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**MOVING TO THE MAINSTREAM:
Integrating Gender in
Afghanistan's National Policy**



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Table of Contents

Acronyms	4
Glossary.....	5
Executive Summary	6
Introduction	9
Methodology	11
PART I: Context: Approaches, Attitudes, Understandings of Gender	13
1. Background.....	13
1.1 Background: gender mainstreaming	13
1.2 Background: national machineries and MOWA	14
1.3 Background: political will	15
2. National policy on gender	18
3. Perceptions of gender in ministries	22
3.1 Gender/gender mainstreaming: terminology/concept	22
3.2 Justifications for a gender focus: welfare and efficiency.....	27
PART II. Combating Gender Inequalities: Facilitating and Hindering Factors.....	29
4. Overview of ministerial mechanisms.....	29
4.1 Gender units.....	30
4.2 Gender working groups/task forces.....	36
4.3 Women's <i>shuras</i>	37
4.4 Gender focal points	39
4.5 Technical advisors	40
5. Further institutional considerations.....	42
5.1 PRR.....	42
5.2 Positive discrimination/affirmative action?	43
5.3 Overlapping institutions: competing rules of the game	46
6. Nature of policy-making in ministries	48
6.1 International influence in policy-making and issues of coordination.....	48
6.2 Top-down structural frameworks	49
6.3 Gender mainstreaming: issues of funding	50
7. Increasing gender awareness: an emphasis on workshops.....	51
7.1 Gender workshops: empty rhetoric?	51
7.2 Workshops: quick-fix solutions?	52
PART III. Conclusions and Recommendations.....	54
8. Conclusions.....	54
9. Policy recommendations	55
References	57
Recent AREU Publications	59

Acronyms

ANDS	Afghanistan National Development Strategy
CCCG	Cross-Cutting Consultative Group
CDCs	Community Development Committees
FDM	First Deputy Minister
FP	Facilitating Partner
I-ANDS	Interim Afghanistan National Development Strategy
IFI	international financial institutions
NAPWA	National Action Plan for the Women of Afghanistan
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
MOIA	Ministry of Interior Affairs
MOPH	Ministry of Public Health
MOWA	Ministry of Women's Affairs
MRRD	Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development
NABDP	National Area Based Development Programme
NSP	National Solidarity Programme
PRR	Priority Reform and Restructuring
PRSP	Poverty Strategy Reduction Paper
TOR	terms of reference
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
WID	Women in Development

Glossary¹

Sex: Sex refers to the biological characteristics which define humans as female or male.

Gender: Gender refers to the array of socially constructed roles and relationships, personality traits, attitudes, behaviours, values, relative power and influence that society ascribes to the two sexes on a differential basis. Whereas biological sex is determined by genetic and anatomical characteristics, gender is an acquired identity that is learned, changes over time, and varies widely within and across cultures. Gender is relational and refers not simply to women or men but to the relationship between them.

Gender mainstreaming: Gender mainstreaming is a strategy for making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and social spheres, such that inequality between men and women is not perpetuated. It is the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in any area and at all levels.

According to the Government of Afghanistan's Gender Mainstreaming Policy, gender mainstreaming also requires the actual participation and leadership of women.²

Glossary of foreign terms

<i>jensiyat</i>	Dari word for sex, but used interchangeably with gender
<i>shura</i>	community decision-making group
<i>tashkeel</i>	administrative structure of a ministry

¹ Source for definitions: UN INSTRAW, <http://www.un-instraw.org/en/index.php?option=content&task=view&id=37&Itemid=76> , accessed 21 October 2007.

² Government of Afghanistan (GoA), Ministry of Women's Affairs (MOWA), 2007, Gender Mainstreaming Policy, In *National Action Plan for the Women of Afghanistan*, Annex A, 103. Kabul: MOWA.

Executive Summary

This paper contends that gender mainstreaming as the government's principal strategy for promoting gender equity in Afghanistan is not being implemented substantively. In spite of considerable emphasis in the Interim Afghanistan National Development Strategy (I-ANDS) and National Action Plan for the Women of Afghanistan (NAPWA) on gender as a cross-cutting issue, structural and financial factors, along with limited human resources and political will, currently limit the mechanisms existing in ministries to the extent that they cannot function effectively. Mechanisms in ministries often include gender units, working groups, women's *shuras* and focal points. Further, international assistance for mainstreaming initiatives often runs parallel to national needs and expectations.³ There are however ways in which the implementation of gender mainstreaming might be encouraged. These have been found through a comprehensive analysis of gender mechanisms in three case study ministries (Rural Rehabilitation and Development, Public Health and Interior Affairs).

Following an introduction to the theoretical and historical background of gender mainstreaming and national machineries, and a brief assessment of political will for promoting gender issues within the Afghan government, this paper is divided into seven sections:

National policy on gender mainstreaming

National policy on gender mainstreaming is concentrated into two principal documents –the I-ANDS and the NAPWA. The fact that provisions for gender equity are made in the I-ANDS, and indeed that the NAPWA exists, are no small achievements for the gender agenda. However, benchmarks given in these documents are vague, highly ambitious, and as such largely unachievable.

Gender/gender mainstreaming: terminology/concept

There are different understandings of gender in the Afghan context, including among ministry staff. Related to the difficulty translating both the terminology and concept of gender, respondents had mixed understandings of its meaning. These understandings contribute to the problems experienced in implementing gender mainstreaming. Furthermore, most justifications for a focus on gender given by respondents – both international and national – involved efficiency arguments, with the implication that attention to gender equity was beneficial primarily for its positive repercussions on the development of the country as a whole.

Gender mechanisms: facilitating and hindering factors

Various mechanisms for the promotion of gender mainstreaming currently exist in ministries. These include gender units, working groups, women's *shuras*, focal points and international technical assistants. The fact that these exist at all is a facilitating factor for gender mainstreaming. However, the majority of mechanisms are struggling with the dual mandate of mainstreaming, which involves both a focus on improving gender awareness inside ministries, and applying gender analyses to ministerial policies, programmes and budgets. Most mechanisms are short-staffed and under-funded. Issues of capacity, relationships between gender mechanisms, political will of senior staff and the varying agendas of international agencies also affect the functioning of these mechanisms. One of many ways to encourage the increasing effectiveness of these mechanisms could involve lobbying those designing ministerial *tashkeels* to re-position them in locations with maximum vertical and horizontal (operational) influence over ministry operations.

³ D. Kandiyoti, 2007, "Political Fiction meets gender myth: post-conflict reconstruction, 'democratization' and women's rights," in A. Cornwall, E. Harrison and A. Whitehead (ed.), *Feminisms in Development: Contradictions, Contestations and Challenges*. London and New York: Zed Books.

Further institutional considerations

Three further institutional factors affecting the implementation of gender mainstreaming include the recently introduced Priority Reform and Restructuring system, measures of positive discrimination for women employees, and the competing rules of the game of different aspects of institutional culture existing within ministries. These have significant effects on the way in which gender issues are being raised in ministries.

Nature of policy-making in ministries

The way in which and by whom policy is made is highly significant to the gender mainstreaming agenda. The influence of the international community on policy-making processes in ministries is highly significant to the ways in which those processes play out. Further, a top-down administrative system dictates that lower-level staff have very little influence in the policy-making process. While this is not necessarily a problem in itself, it highlights the importance of attaining the support and indeed political will of senior staff in the promotion of mainstreaming activities. Finally, issues of funding within policy-making processes determine to a great extent what a gender mechanism can and cannot do, and there is no clear process outlined in the three ministries studied for the allocation of funds for gender mainstreaming.

Increasing gender awareness: emphasis on workshops

A means of training staff in gender awareness popular with national and international facilitators alike is that of workshops. Gender workshops are however described by participants and trainers in abstract, vacuous terms and are not linked to the ways in which gender sensitivity might be implemented practically. They are also brief, unsustainable and largely used as a means to demonstrate superficial achievement (with a "checklist" approach). A more substantial means of training staff in gender is needed.

Conclusion and recommendations

The following suggestions are made as to how gender mainstreaming might be more effectively implemented in ministries:

Mechanisms

- **Gender units:** gender units should be established at the highest vertical position possible and in a horizontal position conducive to the influencing of ministry-wide policy. Official ministerial organigrams should be used as mapping tools in order that units may be positioned in the most strategic locations possible. Units should be established according to the varying structures of individual ministries.
- **Working groups:** inter-departmental working groups are useful and their formation under the support of a ministry gender unit should be encouraged. They could be more effective, however, if a department other than the ministerial gender unit (for example a ministry-wide policy-making department) chair their meetings. They also need to be made directly accountable to a senior ministry official.
- **Women's *shuras*:** Women's shuras should be encouraged as they are national entities and could prove an important connection between the push for gender equality through mainstreaming and the issues of marginalized women on the ground.
- **Mandate clarification:** The separate mandates of gender units and women's *shuras* need to be distinguished and clarified to avoid overlap of tasks. *Shuras* should function as women's unions, and should have a solely internal focus. Gender units should be concerned with gender mainstreaming both inside the

ministry and through ministerial policies, programmes and budgets, but should not deal with the problems of female staff. While they may well become involved in the oversight of affirmative action policy implemented in the ministries at a later stage, which by nature deals with the issues of female staff, it is important that their policy-oriented role is first solidified with a clear and single-focused mandate. The role of focal points should also be clarified if they are to be considered an effective tool for gender mainstreaming. Greater coordination between the focal points of different agencies needs to be implemented.

- **Funding:** processes for the allocation and disbursement of funds for gender activities should be simplified and clarified. Gender units are currently waiting too long for their work to be budgeted, which contributes to the perception that they are not functioning.
- **Positive discrimination/affirmative action:** Recommendations for positive discrimination measures need to be combined with a commitment to increasing the quantity and quality of training for women and amending institutional facilities to accommodate female staff. A more holistic, “affirmative action” approach to human resource management should be taken, involving efforts to make all systems, policies, programmes and services in ministries gender-sensitive.⁴ Gender mainstreaming or “doing gender” should no longer be equated and limited to the increasing of quantities of women in ministries.
- **Gender workshops:** these are largely redundant, as gender as an abstract concept cannot be easily applied to the work and attitudes of ministry staff. Instead gender issues should be integrated into other training courses for ministry staff (such as in management, leadership, team-building) with practical suggestions on how to approach these subjects in a gender-sensitive manner.

