Lessons from Approaches to Increase Women's Participation in Development: Workshop Summary

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AREU

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1.   Background and Purpose

Beginning in January 2004, the Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU) has been carrying out research on gender and local-level decision-making in order to strengthen the existing knowledge base regarding the functioning of household and community power structures. Research was carried out in urban and rural areas including Herat, Kabul, Mazar-i-Sharif, Panjao (Bamyan) and Samangan.

Following the research, AREU decided to hold a workshop for donors, local and international NGOs and government agencies to promote discussion and debate about some of the key issues raised by the study. The workshop held on 30 January 2005 aimed to fill some of the gaps in knowledge and learning about women's participation in Afghanistan development activities. Additionally, it set out to examine some of the problems and constraints donors, local and international NGOs and government ministries were facing in their work with women, and what strategies and information might be useful in addressing these constraints.

This report summarises the key discussions that took place at the workshop, and in its four working groups on institutions and participation, the role of development actors, education and skills-building and macro-micro linkages. The next section contextualises the workshop with respect to AREU's gender research findings. This is followed by a summary of the constraints, challenges and strategies identified by the four working groups. The final section highlights the data and analysis gaps that are necessary to be filled as the development community moves forward.

2.   Context of Research and Workshop

The post-war, emergency situation in Afghanistan has put enormous pressure on donor organisations and others to achieve quick results in their development programmes and projects. In this context, policymakers often find it difficult to make the time to carry out adequate gender analysis and fully integrate women and men into their priority setting, policies and programmes. Moreover, women have traditionally been viewed as a target group distinct from the socio-political, economic and cultural context, and humanitarian and development programmes are often based on unfounded assumptions and preconceptions. AREU's gender and local-level decision-making research therefore aimed to better understand these assumptions and the socially constructed gender norms that shape decision-making in order to improve Afghans' involvement in community-building and democratic development processes. The primary findings from this research are summarised below.

Institutions and participation
Two levels of institutions—household and community—influence women's involvement in making decisions that affect the lives of their communities, families and selves. AREU found that roles and responsibilities within households were defined according to gender norms and influenced household members' ability to participate in and control different forms of household decisions. There is an assumption that women have "incomplete knowledge", limiting their ability to participate at the community level. Some women are able to reduce this perception through formal education or participation in NGO trainings (i.e. sanitation, health) and gain family support to participate in community institutions. At the community level, key local institutions identified included traditional (*shura,* role of elders) and newer structures established by development actors (village organisations, community fora, community develop-ment councils, women's *shuras).* There are more formal leadership opportunities for both men and women in urban areas as compared to rural, but only in relative terms. Sometimes these leadership roles are largely symbolic, and while some organisations are proactive in engaging women, others are discouraged and must be given greater support to develop agendas with women. Differences among women along the lines of age, ethnicity, economic status, education levels, etc. can constrain or support women's participation. Yet when appropriate space for women (that may accentuate these differences) is not provided, this sometimes results in homogenous community development projects/strategies. Traditional institutions may be changing in some areas in favour of greater participation of marginalised groups, but are often still influential in communities (particularly elders) and membership may overlap with the newer structures. This may make transformation for greater women's participation difficult, if they subscribe to traditional views of who should and should not have access to information and be permitted to help define local development agendas.

Role of development actors
Development actors can both positively and negatively affect power dynamics within communities and households. Actors' mandates often dictate the processes they can implement and communities tend to tailor their needs in language according to these aid bearers. Development agencies also target aid according to broad-based geographical boundaries as opposed to socially defined boundaries. Entry requirements for participating in some development projects and leadership roles, such as literacy and education, immediately exclude the most vulnerable populations (the poorest and

illiterate groups), many of whom are women. The links between participation and better, more effective engagement are forgotten, as projects seek to build stability through establishing new institutional structures on the foundations of the old, thereby reinforcing socially constructed gender divisions.

Education and skills building
AREU research has shown that while there is a distinction in the definitions of education and knowledge, both allow for greater participation of women in societal processes, if not in decision-making per se. People are gradually losing faith in decisions made by (mainly) elder men because of the knowledge and experience they have gained through migration abroad during the war years. But women are usually restricted (both by social norms and their own perception of lacking authority) from participating in and influencing decisions. Women are generally perceived to have "incomplete knowledge" and little value is placed on practical knowledge gained from experience within households, both by men and women. This perception is also a strategy used by those with power to exclude women from participation in decision-making processes. Age, marriage and ethnicity are also factors influencing participation in within households.

