levels, to analyse discrimination in terms of access to land and assets, and to develop various gendered indices in the labour markets. As stated in a 2010 report, Afghanistan has "considerable problems in the production and use of statistics, and need[s] significant and prolonged support in developing gender statistics."<sup>87</sup>

A Gender Statistics Unit was formed in the CSO in 2015. Although Afghanistan's gender equality plan, the National Action Plan for Women of Afghanistan (2007-17), as well as the Afghanistan National Statistical Plan (2010) and CSO's Capacity Development Plan (2011-14) require gendered statistics, the Statistics Laws 2006 and 2013 do not call for the production of gender statistics.

84 Central Statistics Organisation, Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, "Gender Division," <http://cso.gov.af/en/page/11125> (accessed 16 March 2016).

85 World Bank, "Afghanistan—AFGHANSTAT: Strengthening the National Statistical System: P121883—Implementation Status Results Report: Sequence 06" (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2015). ACE's Paywand, a collection of 360 agriculture-related studies, is available on the MAIL website (<http://paywand.mail.gov.af>); 5 out of 360 studies relate to women (2004-11).

86 United Nations Development Programme, "Gender Equality and Women Empowerment II: 2015 First Quarterly Project Progress Report" (United Nations Development Programme, 2015), 1.

87 Jessica Gardner and Dono Abdurazakova, "Gender Statistics in the Southern Caucasus and Central and West Asia: A Situational Analysis. Promoting Gender-Inclusive Growth in Central and West Asian Developing Member Countries" (Manila: Asian Development Bank, 2012).



In addition, security issues and political instability have limited the opportunities for data collection, while surveys only partially target gender issues. Capacity development through the Agricultural Data Collection and Utilisation System, initiated in 2014, does not mention gender-disaggregation.

A very limited number of qualitative reports exist on female artisans and handicrafts as well as women in livestock and horticulture; being descriptive in nature, these cannot be said to have academic rigour or nuance, nor do they provide numbers. There is almost no empirical or qualitative research that presents data on the income-generating roles of women within agricultural rural and urban households. We can assess that most women, in addition to their domestic roles, work in certain subsectors in (subsistence) agriculture and the farm-based economy. The questions that still remain are thus: how many women work, in which subsectors, with what status, how many days per week/month/year, and earning what income. Further data is also needed on their labour conditions, ownership/access to land/livestock/common land, farm productivity and constraints, land tenure, and access to irrigation, inputs, technology, and credit, among others.

Overall, only fragmented data and statistics on women and income generation are available for gendered agricultural labour in Afghanistan. Quantitative and qualitative research is also lacking on the nature and type of subsector employment for women. Information on employment status, wages, sectors, and subsectors of women's engagement, GDP share, and so on are either highly inadequate or absent. In particular, provincial data that provide for variations and can help contextualise labour policy are missing. Data discrepancies and limitations mean that women's contribution is undervalued, while their potential remains underutilised.

Afghanistan has made a large number of commitments in its 2004 Constitution as well as through its ratification of international resolutions and policy documents with reference to creating an enabling environment for women. Since 2001, plans, policies, legislation, and strategies have been enunciated and passed. Yet a substantial gap remains in vision, objective, and situational reality. The timely availability of reliable data is critical to the state's ability for gender mainstreaming, a key and crosscutting theme across all sectors and policies, including the Afghanistan Millennium Development Goals 2020. It is important to analyse whether the available data is sufficient to enable evidence-based policymaking, including around core indicators and sex disaggregation. In parallel, female enumerators, extension and input service providers, and members of the Department of Women's Affairs at district, provincial, and farm-holding levels should be trained in the use of mobile phones, tablets, internet, GPS mapping, and other new information technologies for data recording in order to enable to a better capture of data pertaining to women.

## 4. Conclusion

This paper draws attention to some of the issues faced when addressing women's participation in the agricultural economy and the extent of the problem that remains to be tackled. It is crucial that women increase their participation in the agricultural labour force of Afghanistan, not only as underemployed participants or as a distress strategy. The paradox is that women's labour, although crucial and already present, remains invisible despite contributing to agricultural production and income as well as food and nutrition security. However, it remains very difficult to track the unpaid and informal agricultural economy with a thin evidence base. Much more work on the labour supply and participation of women in agriculture is needed to establish whether the underemployment of women represents stronger gendered boundaries, a deficit in market opportunities, or a combination of the two for women in the rural (informal) economy. The causes for women's low participation are diverse, and the lack of adequate information contributes to the conditions not being addressed; the gaps in research and policy in addressing the deficits thus need to be examined. A comprehensive survey and analysis of women's labour force participation as well as labour market assessments for each agricultural subsector, wages, nature of employment, etc. are needed, including skills and occupation profiles. However, increasing farm household income also requires focused programming within the government in terms of women's skills development and technical capacity-building and the far greater inclusion of women in all projects.