Policy

- **I-ANDS draft Gender Equity Cross-Cutting Strategy benchmarks:** current vague “benchmarks” on gender in the draft Gender Equity Cross-Cutting Strategy need to be replaced with concrete targets which ministries can work towards. If they cannot be replaced, then these benchmarks need to be clearly operationalized in order to make their prescriptions implementable.
- **NAPWA review:** When the NAPWA is reviewed after one year, its targets and benchmarks need to be more realistic, and need to take into account the limiting aspects of the Afghan context.
- **Realistic expectations:** If the international community is going to take an integrational and incremental approach to gender mainstreaming in Afghanistan, they cannot expect transformative results (such as those prescribed in the NAPWA) in a short time. Expectations need to be adjusted according to contextual limitations.

⁴ With thanks to an international respondent for commenting on this subject.

Introduction

Gender mainstreaming has been identified by the Government of Afghanistan (GoA) in the Interim Afghanistan National Development Strategy (I-ANDS) as the main strategy for achieving gender equality in Afghanistan.⁵ The forthcoming 10-year National Action Plan for the Women of Afghanistan (NAPWA) has been designated in the I-ANDS as the principal tool through which to support gender mainstreaming and is due to be “fully” implemented by the end of 2010 (the GoA's five-year strategic benchmark). Various gender units, gender focal points, working groups and other machineries exist in ministries but there is little understanding of their differing roles and responsibilities, let alone of how “effective” they are.

Gender itself is a relatively new concept in Afghanistan and while there have been numerous attempts at finding a suitable Dari/Pashtu translation, these have been largely unsuccessful. Any assessment of gender mainstreaming in Afghanistan must therefore first consider what “gender” as a word and as a concept signifies within the socio-political context. It must also take into account the different layers of the mainstreaming process – one executed by the government, and another simultaneously proposed by an international donor superstructure; that being implemented within ministries themselves, and that being promoted - largely by donors - through ministerial programmes (such as the National Solidarity Programme). At present there is limited national ownership of the mainstreaming agenda or its documentation, which is largely driven by donor specifications. While this report deals with bureaucratic factors affecting the implementation of gender mainstreaming inside ministries, the larger picture of international policy-making (and ministries' positions within that picture) is also considered.

This report assesses the current status of gender mainstreaming in three case study ministries (the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development, MRRD; Ministry of Public Health, MOPH; and Ministry of Interior Affairs, MOIA). Part I consists of Sections 1-3, and gives a general background to the issues discussed in the paper. Section 1 outlines the background of gender mainstreaming and the formation of national machineries for women at the state level. Section 2 then details national policy on gender, looking at the Government's prescription for the implementation of gender mainstreaming. In Section 3, conceptualisations of gender and gender mainstreaming in ministries in Afghanistan are explored. Part I as a whole argues that international influence over the incorporation of gender mainstreaming in policy is significant and that gender itself is an unfamiliar term to many Afghans.⁶ The expectations of the I-ANDS and NAPWA regarding the implementation of gender mainstreaming are highly ambitious, if not unrealistic.⁷ They imply a tacit assumption that gender mainstreaming will take place (and take hold) effectively in spite of few resources in a post-conflict, economically unstable, and unconsolidated state.⁸ Moreover, the effect of the inordinately high level of international assistance in Afghanistan on the sustainability of the mainstreaming agenda is rarely considered.

⁵ GoA, 2006, Interim Afghanistan National Development Strategy (I-ANDS), 1:91.

⁶ This is not surprising given that gender is such a new term in Afghanistan, that it has not been translated into Dari or Pashtu, and that even in countries in which gender has long been used to describe power relations between sexes, it is not understood outside certain (usually academic) discourses.

⁷ This however is also the case for other sectors within the I-ANDS – most of the requirements and expectations within the document are somewhat ambitious. Further, it should not be assumed that gender mainstreaming is the only means put forward in the I-ANDS and NAPWA for the achievement of gender equity. Mainstreaming is one of a variety of methods suggested.

⁸ Having said this, an example of an ideal model of gender mainstreaming in any country is not at present apparent, regardless of contextual constraints.

Part II comprises Sections 4-7, and here current mechanisms for promoting gender mainstreaming in the ministries, along with other factors facilitating and hindering the implementation of mainstreaming, are explored in detail. Section 4 maps the different gender mechanisms existing in the case study ministries at present and analyses their contribution to the gender mainstreaming agenda. Section 5 looks at other institutional factors hindering and facilitating this contribution. In Section 6, the ways in which ministerial policies are made, and the effect that this has on mainstreaming initiatives, is considered. Lastly, Section 7 critiques the emphasis placed on workshops as the principal means of training staff in gender. Part II concludes that gender mainstreaming is not occurring in any substantive way in the ministries studied, and that this is largely due to existing gender mechanisms being hindered structurally and financially, and because international agendas for mainstreaming run parallel to actual achievements in ministries.⁹

Part III (Section 8) draws conclusions from the study as a whole, and gives concrete policy recommendations as to how gender mainstreaming could be more successfully accommodated within the proposed ANDS/NAPWA framework.

⁹ Kandiyoti, *ibid.*

Methodology

Methodological decisions taken

The four ministries were selected according to the range of sectors they represent. MRRD, MOIA, and MOPH are very different in institutional structure and carry differing stereotypes concerning their perceived connection to gender issues. MOWA plays a central role in facilitating ministerial gender mainstreaming and thus was an obvious addition to the other three ministries.

Members of ministry staff were selected according to their gender and position, in order to speak to as wide a range of respondents as possible. However, in all of the four ministries, lists of (usually high or mid-ranking) respondents were selected for the research team by senior ministry staff, limiting the range of staff levels included in the data set. Permission from the deputy minister or minister of each ministry was acquired before any interviews were undertaken.

All interviews were conducted individually, and consent forms were presented in Dari and English explaining the purpose of the study and guaranteeing anonymity. Each respondent was asked if they would prefer to be referred to by their job description, or more generally by the ministry in which they work.

A choice of Dari, Pashtu or English as an interviewing language was given to all interviewees.

Primary and secondary data were analysed using a broad framework of policy transfer,¹⁰ and drawing on the models of Kingdon¹¹ and Dolowitz and Marsh.¹² Atlas-Ti software was used to analyse primary data and a comprehensive coding system designed to sort and categorise statements within interviews. This allowed the researcher to draw parallels between the responses of different groups of respondents (men/women/national/international, etc.). Codes were established during the process of analysis itself and not prior to this, to allow for themes to be drawn out of the data and not assumed in advance by the researcher.

The following is an outline of the sampling design for this study:

Semi-structured interviews

	"Gender " staff	Staff not working on gender issues	Ministers/ Deputy Ministers	International advisors/ stakeholders	Key informants	Total women	Total men	Total interviews
MRRD	2	10	Not available	1	3	8	5	13
MOPH	2	7	1	1	2	4	6	10
MOIA	1	8	1	2	2	4	7	11
MOWA	2	9	1	7	5	15	3	18
Totals	7	34	3	11	12	31	21	52

NB: Categories in the first five columns overlap, and hence total more than 52. For example, deputy ministers are also considered "staff not working on gender issues".

¹⁰ Policy transfer is, according to Dolowitz and Marsh, "the process by which knowledge of ideas, institutions, policies and programmes in one time and/or place is fed into the policy-making arena in the development of policies and programmes in another time and/or place," (D.P. Dolowitz, and D. Marsh, 1998, "Policy Transfer: a framework for comparative analysis," in M. Minogue, C. Polidano, and D. Hulme (ed.), *Beyond the New Public Management: Ideas and Practices in Governance*, Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.

¹¹ Kingdon, 1984, as referenced in J. Ogden, G. Walt and L. Lush, 2003, "The politics of branding in policy transfer: The case of DOTS for tuberculosis control," in *Social Science and Medicine*, 57:179-188.

¹² Dolowitz and Marsh, *Policy Transfer*, 38.

Further, Five sets of field notes from gender meetings and informal conversations (where verbatim notes were not taken) were added to the data set for analysis.

Key

1. "Gender" staff: Members of ministry staff whose terms of reference (TOR)/job description is largely concerned with gender-based activities, or who hold an informal position relating to these activities in addition to their formal role. Examples include staff in a gender unit or section, women's representatives or focal points within a ministry.
2. "Staff not working on gender issues": Members of ministry staff whose TOR/job description does not directly refer to gender-based activities, and who do not hold informal positions relating to these activities. Examples include staff in administrative, planning or financial departments within a ministry.
3. Ministers/Deputy Ministers: Self-explanatory.
4. International advisors/stakeholders: Members of the international community whose TOR/job description involved the encouragement of gender-based activities within meetings, those who fund these activities, or those who are involved in the implementation of processes in which gender sensitivity or awareness is a written requirement. Examples include international gender consultants, donors, and those implementing the processes of the ANDS.
5. Key informants: Individuals from the above four categories (but largely categories 1 and 4) whose knowledge of the gender mechanisms in any ministry is substantial and can be considered reliable (based on extensive experience in working with these mechanisms).

Factors affecting the data

It is acknowledged that the presence of the (foreign) researcher may have affected answers given. This may have limited responses made, due to a respondent's uncertainty concerning the study or a suspicion of international activities in Afghanistan in general. More frequently however it appeared that the respondents were comfortable speaking to an outsider. Further, at times it led to respondents explaining statements in detail on the assumption that the researcher was unfamiliar with the socio-political context of Afghanistan.

The quality of translation was extremely high. It is, however, acknowledged that in any interpretation a small part of the original meaning will be lost. This limitation was controlled for by checking all interview transcripts with the research assistants who had assisted with translation during the interviews themselves.

It should be acknowledged by the reader that this study draws upon qualitative research techniques which focus on different perceptions of truth. These perceptions and stories vary according to respondents, and this study attempts to extract the meaning behind these perceptions. As such, there is less of a focus on "fact" than the testimonies of respondents.

PART I. Context: Approaches, Attitudes and Understandings of Gender

1. Background

1.1 Background: gender mainstreaming

Gender mainstreaming was first conceptualized as a way to bring about gender equity in the 1980s, when it became apparent that national women's machineries and other mechanisms set up previously to promote women in development (WID) had not performed according to the expectations of an international women's movement.¹³ Often marginalized and under-funded, these separate mechanisms had simply been unable to penetrate mainstream development policy.¹⁴ As such, a new mechanism was needed, and one which would facilitate the institutionalization of a gender agenda within all sectors of public policy-making. Mainstreaming was introduced as a way in which to do this. As a tool to make routine the consideration of policy according to gender sensitive standards, it is an approach which allows for the assessment of differential impacts of policies, programmes and budgets on the lives of men and women. It also highlights the importance of women's participation at the decision-making level.¹⁵

In part due to world conferences on women following the UN Decade for Women (1976-1985), mainstreaming has fast become global best practice in terms of suggested mechanisms to improve the gender sensitivity of macro-level policy-making.¹⁶ This is particularly the case in developing countries, where provisions of financial aid (for example in Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper processes) have often been conditional upon ostensibly gender-equitable (among other) benchmarks.¹⁷ Literature on the progress of gender mainstreaming has detailed the ways in which it has been implemented in various other country contexts,¹⁸ but to date an analysis of the progress of the mainstreaming agenda in Afghanistan has not been documented. This is primarily a result of the short period of time since it was introduced to the country through policy processes and post-Taliban state-building efforts from 2001 onwards. The fact that the gender mainstreaming agenda is so new to Afghanistan among other factors, singles the country out as a rather unique case study. Consequently, comparisons to gender mainstreaming efforts in other countries should be made with caution.