Macro-micro level linkages
The AREU research found that perceptions of qualities of good leadership may be changing, with more emphasis on the value that educated and knowledgeable people bring to communities. Yet women still must access local leaders through informal means, and women-specific issues are unlikely to be raised in community institutions. Moreover, as it is generally considered inappropriate to bring private issues outside of the community, it is very difficult for women to communicate with district-level representatives and institutions. At the community level there has been a marked improvement in the representation of women in institutions (through the National solidarity Programme [NSP] in particular)—though often indicated by numbers rather than levels of power and influence in decision-making. Moreover, sometimes women's participation is accepted because it is perceived to help communities to access aid, rather than local interest in increasing their participation.

Shuras often represent elements of a community, rather than the community as a whole, and are much less representative of views of different women in the community. As a result, any communication between the *shura* and district or macro level may be biased to reflect the thinking of individual *shura* members rather than who they are meant to represent. Likewise, the lack of communication between male and female *shuras*, means that any decisions that are made by female *shura* are often not adopted.

3.   Working Group: Institutions and Participation

This working group was asked to identify institutions and aspects of programme/project design that constrain women's participation. They considered mechanisms and processes that can address gender issues through national policies and programmes, accountability mechanisms needed, policies or standards which development actors can put in place to ensure progress is made on the ground towards gender and development goals, and finally how development actors could better support communities to define and implement their own development agendas. Keynote speaker Horia Mosadiq of the Human Rights Research and Advocacy Consortium cited traditions and customs, access to space, access of information, and lack of civic education as main constraints to women's participation and the electoral process.

The group broadly identified five categories of institutions that influenced and constrained women's participation and gender programme and project goals:

- Household institutions: families.
- Local/community level institutions: local *shuras*, community associations, community development councils.
- National level institutions: government ministries, political parties.
- Social institutions: educational system (schools), community health workers, education *shuras*, health clinics.
- International Institutions: UN agencies and NGOs.

Constraints, Challenges, and Strategies
A thorough discussion on many possible constraints to encouraging women's participation in institutions led the group to focus on five main broad constraints, as follows:

1. Attitudes
Traditional, cultural and religious attitudes of both men and women were identified as key constraints to women's participation, particularly in rural areas. Many felt that it was important to examine whose attitudes were the main constraint to women's participation, particularly as it was a pervasive trend from families up to institutions. This led to a discussion relating to power dynamics as constraints for women's participation and the need for more understanding about these beyond the household level. Redressing the balance of power could invoke a strong conservative reaction but does not necessary indicate a step backwards.

It became evident that attitudes varied according to region, ethnicity and sect of Islam and that in order to challenge these attitudes, education was of vital importance. **Strategies** emphasised the need for educational programmes to be coupled with awareness raising programmes, aimed at sharing common concerns about development issues, including women's participation. One of the mediums suggested for doing this was mass media, radio, television and plays, some particularly focused on working with children's awareness of gender roles.

2. Lack of Education

It was felt that those who have knowledge are perceived as being able to make decisions, though these people were not identified, except in the case of *mullahs*. Based on the influence of key actors it was questioned whether increased training overcame this constraint and led to increased participation. Restrictions on freedom of movement for women limited the possibility of building skills and participation. It was also felt that the impacts of education on violence against women were not clear, and that shame is a major constraining factor limiting awareness about the occurrence of violence against women.

It was felt that development actors' *strategies* needed to better target gender education throughout the education system, through long-term projects in order to encourage better understanding of gender roles and rights. In rural areas, literacy should be prioritised as a form of empowerment for women's more active participation. Gender officers with knowledge and education should be used to go to regions and work with *shuras* at the regional level, and report back to organisations in Kabul.

3. Social Justice

The importance of social justice was touched upon on several occasions, although no clear links were made between legislation and women's participation. Generally the disparity between what is written in law and legal practices were said to limit women's participation. Legal institutions were not discussed, either in terms of the prevalence of customary law and traditions or in terms of what recourse women had to enforce their rights.

Strategies that provide good examples of working at a variety of levels could encourage a knock-on transformative effect. One such target group could be *mullahs*, *maliks* and local *shuras*, particularly in examining the disparities between Islamic law and practice. The wisdom of having separate *shuras* for men and women should also be re-examined. It may produce better results by getting men to allow older women to participate in *shura* decision-making. These women could then provide linkages between younger women in the household and *shura*. Participants also felt the need to work with women to participate more in the election process.