The following are some suggestions to be considered for women's enhanced participation in the agricultural economy.

### 4.1 Collectivisation

- Currently, there is not enough consolidated information on the ways in which female participation in non-governmental women's groups has provided women with newer ways of accessing civic or community rights. Mixed method studies are needed to throw light on how being part of a female collective has influenced women's view of socio-institutional structures, among others. The links need to be explored between the participation of women in an economic group and their understanding of the market, access to economic spaces, availability of markets, capacities to create markets and linkages, and access to information, microfinance, and technologies. In particular, it should be investigated how women obtain information and access to non-household paid work.
- A survey of women's participation in projects executed by CDCs and women's groups and the effect of their implementation on women's agricultural participation and economic empowerment is required. The findings should quantify the entrepreneurship effects in a panel setting that uses provincial-level variations.
- A rapid assessment survey of women's traditional mobility patterns across provinces could help determine whether certain provinces or districts can be used as "change-driver" areas for a greater focus on the formation of cooperatives and SHGs as well as credit linkages. The objective here is to identify the subsectors in which women participate equally or more than men and are simultaneously allowed to travel to the local/provincial market to buy or sell goods, whether accompanied by a *mahram* or not. Keeping in mind that women's immobility and seclusion are the opposite of "development as freedom,"<sup>88</sup> building on traditional geographical, social, and occupational strengths can help achieve greater gendered economic parity in a shorter time span. This could potentially have a domino effect in other districts, provinces, or sectors to help women consolidate a better place for themselves.

88 Amartya Sen, *Development as Freedom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

## 4.2 Skills and training

- NTVET and ASDP II need a proactive gender policy with focus on the following:
  - the inclusion of women in agriculture-based courses, with gender-sensitive measures in training, access to training, curriculum, methodology, and transition to labour markets;
  - dissemination of gendered programmatic outputs;
  - gender disaggregated results-based monitoring.
- An independent impact assessment of the National Skills and Development Plan would be useful to determine the gendered impact of the TVET system. A gendered Information Mapping of the Educational Management Information System focusing on sector, ethnicity, location, poverty, and vulnerability would be useful to inform policy interventions.
- Qualitative studies are needed to understand the pathways to women's skills acquisition in order to incentivise female professionals in agricultural colleges and understand the gender dynamics of apprenticeships in formal and informal TVET, for example.
- An e-learning policy for women and girls in agriculture that is linked strategically to community- embedded programmes would be useful.
- Adult education programmes that improve the vocational skills of female workers or Open Basic Education to bring illiterate women to grade 3 or 4 levels is particularly important due to the dominance of the informal economy, persisting low female literacy, especially in the rural areas, and the high prevalence of child marriage and its accompanying early motherhood. By consequence, this would address the unmet needs of at least two generations of illiterate women.
- A mapping study of agricultural and veterinary research centres, research farms, certification centres, and biotechnology laboratories being opened through various programmes and projects should assess the staff gender parity in these ventures.
- The many research materials being made available on government websites to agriculturalists should feature women in pictorial visual aids and video presentations in order to graphically impress the reality of women's work in agriculture, showcase their experience and innovation, and reach more women.
- The market opportunity for delivering mobile-enabled agricultural services or mAgri services to provide for the unique and differing needs of female agriculturalists needs greater exploration and data that can inform policy. The assessment should focus on the subsectors, value chains, and regions in which women play both dominant and independent roles.

## 4.3 Assets

- A gendered empirical assessment on microfinance institutions and agencies delivering credit to women is needed in order to identify the following: the choke points that microfinance institutions/agencies face in delivering credit to women's SHGs; the enhanced role that the state can play in facilitating lending to women; the collection of gender-disaggregated data on access to formal financial services across rural sectors; the assessment of gender-based equality of opportunity and pre-intervention access to credit for men and women. Cross-institutional research is needed into the reasons and potential solutions for any gender differences identified.
- An area-based mapping of informal and formal financial services (e.g., credit, savings, insurance, remittance transfers) would be useful, along with an assessment of the institutional tracking of gender disaggregated data, gender balance within institutions, gender differences in the data regarding access to different financial services, and explicit or implicit institutional discrimination vis-à-vis gender, location, sector, and so on would be useful.



- The state should actively pursue land leasing and land allocation programmes for women as representatives of the households unit;<sup>89</sup> government land with wild pistachios, for example, offers an attractive avenue to formalise women's existing economic engagement. In parallel, the government could provide land leased at nominal prices to women's producer groups and form women's cooperatives.