The use of gender mainstreaming as a means to generate change in policy has not been uncontested. The integrationalist, bureaucratic and de-politicised application of mainstreaming in reality is far removed from the transformative feminist theory from which it is derived.¹⁹ This is not to say that an integrational (often called "technical") method cannot produce results. Indeed, an approach which is moulded into existing bureaucratic frameworks can prove a strategic means of institutionalizing the process of

¹³ This was highlighted at the Nairobi Women's Conference in 1985, as documented in S. Baden and A. Goetz, 1997, "Who needs [sex] when you can have [gender]? Conflicting discourses of gender at Beijing," *Feminist Review*, 56:4-5.

¹⁴ A. Goetz, 1998, "Mainstreaming Gender Equity to National Development Planning", *Missionaries and Mandarins*, 42.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, 62; and GoA, Gender Mainstreaming Policy, in NAPWA, Annex A, 103.

¹⁶ J. True and M. Mintrom, 2001, "Transnational Networks and Policy Diffusion: The Case of Gender Mainstreaming," *International Studies Quarterly*, 45(1):27-57.

¹⁷ Gender is a cross-cutting issue in PRSP processes and one of the requirements within this process is that poverty reduction be seen through a gender lens. World Bank PRSP Sourcebook, as reported at http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/TOPICS/EXTPOVERTY/EXTPRS/0,,contentMDK:20177449-pag ePK:148956-piPK:216618-theSitePK:384201_00.html (accessed 23 October 2007).

¹⁸ Goetz, Mainstreaming Gender Equity.

¹⁹ Staudt, Bringing Politics Back In, 177-190.

mainstreaming in a relatively short time, as it does not require the creation of new, specialized institutions (Box 1).²⁰

According to Kathleen Staudt, “technical approaches can protect and sustain women’s gains when prevailing political winds would undermine them”.²¹ Such a statement is particularly relevant in Afghanistan where various “political winds” are likely to resist the gender equality agenda. It is also pertinent in a context where the community of international donors is unwilling to promote a transformative or controversial stance on gender. As the World Bank states in its Interim Strategy Note for Afghanistan (2007-2008), reflecting its position more generally in supporting gender issues in developing countries:

The Bank’s strategy is to lend support to the government’s policy of gender mainstreaming, continuing to pursue the least confrontational lines and build opportunities into the Bank’s portfolio where tangible gains can be made. This will involve strengthening women’s involvement in the sectors where they already have an acceptable presence including health, education and the civil service...²²

This quotation demonstrates the opposite of a transformative approach, with its emphasis on assisting with gender mainstreaming only where its presence might not disrupt existing institutional structures. As the path of least resistance, and as such the easiest way to achieve “tangible gains” without challenging socio-political norms, this

BOX 1: Mainstreaming: integrational or transformative?

In Kathleen Staudt’s analysis there is a distinction between integrational and transformative gender mainstreaming. The following are the key characteristics of each, according to Staudt:

Integrational/technical

- “Builds gender issues within existing development paradigms”
- Northern dialogue over development (i.e. imposed by international policy-makers)
- “Less effective” - easier to implement but results incremental and take longer to become apparent.

Transformative/agenda-setting

- “Uses gender perspectives to transform the existing development agenda”
- Development dialogue aimed at North-South partnership
- Ambitious - difficult to implement but generates notable change in a shorter time once institutions established.

Source: Staudt, K. (1998). “Bringing politics back in: Institutional Contexts for Maminstreaming” in *Policy, Politics & Gender: Women Gaining Ground*. West Hartford, Conn.: Kumarian Press, pp177-190.

²⁰ While the distinction between integrational and transformative mainstreaming is useful in this analysis, it must also be noted that there are not solid examples of global institutions (such as the IFIs or the UN) who have pushed a transformative agenda for gender mainstreaming in their policy documents. As such, Staudt’s category of “transformative mainstreaming” is more of an ideal set against the norm of integrational approaches (Kandiyoti, pers. comm).

²¹ Ibid, 179.

²² World Bank, 2006, Interim Strategy Note for Islamic Republic of Afghanistan for the period FY07 - FY08, 38, Washington, D.C.: World Bank (emphasis added).

may well be a strategic means to push (albeit gently) for gender-sensitive change. Furthermore, for the World Bank – whose mandate is technical and economic, as opposed to political²³ – this distance from the transformative and highly politicized gender mainstreaming agenda as presented in feminist literature is unsurprising and perhaps entirely appropriate. However, the language used here is decidedly cautious, to the point at which one could question the motives behind the Bank's support of gender mainstreaming in the first place.

1.2 Background: national machineries and MOWA

With the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, and the subsequent Beijing Platform for Action (BPFA) came a strengthened focus on mainstreaming through national machineries for women. The BPFA outlined three strategic objectives in this regard – to create or strengthen national machineries and other governmental bodies, to integrate gender perspectives in legislation, public policies, programmes and projects, and to generate and disseminate gender-disaggregated data and information for planning and evaluation.²⁴ The impact of the World Conferences on Women and of the BPFA in particular has been widespread, with a majority of member states introducing national machineries in response to these. In effect, the World Conferences have stimulated international recognition for the necessity of such mechanisms.²⁵

A requirement of the Bonn Process, in which the project of post-Taliban state-building in Afghanistan was initially formed, was that a Ministry for Women's Affairs (MOWA) be established as part of the executive body in the country's Interim Administration. As such, the role of the international community and the global women's movement in promoting the representation of women at the level of national policy-making cannot be discounted. However, precursors of MOWA had existed in a variety of different forms in Afghanistan – such as the Women's Grand Organisation, the Women's General Council and the Women's Central Club²⁶ – since 1943. In its current state, MOWA forms the central component of Afghanistan's national machinery for women.

Discussions on the benefits and shortcomings of this kind of national machinery – an entire ministry devoted to women's affairs – have been widely debated,²⁷ but there is a general consensus that machineries at the highest level possible are potentially the most potent. One of the arguments in favour of a ministry-level body, instead of perhaps a committee at a lower level or an organisation entirely autonomous from government, is that its status is considerable and can be used to its advantage. As Shirin Rai writes, “[l]ocation at the highest level raises the profile of the machinery and arguably enhances its economic and political resources”.²⁸ In Afghanistan however the status of MOWA as a ministry has been significantly contested, most notably in Parliament where its continued existence has been debated on several occasions. Arguments for MOWA include the fact that it represents a commitment to women from the government, and recognition of the necessity of having “women's affairs” represented in the executive.

²³ IBRD Articles of Agreement, Article IV, Section 10, taken from http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/EXTABOUTUS/0,,contentMDK:20049603-pagePK:43912-piPK:36602_00.html#111, (accessed 23 October 2007). While the Bank is prohibited from becoming involved with a country's political affairs, it can be said that any decision made in choosing what and what not to finance makes a political statement in itself.

²⁴ Information taken from <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/platform/institu.htm> (UN 2007), (accessed 13 October 2007).

²⁵ True and Mintrom, *Transnational Networks and Policy Diffusion*.

²⁶ Information taken from http://www.mowa.gov.af/content/about_mowa/history_of_mowa_eng.html, (accessed 10 October 2007).

²⁷ Goetz, *Mainstreaming Gender Equity*.

²⁸ S. Rai, 2003, “Institutional methods for the advancement of women: mainstreaming gender, democratizing the state?,” *Mainstreaming gender, democratizing the state? Institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women*, 28, Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press.

Problems arise, however, when the efficacy of the ministry is brought into question. Its mandate is to function as a policy-making ministry, not an implementing one, and yet it is often judged according to standards of implementation and thus seen as ineffective.²⁹ Furthermore, due to its non-implementing status, very little of Afghanistan's Core Budget is allocated to its expenditures.³⁰ In fact, the policy-making-only mandate provides a means for the Government to justify sidelining MOWA in all matters financial and otherwise.³¹

Another problem is MOWA's heavy reliance on the international technical assistants working within the ministry. These technical assistants play a significant role in the functioning of all ministries (see Section 4), but the extent of their responsibilities in MOWA is comparably high. As mentioned above, MOWA is already at risk of being abolished – primarily as a result of its apparent lack of visible output. This being the case there is a trade-off for internationals working within MOWA of meeting governmental requirements (such as the ANDS deadlines, discussed in Section 4), keeping the ministry afloat in the short-term, or capacity-building staff for long-term development but risking the abolishment of the ministry. Inevitably the former option is preferable, as the existence of a national machinery for women in Afghanistan is highly necessary. This however leaves little in terms of space for the development of mid-level staff who will eventually be required to manage the functioning of the ministry.

This considered, MOWA's own potential capacity for promoting gender mainstreaming in the other ministries – one of its central mandates³² – is essentially limited. However, as discussed in this paper, the shortcomings of MOWA constitute only one of many factors currently hindering the mainstreaming agenda in Afghanistan, and one perhaps more fundamental issue is that of political will.

1.3 Background: political will

Political will from the legislative and executive bodies of government is needed to support national machineries and their agendas. This paper considers the bureaucratic framework of ministries, institutional issues and other facilitating and hindering factors to the implementation of gender mainstreaming, but the improvement of these will have little effect without political will from national government. For this reason, it is highly important that both the legislative and executive branches of government are lobbied and brought on board to support and indeed ensure the implementation of gender mainstreaming. To date, however, the political will within government bodies to do this has been limited. Furthermore, the necessity of support from members of the leadership within ministries themselves cannot be underestimated, their substantive political will also paramount to the promotion of gender mainstreaming.

As discussed above, the future of MOWA is often the subject of votes within the Wolesi Jirga (lower house of parliament), and has rested somewhat precariously on the outcome of these votes since parliament was inaugurated. Political will to support MOWA from the legislative side has been inconsistent and unreliable, with many MPs (male and female) unwilling to vote in favour of its continued existence. However, this is largely not out of individual MPs' lack of concern for the representation of women's issues. Indeed, many parliamentarians have expressed the opinion that MOWA is serving

²⁹ Female international respondent.

³⁰ As a useful comparison, in 1385 the Government allocated over \$137 million of the National Core Budget to the Ministry of Defence, and just \$3.2 million to MOWA. This is not necessarily reflective of how much was actually spent, but it demonstrates governmental priorities. *1385 National Budget*, Budget Department, Ministry of Finance.