4. Inefficiency of Consultative Mechanisms

Women's participation was limited due to lack of institutions, lack of resources and lack of control of resources to varying degrees. Donors highlighted that the European Union's Human Rights and Gender Working Group had funds to spend but were constrained by not knowing the right actors to filter funds through. It was also felt that consultative mechanisms at national, local, and to an extent regional levels, were in place but they didn't work efficiently or effectively. Donors felt that they had limited access available for local engagement, and that there were no mechanisms with which they could engage for effective long-term solutions. Particularly, donors were unsure about how to influence decisions in households, and whether income-generating projects give more influence or have limited effect.

5. Female Leaders

Access to public space hindered women's ability to communicate with development actors, their communities and the government. Challenges arise in getting men to

understand the benefits of women's participation and encouraging more effective engagement with communities through female leadership. Women are often not willing to take the first step to participate and serve in a leadership role. This then raised the question as to where donors should be focusing, at the cabinet or local level. Donors do want to involve women, but often don't because it is too hard. They adopt programmes and policies that could increase women's participation, as a distant secondary target. This relates to the fact that policy designing at ministerial level often excludes women's participation, in part due to the lack of influencing "informal" power of the Ministry of Women Affairs. It was recognised that different actors prioritise women's participation differently, and donors felt it was difficult to be gender- balanced because primarily they work with men.

Developing capacity is a key *strategy* for better civil society engagement and working with local partners and government officials to set an example in advocating women's participation. There is also a need for development actors to encourage women's participation in leadership positions in organisations and institutions, particularly through training.

4. Working Group: Role of Development Actors

The task of this working group was to identify the roles and responsibilities of key actors in creating opportunities for women to participate in development programmes: from the micro to macro level. They examined questions concerning the objectives of development actors, the clarity of gender "terminology", and what development actors might do better or differently to achieve gender goals. The keynote speaker Roya Rahmani (Rights and Democracy) highlighted the fact that women have been active agents of peace building and conflict resolution and their participation at the national, regional and international levels should be increased. She raised questions about the form of support that development actors provide, women's participation stimulus, and coalition building and networking among women's groups.

Development objectives related to women and gender
One of the first questions the group attempted to answer was what have been the objectives of development actors related to women and gender. The ensuing discussion highlighted how the language of development programming has largely been oriented around women's objectives, and only recently has a broader definition of gender come into play. Women's objectives were said to include: increasing women's participation, empowering women to allow them to take their rightful role in socio-political and economic spheres, increasing access *by* women to those spheres and increasing access *to* women on the part of programmers. The group felt it is also important for programmers to engage with men so that they understand the value of women's participation (through *shuras*, or other community mechanisms where men are traditionally leaders).

Some questions relating to the assumptions of these objectives were raised, namely: does increased access automatically translate to power over decision-making? What does increasing women's participation mean in reality? Is it a case of statistics (a rather poor benchmark, as noted by the group) or actual active participation? Does a consideration of gender happen in isolation to considerations of class, ethnicity, age, economic standing?

Inter-governmental task groups are needed to mainstream a consideration of gender in programming, but actors must be cautious about the political considerations that can and do undermine such mechanisms. NGOs have tended to put gender on the back burner due to cultural constraints that make mainstreaming gender "too hard" to tackle. Also the current situation means that many NGOs continue to operate under humanitarian/emergency mandates rather than a development mode, and are pressed for immediate results. It is under these conditions that development actors must be aware of the "politicization" of the gender issue. It is therefore vital that development actors recognise the sometimes unintended negative impacts of gendering programmes.

Based on the above discussions the group determined that gender programmes need to increase women's mobility as well as provide the basic tools to address gender bias, injustice and discrimination. Gender programming needs not to focus on quantity but on quality in terms of women's ability to make choices and be able to act on them.

Constraints, challenges and strategies
Donor constraints
Donors often cannot or do not designate time and money for the evaluation of proposed or completed projects. Their projects are often short-term and they lack long-term commitment to Afghanistan. They also face security problems which hinder their access to reaching remote areas. Lack of communication, coordination and cooperation between donors, and between donors their local offices, hinders effective engagement. Donors are often driven by external mandates and those they are accountable to, meaning that they are not all working towards some common purpose. Often donors find it difficult to engage due to lack of on-the-ground staff and not having good local partners to work with. Most importantly for targeting better women's participation, donors often have no common definition of gender concepts or how to implement gender equity programs.