#### 4.4 Evidence to aid policy

- In Afghanistan, products that have consistent and widespread demand and for which the human and infrastructural capacity demands exist or could be created relatively easily are currently being met by import substitution (e.g., eggs, chicken, day-old chicks, beef, cows, milk, butter). An overview of import substitution to identify corresponding underdeveloped female labour chains that have unrealised market potential would be useful to help direct policy and investment.
- A pilot study on the viability of Special Economic Zones for women's employment in agribusiness, with specific reference to both security and working in all-women's spaces, would be useful. Can these zones be district-based? Can they draw on the localised norms of the women's CDCs and be linked to the local women's cooperatives and organisations? The zones could be situated within the industrial parks currently being developed with a quota for female entrepreneurs. However, learning from the adverse working conditions that women face in similar zones across South Asia, care should be taken to frame legislation that protects their labour rights.
- Tracing social relations through commodity chains and understanding the household as a site of production in the value chain helps uncover the economic and asymmetrical relationship among the actors in a value chain. A mapping study of the input, labour, production, marketing, and consumption chain of the subsectors in which women are involved would be useful. The occupational and vertical segregation of subsectors, the gendered division of labour in work, and the gender wage differential can be addressed. For example, how can the carpet industry, once a traditional stronghold of women, be revived to benefit women equitably? Has the Group Guaranteed Lending Scheme been useful? How can female producers be linked from the farm via purchasing agents to the market through women-only or primarily women value chains.
- The 19th International Conference on Labour Statistics of the International Labour Organisation in 2013 adopted new standards for measuring work, employment, and labour underutilisation. These standards have positive implications for the measurement of unpaid family work and could be considered for Afghanistan in the socio-demographic and economic surveys that are being conducted. Additional questions in the current questionnaires should be considered to generate provincial-level gender disaggregated data on operational landholdings (formal, informal, lease, and tenure holdings), assets (livestock, equipment, vehicles, house, enterprise, etc.), and loans/credit (source and value).
- According to the Afghanistan National Statistical Plan,<sup>90</sup> the NRVA 3 has 44 questions in the women's questionnaire under "Women's Activities (for all females in HH, 10+)." It may be useful, in the interim, to access and analyse the microdata from the CSO to understand the nature of the questions and responses and so better inform future surveys. It may also be possible to correlate the information with the potential economic value of such work and assess activity codes for determining work, reference periods, timing (seasonal/non-seasonal), and other mechanisms to correctly understand women's responses to questions on their economic participation.

<sup>89</sup> In Bangladesh, the Khas Land Distribution Policy specifies joint ownership by both the husband and wife. Other Muslim countries such as Somalia and Turkey have created a similar policy. In Pakistan, the 2011 Anti-Women Practices Law makes it a punishable offence to deprive women of their inheritance rights.

<sup>90</sup> Central Statistics Organisation, Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, "Afghanistan National Statistics Plan" (Kabul: Central Statistics Organisation, 2010), 42, Annex A, Table 0.1.

- Time-use studies are needed to understand the allocation of time to different activities—productive and non-productive—for both men and women. This will go a long way toward identifying women’s true contribution to productive work as well as the constraints that they (and men) face in making greater contributions to economic activity.
- A base paper on gendered data availability and gaps including indicators, output, and impact across both policies and projects is required so that data needs can be projected and contribute to policy intervention over the coming five years. The base paper should identify and include clear equity and gender parity benchmarks in a strategic plan results framework.
- A guidance note on indicators and approaches that can be implemented through existing monitoring and evaluation structures, including through “new metrics” (measurement tools and indicators), could be developed by a multilateral United Nations agency in consultation with state and local-level actors and stakeholders to ensure that gender equity and equality are addressed in all evaluation, monitoring, and data collection conducted by ministries.
- The Kuchi population contributes a significant proportion of small ruminants, including sheep and goat. Information and data are needed on the ways (locations/trading centres/markets/distribution centres, routes, quantity, prices, etc.) in which produce (wool/cashmere, skin, milk, young, etc.) is collected and monetised, on the input/extension/credit services being provided, the documentation and grazing interventions being used, and so forth. In particular, women’s roles in all these activities should be investigated.
- The ALCS 2013-14 states that 1 percent of households in Afghanistan are female-headed. However, this figure seems improbable given the numbers of lives lost during and after the country’s decades of conflict, the male out-migration, and the social pressures that compel women to present, for example, their 10-year-old son as the head of the household rather than admit to being *zan beparast* (without male protection, i.e., destitute). These numbers have repercussions on policy development (for example, food insecurity doubles for female-headed households). A pilot study in Kabul Province could provide an insight into the numbers and employment conditions of widows/single women and also present recommendations on their labour force participation.

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