³¹ Female international respondent. This is also discussed in a previous AREU publication on the representation of gender interests in parliament. A. Wordsworth, 2007, *A Matter of Interests: Gender and the Politics of Presence in Afghanistan's Wolesi Jirga*, 29-31, Kabul: AREU.

³² I-ANDS, 1:91.

to encase women within a single institution and limit their influence elsewhere, in other governmental institutions.³³ As such, there is a degree of support for women being mainstreamed into other fields of government. This demonstrates to some extent that there exists political will in parliament to promote gender mainstreaming of sorts, at least, if not a consistent support for MOWA.

Staudt argues that prospects for mainstreaming improve in democracies "where women exert their interests in critical mass numbers".³⁴ There is a large percentage of women in Afghanistan's Wolesi Jirga (27 percent), where women's gender interests are raised to some extent. However, women do not form a consistent collective interest group in parliament. Gender interests that are represented rarely progress into policy and are not as yet substantively built into policy platforms of any parliamentary groups that might exist.³⁵ There is also a weak connection between MPs and MOWA in general, which results in a lack of understanding on both sides of each other's role and potential to promote gender mainstreaming. Thus, while the political will of a number of parliamentarians to support gender issues and (by extension) gender mainstreaming exists, there are currently not the means to ensure that this translates into governmental policy or national ownership.

In the executive branch of government, political will to support gender mainstreaming remains minimal. There is only one female minister, the Minister for Women's Affairs – and whilst Karzai has made promises to bring more women onto the executive body (and thus adopt more of a "mainstreamed" approach to women in leadership) he has not done so to date.³⁶ This is significant given that the government's definition of gender mainstreaming requires the active participation of women in leadership.³⁷ Furthermore, the high turnover of Cabinet members results in relationships being built, and connections made, in order that certain agendas might be pushed, only to be remade when an executive member is replaced. This is highly detrimental to the furthering of a gender agenda which can require time and an openness to change before it can be integrated into national policy. Some would argue that the high turnover of Cabinet staff could prove to be a policy window in favour of gender mainstreaming if new individuals with gender-sensitive priorities are brought in.³⁸

However, given the current tendency for terms of office in the Cabinet to be notably short, the amount those individuals could actually achieve in terms of pushing a gender agenda remains minimal.

Finally, it is necessary to consider the political will of those in leadership positions (such as deputy ministers or heads of department) in ministries themselves. Senior-level support and ownership of gender mainstreaming initiatives was perceived by almost all respondents as paramount to its success. This is to some degree unsurprising considering the hierarchical nature of most ministries in Afghanistan. However, buy-in of leadership figures is considered difficult to attain. Without strong figures in authoritative positions to push the mainstreaming agenda, the chance of it being integrated into policy is slim. By extension, the support of an influential figure within a ministry will facilitate the

³³ Having said this, few MPs give alternatives to MOWA, and the general consensus (in as much as there is one) appears that for the time being, MOWA should continue to serve in its current role. Wordsworth, *A Matter of Interests*, 29-31.

³⁴ Staudt, *Bringing Politics Back In*, 178.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 30.

³⁷ GoA, *Gender Mainstreaming Policy*, in NAPWA, Annex A, 103.

³⁸ This argument is put forward in N. Zahariadis' work on policy transfer through Kingdon's (1984) Multiple Streams Framework. Zahariadis contends that administrative or legislative turnover can be highly significant in the way in which issues for policy are addressed. N. Zahariadis, 1999, "Alternative views of the role of rationality in the policy process," *Theories of the Policy Process*, Boulder CO: Westview Press.

incorporation of gender-sensitive policy. This is the case in MOIA, where the First Deputy Minister (FDM) is keen to be involved in gender awareness-raising and has been active in his encouragement of gender-related issues. Having said this, decisions on gender (and other fields) as taken by these figures are often dependent on funding and international policy, as transferred through advisors and policy documents. As such, the political will of the international community to support gender initiatives is as much if not more the force behind policy decisions taken. This can be seen in MOIA where the dynamics between the FDM and different international actors are continually shifting (see Section 4.1). An additional factor to add is that the turnover of ministry staff and in particular those in leadership positions, as in the executive, can be quite fast. This being the case a similar phenomenon occurs in that those who are keen to support a gender mainstreaming agenda are rarely in office long enough to promote it substantively.

Political will for the promotion of gender interests and gender mainstreaming exists in the legislative and to some degree in the executive branches of government, but it is not substantial, and it is not at present channelled into policy-making processes. In ministries there is some degree of political will to support the mainstreaming agenda, but it is dependent on certain individuals and also on the international agendas playing out within their ministries.

2. National policy on gender

Government's five-year strategic benchmark

"By Jaddi 1389 (end-2010): The National Action Plan for Women in Afghanistan will be fully implemented; and in line with Afghanistan's Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), female participation in all Afghan governance institutions, including elected and appointed bodies and civil service, will be strengthened." (I-ANDS, vol 1, p. 91)

Afghanistan's equivalent I-PRSP (Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper), the I-ANDS, forms the backbone of the country's development strategy. The completion of the full ANDS will enable Afghanistan to qualify as a Highly Indebted Poor Country according to the standards of International Financial Institutions (IFIs).³⁹ This in turn will make certain benefits available to Afghanistan in the future, such as debt relief and concessional loans.⁴⁰ One of the requirements of PRSPs is that the country structures policy in order to achieve as far as possible the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The third MDG concerns promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women.⁴¹ In order to meet this particular MDG, gender equity⁴² has been incorporated into the I-ANDS as a cross-cutting theme, along with counter narcotics, regional cooperation, anti-corruption and the environment (Figure 1).

³⁹ Throughout this paper, references to the I-ANDS refer directly to the Interim Strategy document that is currently under review. References to the ANDS refer to the entire ANDS (PRSP) process.

⁴⁰ I-ANDS, 1:19.

⁴¹ Information taken from <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/>, (accessed 23 October 2007). These goals are further reiterated in the Afghanistan Compact, agreed upon in London in January 2006.

⁴² It is notable that the third MDG refers to gender *equality*, and yet the cross-cutting issue for ANDS is on gender *equity* (see glossary for an explanation of the difference between these terms). Whether this is a purposeful distinction or not is not clear – but given that the Afghanistan Constitution dictates a focus on the *equality* of all Afghan citizens (Article 22, Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, 2004 [unofficial English translation]) it seems illogical to conclude that equity was chosen as the easier and less controversial of the two terms for the ANDS. This is however an area for potential future research.

The cross-cutting themes of the ANDS are intended to infiltrate all sectors, and promote coordination and accountability between these sectors.⁴³ This structure is conducive to gender mainstreaming, as noted in the I-ANDS document:

*By their very nature, these programmes cut across different ministerial and stakeholder mandates...Mainstreaming these themes is a "mandatory" and not a "voluntary" requirement. To this end, indicators have been developed for each of the cross-cutting issues...*⁴⁴

Figure 1: The ANDS Programmatic Framework

Pillar 1	Pillar 2	Pillar 3					
Security	Governance, Rule of Law & Human Rights	Economic and Social Development					
<i>Sector 1</i>	<i>Sector 2</i>	<i>Sector 3</i>	<i>Sector 4</i>	<i>Sector 5</i>	<i>Sector 6</i>	<i>Sector 7</i>	<i>Sector 8</i>
Security	Governance Rule of Law & Human Rights	Infra-structure & Natural Resources	Education	Health	Agriculture & Rural Development	Social Protection	Economic Governance & Private Sector Development
<i>Cross Cutting Theme 1: Gender Equity</i>							
<i>Cross Cutting Theme 2: Counter Narcotics</i>							
<i>Cross Cutting Theme 3: Regional Cooperation</i>							
<i>Cross Cutting Theme 4: Anti-Corruption</i>							
<i>Cross Cutting Theme 5: Environment</i>							

Mechanisms are in place to promote the mainstreaming of gender equity through the various sectors, such as a Cross-Cutting Consultative Group (CCCG) on gender which advises Consultative Groups on gender mainstreaming, the CG2 Working Group on Gender, which is designed to facilitate the implementation of high-level benchmarks on gender, and the CG7 Sub-Working Group on Vulnerable Women. All of these are headed by MOWA. Moreover, a gender equity cross-cutting strategy (due to be incorporated as a chapter of the ANDS, and related closely to NAPWA) is currently being drafted, and a set of gender mainstreaming guidelines for sectoral strategies exist which are aimed at encouraging the formulation of these strategies through a gender lens (Box 2). In spite of these measures, there is a tendency for cross-cutting issues to be sidelined and not be given the same emphasis as the sectors themselves. This was a concern of various respondents from international organisations, one of whom considered the attention to gender in the I-ANDS insubstantial:

[T]he I-ANDS document itself is gender blind. When we talk about gender they say it is a cross-cutting issue but this only means that it is not given as much weight as a whole sector... They had the idea that gender would ... affect all other areas, but they didn't know how they were going to operate this – they didn't know how MOWA would support the other ministries or who was going to

⁴³ I-ANDS, 1:90.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

make sure that gender was mainstreamed – there was no system in place.
(female representative of international agency)

Indeed, a principal problem with gender equity as a cross-cutting issue is that it becomes remarkably easy to exclude from sectoral budgets. It can be assumed that funding for cross-cutting agendas will come from “elsewhere”.

One possible contribution to the confusion surrounding the ways in which gender mainstreaming should be implemented is the fact that national policy documents – primarily within the ANDS processes, such as the draft Gender Equity Cross-Cutting Strategy – are notoriously vague. The “benchmarks” given within this document, for example, are difficult both to decipher and to implement. Indeed, the (over-)use of the term “benchmark” is unjustified, given that in essence very few solid benchmarks are given. A benchmark is commonly defined as a “standard by which something can be measured or judged”,⁴⁵ and yet as the following extracts demonstrate, those benchmarks given in this particular strategic document do not provide such standard. One of the core priorities outlined in the document is the mainstreaming of gender in key sectors,⁴⁶ the benchmark for the first two of which, “Macro-Economic Framework” and “Private Sector Development” read as follows:

*Benchmark: Increased investment in social services such as education, health, clean drinking water, and other commitments in the Afghanistan MDGs in accordance with international benchmarks.*⁴⁷

*Benchmark: Adoption and implementation of measures that improve women’s participation, leadership and access to business and economic opportunities.*⁴⁸

Indeed, these are rather vacuous notions against which nothing could usefully be measured or judged, and they do not provide specific targets for sectors or ministries. How these recommendations relate to gender mainstreaming is also unclear. Having said this, this ambiguity is characteristic of many of the draft sector strategies and is certainly not limited to gender. Further it must be considered that these documents are currently only in draft form. There are also examples of more concrete guidelines within the draft Cross Cutting Strategy for gender equity. The benchmark for Information and Communication Technology (ICT), for example, is substantially clearer, recommending that the government should aim to attain “at least 30 percent female representation among ICT trainers, professionals and instructors”.⁴⁹ However, this is one out of ten benchmarks within the “mainstreaming of gender in key sectors” section of the strategy.⁵⁰

Of course, clear and strategic benchmarks, even if commonplace, would not function as magic bullets and improve the implementation of gender mainstreaming overnight. They would however provide a step in the right direction. They would also signify to national policy-makers the directed commitment of the international community to the gender agenda, as, while benchmarks are in theory provided by government staff, in

⁴⁵ Benchmark. (n.d.), *The American Heritage® Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition*, from Dictionary.com website: <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/benchmark> (accessed 18 October 2007).