Donors need to develop long-term *strategies* aimed at sustainable programmes which generate revenue after the initial funding period ends, in order to balance immediate needs (e.g. disarmament, poppy eradication) with long-term ones. Exit strategies should be designed to include provisions to help the country be self-sufficient, and donors should find ways to address these provisions in PRSP and other processes. Donors must coordinate with the government and hold them accountable for promoting private investment. Improved donor harmonization and communication aimed at making mechanisms, like consultative groups, more useful and accountable would help women's needs to be heard. This could be done by having NGO networks (such as ACRBAR or AWN) attend consultative group meetings both to give NGOs a voice and to hear what donors are doing around women's programming. Capacity building is needed on all levels, including building local staff capacity and encouraging Afghans' involvement in organisations. This includes ensuring flexibility in dealing with local partners (especially women's NGOs). Donors need to give more time to evaluate their work in order to focus their projects and concepts to what they do best. EVERYONE (from donors on down to community organisations) is obliged to give the media a realistic picture of what is going on in Afghanistan and what can and can not be achieved through programmes.

Local office constraints
Local offices are driven by donor agendas, which are often constantly moving targets. In their responsibility for directly implementing projects, local offices often fail to build capacity and sustainability, especially when they face time constraints imposed by donors. High staff turnovers result in lack of consistency in terms of having institutional and organisational knowledge. There need to be linkages with government offices in order to better coordinate programming built on realistic expectations of available resources. Bureaucracy remains a final constraint for local offices; yet this is prevalent at every level of operation.

Local office *strategies* need to include mentoring local staff and having national staff in key decision-making positions. They should also devote time to look outward and learn from other organisations. There is a need for proper exit strategies that help to develop small organisations and civil society and focus on strengthening local government capacity and coordination at the sub-national level. Local offices need to clarify what is meant by women's participation and work towards that by creating standards. This needs to be coupled with reaching out to NGOs and women's groups

and encouraging them to promote women's participation. Also, local offices must have realistic expectations about what can be achieved through improved communication (between themselves, donors, etc.) about activities.

Grassroots organisations' constraints

Grassroots organisations are constrained by many similar factors to the above. They often have no long-term single vision and attempt to take on too many different activities. They have no direct way to communicate with donors and yet are hindered by donor mandates. They lack capacity in language skills, basic knowledge, monitoring, standards and staffing quality. These organisations also have the added dimension of working more directly in insecure environments under the tensions of local politics.

Grassroots organisations' *strategies* should include dedicating time and resources to gender analysis with a focus on priorities. It would be better to design only one or two long-term projects with outcomes that are contextual, realistic and accumulative rather than many short-term ones. Capacity building should suit the needs of the community and not take a "one size fits all" approach. Capacity building should extend to local staff and the community and include English training for key staff, building gender knowledge in community, and encouraging young people with interrupted education to go back to school. Improved communication and dialogue with donors, local offices, partners and religious groups should be encouraged and there needs to be more flexibility in dealing with these. Importantly, the government needs to be encouraged to play a stronger role in regulating organisations.

5.   Working Group: Education and Skills Building

This working group set out to identify how education and skills-building initiatives (i.e. literacy, carpet weaving, embroidery) impact on women's participation in institutions and decision-making. Within this remit they were asked to attempt to examine questions concerning the difference between knowledge and education, pre-existing knowledge in communities, urban/rural differences, the impact of skills-building initiatives and increased knowledge on participation and decision-making, and how increased knowledge at the local level can be used to strengthen organisational and governmental strategic objectives. Pam Hunte, the keynote speaker on education and skills-building, suggested that participants needed to think about what education and knowledge are and how family structures influence decisions in sending children to school. Organisations must build on the knowledge that already exists within communities by examining the grassroots educational and knowledge systems in place and seeing how these link to what new methods are coming in. Most importantly, knowledge and education building initiatives must share ideas in how systems can work together.

Constraints, challenges and strategies

What is the difference between knowledge and education? What is the impact of personality?
Education is defined as formal studies up to degree level, and general education. Knowledge is defined as informal and experience-based in specific fields, such as health. Both knowledge and education influence personality and how people are perceived based on characteristics of trust, respect, the extent to which someone is vocal, maturity, age, honesty and bravery. Knowledge and education impact on women's ability to participate in households and their leadership capability, through building on their skills of communication and empowering them to act. Older women are thought to have more knowledge, while younger women are thought to have more mobility. Knowledge and education perceptions influence female leadership roles. In urban areas, leadership is defined by education, while in rural areas knowledge is more apparent as an influence of one's leadership capability. Skills training attempts to raise the quality of skills for economic gain, through practical skills (e.g. poultry raising/quilting/ embroidery) which increase money for survival.

How is participation in skills-building initiatives impacting on women's involvement in community decision-making?
Training, particularly relating to skills building, develops women's confidence. Donors need to be aware that their goals are often too big, and their steps too short. Donors need to consider what happens after the training is complete, and what outlets exist for these new skills. Empowering women must mean giving them choices and them knowing what these choices are, for example, how women can be functional outside a village environment. Within this context of continual learning, mistakes are okay, provided donors learn from them. The challenge for donors is to carry out good needs assessment surveys, to see the problems and analyse them.

The main constraints then in terms of using education and skills building as a tool to encourage women's participation in decision-making are the following:

- Determining what is relevant or important, and what type of change are we looking for;
- Acknowledging that each situation is different in both urban and rural contexts, but the commonality many want is economic improvement; and
- Considering whether education and skills building raises women's status and decision-making in the household and community.

In developing *strategies* and opportunities actors need to consider what progress is. Some people are happy with their work and others not, so how do targets relate to development actors' own personal and organisational goals. While creating an appropriate environment for women to participate is important, what does participation mean to those women? Essentially, men and women should know and be able to experience their rights and responsibilities as Afghans according to what is laid down in the constitution.

In order to better target participation, it is critical to understand what type of knowledge is needed and this can be improved. Most participants agreed that skills training and education was vital to promoting women's status, but were unclear as to how this would directly impact on their status. There needs to be a balance between big goals and a willingness to take small steps in order to achieve this. The NSP and CDCs are a small step towards change, but it must be remembered these are part of a slow gradual process.

How can the links between increased knowledge at the local level and organisational or governmental strategic objectives be strengthened?

Development actors need to acknowledge that they can't force participation, however, their role should be to ensure that women know their rights and can exercise those rights through the efficient functioning of institutions and mechanisms meant to uphold rights and responsibilities. One opportunity to facilitate this is by creating safe environments for women to meet which are accepted by men.

Gender relations can be developed through good examples set by the principles and rules of organisations. However, these must be supported by legislation and laws of the government, for example as set out in the constitution. Both men and women need to be more aware of these laws. Awareness-raising is therefore vital, through mediums such as radio and television.

6.   Working Group: Macro-Micro Linkages

This working group set out to identify how micro-level gender issues can be better reflected in macro-level policies, processes and programme design (e.g. elections, NSP, the National Urban Programme, NEEP Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper). They attempted to answer questions concerning how the research findings helped with understanding why women's interests and participation are excluded from macro policy, programming and processes. The group also aimed to identify what aspects of policy processes and programme design constrain women's participation and/or the effective representation of their interests and mechanisms and processes to address gender issues. Keynote speaker Meryem Alsan (UNIFEM) highlighted that women's participation is a civic–political right, with duty bearers and claim holders. This right needs to be upheld, respected and protected as stated in the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights (to which Afghanistan has signed up) and as written into the constitution. However, development actors need to ask how much the state can do when essentially what is needed is a process in society that brings about behavioural educational change. She questioned how donors could measure gender role change, particularly in relation to other societies. It is the answers to these questions that will determine future understanding of gender roles in participation, and present challenges to the status quo. Macro-micro policy linkages are two-directional. Measures at the micro level must be allowed to infiltrate up and macro-level policies must be communicated down. It is the responsibility of development organisations (as intermediaries) to understand the micro and macro levels to be able to analyse and link them. This role involves asking questions that trigger discussions about who participation is for.

Constraints, challenges and strategies
Participants identified five sets of constraints that impact on women's participation in relation to macro-micro linkages.

Unclear/insufficient linkages between different levels in programmes and processes
There was some discussion and disagreement among participants as to whether there is a lack of linkages, or more a problem of different actors attempting to use existing linkages for their own purposes, rather than being united in a common goal. Centralisation of the government tends to leave rural institutions isolated, as community-level structures are not linked upwards to government bodies and other traditional structures. As a result, interests and concerns are often dissipated among a variety of forums, instead of being a united voice. This is not helped by the weak formal power given to the Ministry of Women's Affairs, which has no executive power.