⁴⁶ The four key sectors identified for gender mainstreaming are: Macro-Economic Framework, Private Sector Development, Culture and Media, and Information Technology. Why these particular sectors were chosen, as opposed to others, is not specified.

⁴⁷ I-ANDS, Draft Gender Equity Cross-Cutting Strategy 2008-2013, (revised version), 8.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ I-ANDS, Draft Gender Equity Cross-Cutting Strategy, 2007, 9.

⁵⁰ It should be emphasised here that the sector strategies for the I-ANDS are all in draft form at the time of writing and thus strong critique of their content is perhaps premature. However, the analysis of these documents provides useful insight into the processes behind national-level policy-making and thus has been included in this study.

reality they are written by international technical advisors⁵¹ (section 4.5). At present the vagueness of benchmarks communicates a lack of attention to detail and a distinctly hollow approach to the subject. If there are few clear strategies to follow or measurable benchmarks to work towards, there is little hope of gender mainstreaming being taken seriously as a policy for substantive implementation. Having said this, the very existence of a draft gender sector strategy (albeit vague) and the incorporation of gender perspectives across other draft sector strategies, currently being undertaken by MOWA and UNIFEM, is an undeniably positive factor. These documents allow the potential at least for gender to be mainstreamed across governmental policy, even if the implementation of that policy seems distant and unattainable at present.

The establishment of NAPWA as a key benchmark in the I-ANDS has been a political success. It was formed as a result of Afghanistan's participation in the Beijing +10 UN Women's Conference in New York, in 2005, to which a national delegation was sent. Led by then Minister for Women's Affairs, Masooda Jalal, the delegation subsequently pushed for a National Action Plan for Women in Afghanistan, having interacted with those implementing similar national policies in other countries. As such, NAPWA is a prime example of the transferring of policy through international conferences, the UN and the global feminist movement in general. According to the I-ANDS, NAPWA forms one of the key mechanisms through which gender will be mainstreamed at the national level. As such it is a considerable achievement on the part of the national and international actors involved that such a major governmental commitment to women

BOX 2: Means of mainstreaming gender equity within the I-ANDS framework

Gender equity: cross-cutting theme 1

- CCG on Gender, meets monthly to advise Consultative Groups on gender mainstreaming
- Gender mainstreaming guidelines produced to assist sectors in producing gender-sensitive strategies
- CG2 Working Group on Gender
- Technical Advisory Group for Women and Children (Sub-working group within Legal Reform working group)
- Sub-working group on Vulnerable Women (under Social Protection Pillar), CG7.
- Gender Equity Cross-Cutting Strategy: chapter in the I-ANDS to promote gender mainstreaming in sector strategies
- Series of strategies outlined to enable GOA to reach MDG targets. These include establishing gender units in each ministry, strengthening MOWA's capacity to encourage gender mainstreaming in other ministries, and improve the collection of sex-disaggregated data.

ANDS gender benchmarks

- Five-year strategic benchmark: by end-2010: NAPWA will be fully implemented, and according to Afghanistan's MDGs female participation in governance will be strengthened (I-ANDS, 1:91)
- Seven other gender benchmarks in various sectors including Governance; Rule of Law and Human Rights; Education; Health; and Social Protection.

MOWA-ANDS Secretariat

- Meets to coordinate efforts between ANDS and MOWA in promoting gender mainstreaming, and highlights any difficulties being faced by either party. Functions primarily as a problem-shooting mechanism.

⁵¹ For further evidence to support this statement please see AREU's forthcoming work on the policy process in Afghanistan.

and gender equity has been incorporated into national policy.

Since NAPWA was first conceptualized it has been through various stages of development. The process of policy formation has been largely undertaken by MOWA, with the support of UNIFEM. From the beginning national – as opposed to international – ownership has been encouraged. This is not to say however that international intervention has not been significant, and UNIFEM has provided a key driving force behind national consultations on NAPWA, meetings in ministries and other participatory practices. Indeed, it appears that other members of the international community (and particularly international technical assistants in MOWA) have been largely excluded from the formation of the document, which, on the one hand, has protected it from the potentially conflicting agendas of powerful agencies, but on the other, has left many internationals highly critical of the process, which to them appears a project of UNIFEM alone.⁵² Such “turf wars” do not appear to have affected the amount of support available for the implementation of NAPWA, as other internationals, whilst critical, accept the necessity of such a document and the achievement of its being mentioned in the I-ANDS. They have however offered useful critique – namely, that the implementation of NAPWA is unrealistic in its timeframes, and that it is more of a shopping list than a strategy. Another problem with the document as identified by international analysts is that its introductory contextual analysis is littered with underspecified development slogans such as “harmful traditional practices” and “Afghan culture” which have been assumed and adopted more generally in policy documents in Afghanistan without any kind of analysis or expansion. These criticisms should be taken on board constructively in the revisions to NAPWA which will be undertaken after one year of its being ratified.

3. Perceptions of gender in ministries

3.1 Gender/gender mainstreaming: terminology/concept

This Section explores different understandings of gender in the Afghan context as discussed by ministry staff. Gender is a relatively new concept in Afghanistan and does not have an exact translation in Dari or Pashtu.⁵³ During this study, various terms have been used by respondents to describe gender (Table 1).

It is common for people (Afghan and international alike) to translate gender as *jensiyat*, or sex, and thus abandon the idea of constructed social roles and power dynamics that “gender” encapsulates. This is not a phenomenon unique to Afghanistan; gender is notoriously difficult to translate from English into other languages.⁵⁴ Indeed, the most common concern of respondents about gender, as reflected in the following quotations, was essentially that it is a foreign or un-Islamic term, and that it was not fully understood by many Afghans, as a term and a concept:

If we only focus on the roles of women and we do not use the name of gender, this will be better. It will not have a negative effect but a positive one. For example in Islam it says that education is necessary for men and women, but gender is not mentioned. We should just follow what is said in the Qu’ran. (female respondent, MRRD).

⁵² Three international respondents independently expressed such criticism in interviews.

⁵³ Working groups made up of gender staff from the ministries, members of NGOs, UN agencies and linguistics experts from Kabul university have been formed to attempt to find an adequate translation for “gender” but have to date been unsuccessful (male respondent, international agency and male respondent, MOPH).

⁵⁴ Goetz, *Mainstreaming Gender Equity*, 53.

In our society gender is a term that everyone is sensitive about. Not in Kabul but in the provinces, if you use the term gender, people immediately think it is a non-Muslim word, and it takes skill to raise people's awareness about this. (female respondent, MOWA)

Gender in Afghanistan is not new, but the wording is not clear. We don't have a clear meaning. We have to use the English word "gender"... This word we have inherited from you and we are not sure how we should conceptualize it in our own understanding. (male respondent, MRRD)

Two separate (but related) issues are raised in these quotations - the terminology and the concept of gender. If, as the respondents cited above initially suggest, the problem lies only with gender terminology, and its translation, then if a suitable Dari/Pashtu translation is found, the concept may be accepted without too much resistance. However, if as implied in the third quotation the problem lies with the conceptualization of gender, there exist deeper and more complex implications. Moreover, if gender is indeed considered "un-Islamic" by the average Afghan, the difficulty in promoting a gender-sensitive approach to policy-making may well be increased.⁵⁵

It has been found during this study that both male and female respondents tend not to distinguish biological sex from its social attributes. For example, it is often assumed that the positions of men and women in society are determined by a natural order and not by a socially constructed one. This assumption can engender inflexible attitudes towards the sexual division of labour within social practices, which can also be accompanied by a resistance to change in the social roles that men and women are able to assume. This resistance can itself be seen as a gender agenda, while not named as such. Moreover, this alternative "gender" project can considerably affect notions of "gender equality".

Table 1: Translations of gender⁵⁶

	Dari	Transliteration	English
I-ANDS	جنسیت اجتماعی (جنس)	<i>Jensiyat-e ejtamahi</i> (gender)	Social sex (gender)
1 (MOWA strategy document)	جنسیت	<i>Jensiyat</i>	sex
¹ 2	تساوی جنسیت	<i>Tasawi-e jensiyat</i>	Equality between sexes
3	قدرت دادن به زنان	<i>Qodrat dadan ba zanha</i>	Empowerment of women
4	جنس زن و مرد	<i>Jens-e- zan wa mard</i>	Sexes of men and women
5	موقف اجتماعی زنان	<i>Moghief-e- ejtamahi zanan</i>	Social status of women
6	تساوی حقوق	<i>Tasawi-e huquq</i>	Equal rights
7	مساوات بین زن و مرد	<i>Masawat baine zan wa mard</i>	Equality between men and women

⁵⁵ The subject of gender and Islam is a potential area for further exploration in Phase 2 of this study.

⁵⁶ A female member of AREU's gender team compiled this table. Terms are given in Dari and not Pashtu in Tables 1 and 2 because all of the interviews were conducted in Dari. Respondents were given the choice of Dari, Pashtu or English as languages in which to conduct the interviews but all chose either Dari or English.

The terms “gender” and “women” were often used interchangeably by respondents during this study. This is not unsurprising considering how “gender” is still understood to signify “women” in many other contexts, in spite of the fact that the term has been used to inform global development policy on the social relations between men and women for the last 30 years. One respondent from MOPH clearly explained how “gender” is misunderstood as “women” in the Afghan context:

...most people think that gender is only about women's rights and equality for women. There are a few people who have gone to gender trainings..., but although they might say gender is about men and women, in their mind they think it is only about women. (male respondent, MOPH)

This understanding of gender as synonymous to women or women’s rights was made apparent during interviews with different respondents from the ministries, who would begin by talking about gender mechanisms and then go on to discuss women’s *shuras*, celebrations for women’s day and the ways in which “women’s rights” were adhered to in their ministries. This was not limited to interviews with ministry staff. Representatives of international agencies, both Afghan and expatriate, would also align gender with a focus on women. Furthermore, this blurring of gender and women occurs throughout national policy documents, such as the I-ANDS. Gender and women are used interchangeably in the I-ANDS, and there is no discussion of what gender is, or mention of the roles and relations (let alone power dynamics) between men and women.⁵⁷ This paper does not contend that a focus on women alone is misguided, but that equating gender to women is highly problematic in the policy process. This is primarily because if gender is taken to mean “women” all notions of the relations between men and women, and the effect that these might have on the implementation of policy, are omitted.

It can be argued that the word “gender” is less meaningful in the current Afghan context than “women”. While in other contexts, slippage between the terms is also commonplace, there is yet an understanding of the meanings of both terms, generally speaking. In Afghanistan, understanding of gender is not widespread and as such there is little concept of what is being missed by its replacement with “women”. This is exemplified in one Minister’s choice to name the “gender unit” in his ministry a “women’s affair’s unit”, reasoning that “‘women’s affairs’ has more meaning for the people”.⁵⁸ There is however a general acceptance of the fact that gender can be used to certain ends in specific contexts. Indeed, it is acknowledged by some respondents that the discourse of gender equates to the language of international policy and consequently the access to valuable funds for ministry activities. One male respondent from MOPH expanded on this point:

Afghanistan is of course part of the globe and it cannot avoid the currents of information and exchange of goods that is currently going on. This is part of the concept of the world as a small village thanks to good internet connections and other things. This makes it difficult to avoid the global issues, especially since 2001 when Afghanistan came to global attention. Gender is one of the cross-cutting ideas in policy and there is a lot of funding for gender issues. If a programme is considered to be gender-sensitive then it will be funded. (male respondent, MOPH)

While this was not a common response from interviewees, it illustrates an important perspective on the use of gender terminology. International actors may not have envisaged gender terminology being used as a means to acquire funds. However, in encouraging a familiarization with a gender discourse, financial incentives may help to

⁵⁷ I-ANDS, 1:90-94.

⁵⁸ Reported by female international respondent.

institutionalize an otherwise alien terminology. Having said this, taking a gender discourse on board does not necessarily imply an understanding of its meaning or a motivation to implement gender initiatives. This practice of “talking the talk” has been dubbed “fake ownership”⁵⁹ and is not conducive to the substantive implementation of gender mainstreaming.

Another misconception of respondents in interviews is that gender equates to gender equality: that gender is equal rights between men and women. As one male interviewee from the MOIA described:

Gender is a new term, but it means equality of the sexes, tasawi-e jensiyat. Or, making men and women equal, this is gender. (male respondent, MOIA)

This merging of gender with gender equality however is less problematic than the fact that respondents only rarely expanded on what the implementation of gender equality in Afghanistan might mean. Further, the notion of “equal rights for men and women” appears to be a learnt phrase, with respondents being reluctant to explain further what these “rights” might be. While there is an acknowledgement of the fact that in Afghanistan at present there is a disparity between the rights of men and women, there is also an unwillingness to take responsibility for changing the situation or to give details on how this might be achieved.⁶⁰ This, according to many respondents, is the task of the Ministries of Justice, Education or Hajj and Religious Affairs⁶¹ – very few people interviewed identified gender inequalities as cross-sectoral responsibilities.

A further problematic but common use of the term gender is the way in which it is often reified, which is to say that the abstract concept of gender is treated as a concrete noun. The following quotations highlight the way in which respondents talked about gender in this way:

When women are promoted in society, then gender will be implemented. (female respondent, MOWA)

In Afghanistan gender is not implemented, there is no gender in Afghanistan. (female respondent, MOWA)

Gender actually is a support programme for women in Afghanistan, and I support this. Gender is working closely with my department, as we have had several meetings about supporting women in Afghanistan and their rights. (male respondent, MOIA)

It is interesting that so many respondents referred to gender as a concrete “thing”.⁶² This implies that “gender” itself is seen as something to be achieved – as an end, a goal, or a benchmark. Moreover, it was suggested that when women have gained equal rights with men, gender will be completed and there will be no need to continue considering issues from a gender perspective. It should be noted that respondents did not see this

⁵⁹ Coined by Rachel Wareham. Communicated to the author by Kandiyoti (pers comm).

⁶⁰ This is reflective of “gender accountability” debates more generally – in many countries actors are aware of gender disparities existing but there appears to be a widespread reluctance to designate responsibility for the addressing of these disparities (with thanks to the international respondent who contributed this point).

⁶¹ Respondents mentioned that the Ministry of Hajj and Religious Affairs not only had great influence among rural people (to whom it was assumed gender training needed to be given most urgently) but also the greatest access to these people through local mullahs. It was suggested that as a result of these facts this ministry should take responsibility for rectifying gender inequalities (various respondents).

⁶² This could also have been as a result of the way in which questions were posed, or of the way in which answers were translated. Nevertheless respondents talked of their own accord about gender in this way before questions were asked.

being “achieved” in the short-term, but rather referred to some indeterminate point in the future when men and women would have equal rights.

It is also important to consider how gender mainstreaming is translated and conceptualized (Table 2). There has been some difficulty in translating the term. This is clearly the case in the Dari I-ANDS, in which the word for gender mainstreaming is the same as the word used for gender equality.

Table 2: Translations of gender mainstreaming⁶³

	Dari	Transliteration	English
I-ANDS	برابری جنسیت (اجتماعی) (جندر)	<i>Barabari-e jensiyat-e ejtamahi (gender)</i>	The making equal of social sex (gender)
1	اتغام و عمومیت جندر	<i>Iteqam wa umumiyat gender</i>	Generalisation of gender
2	جهت گیری جندر در مسائل اجتماعی	<i>Jehat geiry gender dar msahil ejtamahi</i>	Giving direction to gender in all social affairs
3	شامل سازی جندر در مسائل اجتماعی	<i>Shameil sazi gender dar msahil ejtamahi</i>	Integrating gender in social affairs

This translation demonstrates a distinct discrepancy in meaning between the English and the Dari for gender mainstreaming, and could become a source of confusion. Translating gender mainstreaming as “the making equal of [gender]” omits all reference to how this “making equal” might occur. Whereas gender mainstreaming in itself is a strategy, its I-ANDS Dari translation is an abstract notion without reference to the way in which it might be implemented. This may be why ministry staff who might otherwise be expected to know about gender mainstreaming (such as staff of the gender units) were actually unsure of its meaning, as the following quotations demonstrate:

I think gender and gender mainstreaming are the same thing. Our aim is to promote gender in all of Afghanistan, to empower women and to bring women on the same level as men. (female respondent, MOWA)

I heard about [gender mainstreaming] in the gender working group, but I don't know exactly what it involves. We have only had trainings on gender issues but not on mainstreaming. (female respondent, MOPH)

[Gender mainstreaming] means that if we give awareness to MOIA personnel about gender then they will go to their families and communities and implement gender so that it becomes common, this is gender mainstreaming. (female respondent, MOIA)

Given the confusion in translation, it is not surprising that gender mainstreaming is proving problematic to implement. Moreover, the link made in translation between gender and social affairs (Table 2) is significant, in that gender is typically relegated to “social affairs” and not associated with other fields such as economics, or defence.

⁶³ Thanks to AREU colleagues for compiling this table and helping with translation.

Finally, but significantly, a key finding from this research was that there was no marked difference between the ways in which men and women understood or conceptualized gender. Their individual understandings of the term depend on a variety of factors, such as their exposure to gender literature, and their training and background in working for international organisations. Men interviewed were often just as able if not more so than women to give detailed explanations of gender to the research team. Comparing motivations of men and women for supporting gender awareness, however, is another matter, the accurate analysis of which will require the collection of further data. This is proposed as an area of focus for the second phase of this study.

3.2 Justifications for a gender focus: welfare and efficiency

Respondents from ministries justified the importance of encouraging gender equality in Afghanistan in different ways. The most common explanation given, as the following quotations demonstrate, is that if women are educated, then they will be able to function as good mothers and by implication will be a benefit to the development of society as a whole:

When a woman becomes educated she knows how to raise her children and she will bring up good and knowledgeable children for society, and when we have good and educated generations so we will have a healthy society. (male respondent, MOWA)

When Afghan women are daughters they care a lot for their fathers, when they are wives they take care of their husbands, and when they are sisters they take care of their brothers. If the government pays more attention to women in every field of life and helps them to improve, then the future of the country will be bright. Our Great Prophet Mohammad said that we should give good discipline to our daughters because they will be mothers in the future. (female respondent, MOWA)

Such “welfarist arguments”, reminiscent of development theories pre-dating the Women in Development (WID) era of feminist thought in the late 1980s, focus on women’s reproductive role in the home and consider this role their contribution to development more generally. These justifications for a focus on women were commonly given by both male and female respondents. They are linked to the ideas discussed in section 3.1 regarding a general lack of distinction between women’s biological sex and their socially-assigned gender roles. To add to this welfare approach, other respondents focused on the need to define women’s productive role in society as reasons for including them in development initiatives:

...there is a lack of understanding at the highest level, they do not understand why gender mainstreaming is important. We need to link it to something else, we need to have gender equity, for example, but not just for the sake of gender equity –instead, for the sake of development and progress...NGOs talk about women’s empowerment, but they have to talk about why this is important, for what it would be useful, and how it is possible to sustain this. Then people will be able to see why this really matters to them. (male respondent, MRRD)

This “efficiency” approach, stemming from the latter period of the WID era, is frequently dismissed by contemporary feminist scholars as inadequate as they do not appear to value gender equality as a satisfactory end in itself. Rather, it emphasises women’s productive role, and attempt to justify why a focus on women in development is important as regards potential benefit to other members of society or society as a whole. These arguments –while highly valuable in their contribution to the women and development discourse at the time, have now come to be seen as somewhat detrimental

to a rights-based approach and concerns for gender equality on its own merit. Indeed, as Shahrashoub Razavi and Carol Miller conclude, the combination of arguments for gender justice with those of economic efficiency has been effective as a political strategy but has encouraged the sidelining of women's demands in developmental policy.⁶⁴ However, the success of this approach as a political strategy cannot be dismissed. As the third quotation above implies, it may be that in order to convince policy-makers that gender equity is essential and worthy of investment, an efficiency stance is needed – in the short term at least. In the context of Afghanistan, where competition for core budget allocations is fierce, and where (as elsewhere) gender equality in its own right is not a high priority in national or international agendas, these arguments may be key justifications in the fight for funding and recognition. Contrarily, in the long term, efficiency approaches become inadequate, as the individual human and citizen rights of women are not considered of high enough importance to merit national action. If sustained change in structural inequalities is to take place, a shift towards empowerment,⁶⁵ as opposed to efficiency, is needed.