Weak policy processes
It was apparent from discussions that there was no coherent single gender policy at the macro or micro level to engage in. This was also hindered by a lack of understanding of micro-level policy and programmes at the macro level and vice versa, due to poor sharing of information. This allows for disparity between policy and practice and double standards. Generally, decision-making is non-participatory and centralised so that marginalised groups are not involved. This is exacerbated by women's lack of access to the public sphere and a lack of broader networking among the gender community.

Development actors' *strategies* need to take advantage of political or structural change openings (such as upcoming Parliamentary elections) and ensure that gender approaches are mainstreamed. Strategies could also include hiring more women, as well as basic broad civic education.

Cultural issues
Traditional values are strong in Afghanistan and there is fear of public opinion. *Mullahs* and *maliks* dominate decision-making based on their own set of values. People within the legal system believe strongly in the traditional system and it is their understanding which needs to be targeted by policy.

Participants suggested *strategies* such as better legislation and reform of family law and courts, including the training of judges, would ensure that discrimination and rights abuses can be challenged within the justice system. There is also a need to educate *mullahs*, *arbabs*, *maliks* and teachers so they can think beyond the traditional system. Additionally, it is important to raise awareness of these issues through the media and in schools, including through the curriculum.

Goals, processes and attitudes of the international community
Participants stated that influences from outside Afghanistan could also be a constraint to gender participation, as well as contributing to the unhelpful politicisation of gender issues. Often the international community is reluctant to engage in gender issues because of fear of backlash; indeed, one participant estimated that under 10 percent of donor money prioritises women. Donors also work on short time scales on an annual basis which make projects unsustainable and short-sighted.

Donors' *strategies* must recognise diversity and explore the use of codes of conduct as standards by which to monitor that their work does no harm. There was some debate among participants as to whether there is sufficient donor coordination—some felt that there was, but that it was unfocused and without specific goals. Moreover contractors and private sector operators often work with little regard to gender awareness, and with very little transparency or accountability, either to government or communities. The Afghan government has a responsibility to make these groups accountable. These organisations need to be subject to the same rules and codes of conduct as NGOs. In terms of focus, donors must help strengthen the office of women's international affairs and human rights in the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development and relationships between the Ministry of Women's Affairs and the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission to ensure there are mechanisms where people, including women, can address their grievances.

Limited gender awareness and commitment
Gender awareness and participation is constrained by the fact that it is not supported by key decision makers; the process lacks government commitment and tends to be donor-driven. Gender participation needs more support from parliament and institutions, particularly from provinces, districts and village elected bodies.

Strategies for countering this lack of awareness include more training for high levels (such as the electoral commission and civil servants), use of media and gender training of media, gender auditing and budgeting and better monitoring for compliance with regulations.

7.   Moving Forward – Addressing Information and Analysis Gaps

Development actors need to dedicate time and resources to doing gender analysis and a gender audit. It is likely that an in-depth analysis would reveal gaps in capacity building and in the lack of long-term sustainability of programmes. A gender audit has already begun to take shape, but this process needs more support. There needs to be a compilation of donor money and an assessment of mechanisms of accountability of international actors (perhaps based on international experience).

Other major areas around which participants felt more information or clarification was required included:

- *Information gaps*. Questions that need to be explored include: what is the percentage of women in senior positions in development agencies? How prevalent is gender violence and what are its effects? What motivates people to change, and is there a benchmark to measure social change? Where do the Kuchis fit into gender programming and what can we learn from studying them?
- *Defining the role of the government.* Participants wanted to have a better understanding of what gender means to the government, and how government officials feel about their ability to represent people.
- *Legislation and the justice system*. What legislation currently includes provisions for women's participation, and what is happening "on the ground"? How is law implemented at the community level (informal justice)? What is working for the justice system?
- *Best practices*. Several working groups discussed the need to have strong examples of projects that have worked to increased women's participation (with an understanding of why they worked), and to make a collection of best (and worst) practices available to development practitioners.
- *Attitudes*. Knowing more about different men's and women's opinions and attitudes is important to understand contextual differences. Included in this is finding out what women (especially rural women) want to change in their lives. Moreover, because women's mobility is key to participation, it is crucial to understand the perceptions versus the realities of what dangers women face, and how these affect their mobility.
- *Media assessment*. What have been the effects of media and different outreach materials on increasing women's participation? How can media be effectively used in development programming in the future?

Finally, participants emphasised the importance of making the results of research and information gathering on these issues available to all and translated into Afghan languages.