⁶⁴ S. Razavi and C. Miller, 1995, "From WID to GAD: Conceptual Shifts in the Women and Development Discourse," *Occasional Paper 1*, 41, Geneva: UNRISD.

⁶⁵ The term "empowerment" is in itself ambiguous and has been (over-)used in development discourses to the point at which its meaning has been all but lost (for further discussion on this subject please see A. Cornwall and K. Brock, 2005, "Beyond Buzzwords: 'Poverty Reduction', 'Participation' and 'Empowerment' in Development Policy," *Development Policy*, Geneva: UNRISD. Here, however, it is used in the above statement to suggest that a focus on women's needs as equal citizens in society should be employed, with a recognition that they have been structurally marginalised in previous regimes in Afghanistan.

PART II. Combating Gender Inequalities: Facilitating and Hindering Factors

4. Overview of ministerial mechanisms

Existing mechanisms for promoting gender awareness vary from ministry to ministry, and can include gender units, women's *shuras*, focal points, working/steering groups and/or ministry-based international consultants (Table 3). At the very least, most ministries have a women's shura, which acts as a makeshift union for female staff, but which is not included in the ministerial *tashkeel*. The following Section will discuss different kinds of gender mechanisms which exist in the three case study ministries and assess the ways in which they are currently functioning.

Table 3: Gender mechanisms existing in 10 sample ministries⁶⁶

Ministry	Gender unit	Working group/task force	Women's shura	Focal point	Women's representative	Gender consultant (national/international)	Other	Comment
Agriculture	X		X		X			Working with MOWA on economic development
Commerce	X		X		X	X		A seminar for staff about gender has been held.
Defence								The research team attempted to collect data in MOD but were unsuccessful.
Education	X*				X			* Called the Women's Unit. Informal connections with MOWA.
Finance	X				X	X		
Foreign Affairs	X							There is no women's shura but women meet informally when a meeting is considered necessary.
Hajj/ Religious Affairs					X			There is no gender unit but there is a "Sister's Department" working for women
Justice			X		X			
Labour/ Social Affairs					X			
Refugees	X		X		X			

⁶⁶ "X" refers to the existence of a mechanism.

This table indicates that there are staff working in gender in the surveyed ministries – a positive factor for the implementation of gender mainstreaming. These data are not discussed further in this paper, however, as while the table comprises a brief survey of the existing gender mechanisms in ministries, it does not encapsulate how or when they were set up, by whom, and whether they are indeed “functioning”.

Table 4: Gender mechanisms existing in three case study ministries

Ministry	Gender Unit	Working group/Task force	Women's <i>shura</i>	Focal point	Women's representative	International gender consultant	Other	Comment
Public Health (MOPH)	X	X		X				
Rural Rehabilitation and Development (MRRD)	X		X	X	X	X		
Interior Affairs (MOIA)	X*		X		X	X	Steering committee for women's affairs	*Gender unit is called a “Women's Affairs Unit”

4.1 Gender units

According to the I-ANDS, gender units are to be established in each ministry to monitor the implementation of gender mainstreaming.⁶⁷ This has not yet been achieved (Table 3), but gender units of some form or other do exist in all three case study ministries where the research was conducted (Table 4). Where units are situated within ministerial structures, and the extent to which they are established, varies. This Section discusses first the confusion surrounding the mandate of gender units within ministries. Second, it explains how a unit's vertical and horizontal location within a ministerial structure is highly significant. Third, it covers how the particular kind of structure of the individual ministry will determine to some extent how effective a unit can be.

It is apparent that the gender units studied have some difficulty implementing both aspects of what is essentially the dual function of substantive gender mainstreaming: raising gender awareness within the respective ministries (targeted at internal staff), and working on mainstreaming gender through ministerial policy, programmes and budgets (for external, public beneficiaries). Given that these units are generally under-resourced and short-staffed, it is difficult to dedicate the same amount of time and resources to both parts of this mandate. As such there are often trade-offs between focusing exclusively on internal or external issues, and also between working on one area well or both areas in a sub-standard fashion. This can contribute to the existing confusion of ministry staff who do not work in gender issues as regards to the TOR of gender units, as found in all three case study ministries during this study (Box 3).⁶⁸

⁶⁷ I-ANDS, 1:93.

⁶⁸ This phenomenon could also be in part explained by the way in which very few departments in Afghan ministries are aware of what other departments are doing. This is one symptom of generally poor internal communication systems.

BOX 3: Confusion about Gender Unit TORs

"I don't know what they do. I think they only celebrate women's day (8th March). They monitor and observe courses for women." (female respondent, MRRD)

"[People] know that it exists, but they do not know what it does, or they think it does nothing." (female respondent, MRRD)

"The Gender Department in our ministry has many plans but they do nothing - they have workshops but they do nothing else. They need to change the ideas of the people in the country, and I think it is not possible for one gender unit to do this." (female respondent, MOWA)

"I think they have limited resources, I hardly ever hear that they have had any big achievements, and I haven't participated in any of their trainings. When we do things we start from the home and then we move outside, and if we cannot implement programmes at home, how can we do this outside? Maybe they have done something but I think they should have done more in the ministry itself." (male respondent, MOPH)

"Most ministries make gender units by name but they are not working well; they are not active." (male respondent, international agency)

"If the Gender Unit at MRRD tried to influence policy at all then it would be good but it is not happening at the moment. Basically they have just hired a group of women to do specific tasks, and this is not mainstreaming." (female respondent, international agency representative)

High expectations of the ANDS, ministerial leadership and international donors – that units should be able to both facilitate gender mainstreaming in policy and within their ministries – do not sit comfortably with the lack of funds and human resources available to these units. This discrepancy contributes to gender units being considered dysfunctional by those who are aware of this mandate. For others, and particularly ministry staff whose TORs do not include gender issues, gender units are perceived as non-existent, unnecessary, or very limited in terms of what they are able to achieve. One way to approach this problem would be for gender units to simplify and stagger their work plans –perhaps focusing on one key area (such as mainstreaming gender into internal ministry policy) per year.⁶⁹

A significant factor determining the potential efficiency of a gender unit, and its ability to achieve its mandate, is its position within the ministerial structure, or *tashkeel*. The position of the gender unit in the *tashkeel* is important in determining its reach and scope, and its ability to penetrate ministry-wide policy. Indeed, the importance of where gender mechanisms sit within ministerial structures has been recognised in several other contexts.⁷⁰ While a unit's position in a ministry does not in any way guarantee the effective functioning of the unit (which is also highly dependent on available human and financial resources, capacity and political will amongst other things) it is nonetheless a key initial factor to access influential support. The positions of the gender units in the three case study ministries differ greatly as their positioning relies on the decisions of ministerial policy-makers.⁷¹ In the MRRD, the gender unit is now accountable to the Research and Policy Department, and has existed for up to four

⁶⁹ With thanks to a UNIFEM representative for contributing this suggestion.

⁷⁰ These include the Philippines, in which it is mandatory that gender units report to the highest ministerial authority (female international respondent).

⁷¹ See appendix for ministerial *tashkeels*.

years.⁷² In MOPH, the unit was established a year ago, and is positioned in the Reproductive Health Department. In the MOIA, the gender (or “women’s affairs”) unit has only just been formed. It will stand as an independent unit in its own right, but its official position in the *tashkeel* has yet to be confirmed. One suggested position for the unit is under the head of Internal Affairs, who is himself directly accountable to the First Deputy Minister. This however has been challenged by recent proposals put forward by the US military working in the ministry for an alternative positioning under the Chief of Headquarters Staff (Box 4).

There are two elements of institutional structure that must be considered when looking at the position of gender units within ministries – vertical and horizontal positioning. Vertical positioning concerns where in the hierarchy of the ministry the unit is placed, and how many institutional levels exist between the unit and the highest levels of authority. Horizontal positioning, or operational considerations, concerns the extent to which the remit of the unit allows it to affect the workings of other departments in the ministry. These are both fundamental in determining the reach and scope of a unit.

In MOIA, the moving of the gender unit one vertical level closer to the First Deputy Minister (Box 4), as proposed by CANADEM, would be highly significant as it would raise the status of the unit and allows it closer connection with the highest authorities. In a ministry such as MOIA, where authority is emphasised by the militarised titles given to staff members according to a strict hierarchy, the implications of this move should not be underestimated. Rather than being submerged within the Human Rights Department, or confined to the organisational support processes of the Headquarters Staff sector, it would report directly to the head of Internal Affairs and be closely accountable to the FDM. Given that gender mainstreaming policy involves substantial organisational change, and furthermore is a new, foreign agenda, there is no doubt that the presence of a high-level champion responsible for the gender unit is necessary to promote such an agenda within the ministry.⁷³ The importance of the gender unit reporting to the FDM, and of vertical positioning in general, became apparent in one interview in particular with a member of MOIA who was considering taking a position in the new gender unit. She explained how the vertical position of the unit would affect her decision:

It is very challenging for the gender unit to have its activities here. I will accept the position only if it is put under the direct control of the First Deputy Minister. Only if he supports me directly will I take it, as otherwise it could be very challenging. (female respondent, MOIA)

When later asked to describe the ways in which she thought the position in the gender unit might be “challenging”, the respondent primarily referred to resistance from other staff members towards gender, and particularly those who had been working in the ministry for a long time (see section 5.3 on “overlapping rules of the game”). In order to be able to overcome this resistance, she felt she would need the direct support of the FDM.⁷⁴ In other words, the closer the vertical position of the unit to the highest authorities, the more influence it is likely to have.

⁷² Female respondent, MRRD.

⁷³ With thanks to an international respondent for commenting on this.

⁷⁴ Female respondent, MOIA.

BOX 4: MOIA Gender Unit case study

At the time of interviews, a number of people working in and connected with MOIA were approached by the research team for information about the gender unit. It transpired that there was a good degree of confusion surrounding where the unit was positioned. Some thought it was in the process of being set up in the Education and Training Department, and others (including gender unit staff) thought it had been established for two months already under the Human Rights Department (itself under Internal Affairs). CANADEM have assigned an international Senior Police and Gender Advisor to work closely with the MOIA. On hearing about this confusion, she met with the First Deputy Minister (FDM), and it transpired that many people in the ministry had been referring to two entirely different ministerial *tashkeels*, one apparently more official than the other. Indeed, different groups of internationals working in MOIA had been deriving information from these different *tashkeels*. In the process of trying to establish where the "real" gender unit was, the gender advisor was able to make a case for it to be brought up a level in the *tashkeel* and be made a unit in its own right. Plans to separate it from Human Rights, but keep it on the same structural level as this department, were made accordingly. As such the gender unit was due to move closer in accountability to the FDM. This plan was not confirmed by ministerial decree but was unofficially approved by the FDM.

Since interviews took place, there have been further developments. The US military working in MOIA have apparently urged the deputy minister to consider placing the gender unit under the Chief of Headquarters Staff, instead of under Internal Affairs (where it would have reported closely to him). This proposal has been made regarding the 2008 *tashkeel*. Departments in Headquarters Staff currently comprise Administration, Policy and Plans, Intelligence, Training and Education, and Logistics. The problem with putting the gender unit in Headquarters Staff, however, is that the unit would be operationally (horizontally) confined to HQ operations. This would not only keep its activities internal to the ministry (and thus limiting its influence on policy) but also internal to HQ, with little scope for work in the regions. As such, the gender unit would be pushed into administration and housekeeping duties. Most importantly, in this position the gender unit would not be directly accountable to the FDM. There are currently two potential positions for the unit in the 2008 *tashkeel* – one under Internal Affairs, reporting to the FDM (as put forward by CANADEM) and one under HQ Staff (as put forward by the US military). At present it is uncertain which will be the selected position.

This convoluted process has brought to light the levels of miscommunication in the ministry, and conflicting interests between international groups working there. However, while investigating the causes of confusion, a policy window became apparent and it was possible for an international advisor from CANADEM to push for structural change that could potentially benefit the reach and overall efficacy of the unit. However, the strength of the US military's proposal to confine the gender unit to the HQ Staff Sector may well close this policy window. While the FDM is very supportive of gender issues and would be willing to directly supervise the gender unit, the competing demands of international players may prevent this from happening.

It is pertinent to question the motives behind the US military's alternative proposal for the position of the gender unit. One possible reason behind their suggestion is that they consider the Internal Affairs Department as an Inspectorate General, or a department which in effect polices the police. Departments in this sector are not involved in education, policy development or programme implementation. As such, this department would not be an ideal location for a gender unit, and it appears that the Chief of Headquarters Staff location has been selected somewhat arbitrarily as a place to put a unit which is not ideally suited to any other position. There are no doubt other reasons behind the US military's proposal, but this process highlights the difference in international opinions regarding institutional reform and the clash of expectations over departmental functions. It calls for far greater coordination between international actors to avoid the confusion which is currently preventing informed decisions from being made.

Sources: International female respondent, *MOIA Tashkeel 2007*, and *Gender Unit Tashkeel Revision 2008*.

Figure 2: MOIA Gender Unit: vertical positioning (as proposed by CANADEM)

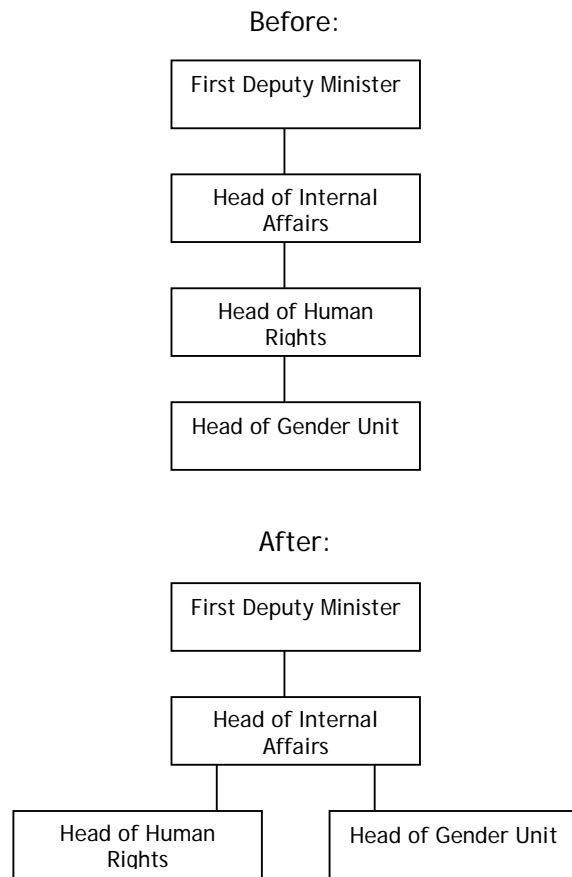
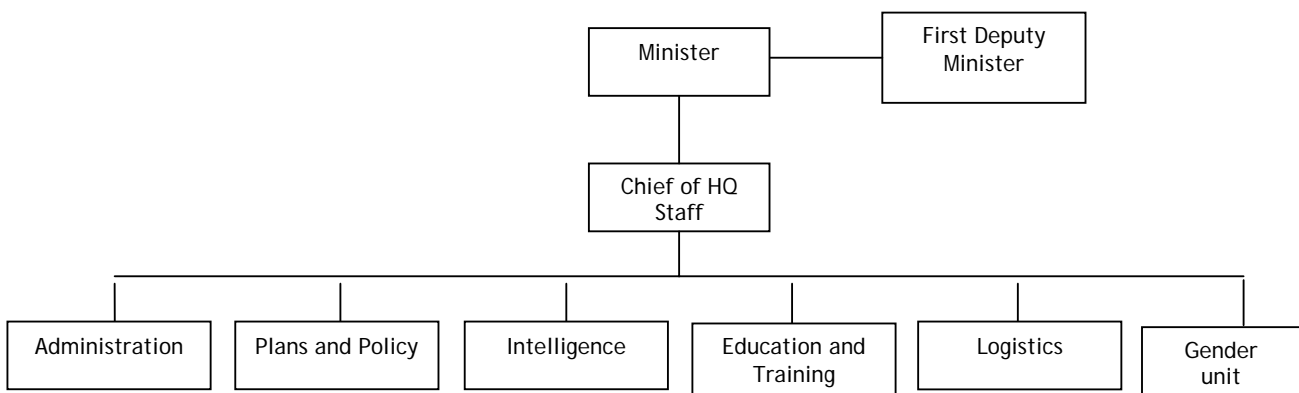


Figure 3: New proposal for Gender Unit in MOIA (US Military)



In spite of the apparent benefits to the work of the gender unit in this positional shift, another, competing proposal has been put forward by the US military working in MOIA for the placing of the unit within the 2008 *tashkeel* (Box 4, Figure 3). As described in Box 4, this would be highly detrimental to the reach and scope of the unit, which would be confined to HQ affairs and excluded from policy-making processes. Interesting here is

the extent to which international donor interests affect or indeed determine the way in which institutions are being re-formed – at least structurally – in Afghanistan.⁷⁵

The gender unit in MOPH is an example of a unit whose reach is already restricted in a similar way. It is not closely linked to the top-level authorities and reports to the Director of Reproductive Health, who is then accountable to the Secretary General, who reports to the Deputy Ministers. Without vertical influence or authority, then, the gender unit is also confined horizontally by its position in the Reproductive Health Department. Two respondents from the ministry explained this in more detail:

In every ministry they have a human resources department and here they should be providing trainings for everyone. Now our gender unit is in the Reproductive Health Department – why? It should be under the policy department which would then cover everyone, and not only the people in one department would be reached, it would not be limited ... I feel like the rest of the ministry is forgotten. (male respondent, MOPH)

From my point of view, in our ministry the gender unit is situated in the wrong place. They have linked it with Reproductive Health, but it is supposed to be a cross-cutting issue. It should be in a high level so that it has influence over the whole ministry. ([different]male respondent, MOPH)

The gender unit in MOPH has relatively little influence on the way in which other departments in the ministry function. The Reproductive Health Department is already misguidedly associated with women and women's health, and the position of the gender unit within this department serves to reinforce the stereotype of gender equating to women (see section 1.3). Further, there is no coordination between the Reproductive Health Department and other sectors of the ministry, which effectively cuts the gender unit off operationally from the functions of other departments. This is the case in spite of the fact that it coordinates a working group in which other departmental representatives are members. One result of this horizontal limitation is the unit appears to focus the majority of its work on external health programmes related to maternal and child health, producing gender "messages" for a campaign on public health practices, for example. This in itself is not a counter-productive activity, but it is not complemented by a focus on increasing gender awareness within the ministry. While partially fulfilling its mandate, the unit's relatively narrow scope is preventing a broader focus on other programmes.

On the contrary, the gender unit in MRRD is situated within the policy department, which ostensibly gives it access across different departmental policy-making processes. However, it is not positioned close to top authorities and until recently it has not been clear to whom the gender unit is vertically accountable.⁷⁶ There has also been confusion over the overlapping roles of the gender unit and women's *shura*. To date, partially as a result of its vertical distance from senior authorities, the effect of the gender unit on ministerial policy-making has been limited. This limitation has also been the result of the structure of MRRD.

The kinds of macro-institutional structures of the ministries themselves are important factors determining the efficacy of gender units. Structures vary greatly from ministry to ministry, along with the ways in which the central ministerial body relates to the programmes it operates. For example, the structure of the MRRD is quite unique in that it is comprised of a central unit, and entirely separate entities which exist to coordinate

⁷⁵ Applying the frameworks of Dolowitz and Marsh, this example of structural change in MOIA could be analysed as a case of coercive policy transfer. Dolowitz and Marsh, *Policy Transfer*, p42.

⁷⁶ Female international respondent.

the major national priority programmes as determined by the government (for example the National Solidarity Programme [NSP] and the National Area Based Development Programme [NABDP]). The gender unit is positioned within the central body of the ministry itself, but has very little influence on the ways in which the different programmes function. The disconnect between the centre and programmes was described by various respondents from MRRD:

If there is any coordination between programmes, it is in the field, as a result of the work of the Facilitating Partners, and it does not exist in the central office. NSP has no gender policy – the FPs have done this. But the NSP have never hired a gender specialist, because they think they are already very gender balanced... but they have no policy on gender. (female international respondent, emphasis added)

When I first started with MRRD in 2005 I went to see the gender unit but they were not interested in working together for women... They have problems within the ministry – we hear about this but they are separate from us. (female respondent, MRRD [NSP programme])

Programmes are left to organise their own policies on gender, and some are more successful than others in implementing this. NABDP is a UNDP-funded programme, for example, and has hired a gender and community development specialist who has been able to pioneer an integrational, team-building approach to gender awareness which (according to the specialist herself) has been well-received.⁷⁷ NSP is considered highly gender-sensitive as a result of its emphasis on women's participation in Community Development Councils (CDCs). Indeed, its Operational Manual lays out clear guidelines for ways in which gender equity might be implemented in CDCs.⁷⁸ These guidelines are addressed to the Facilitating Partners (FPs) of NSP, who are tasked with the responsibility of ensuring that gender equity is considered. This is appropriate, as the FPs implement the programme at the ground level. However, there is no mechanism outlined in the Manual for monitoring whether or not CDCs do meet gender targets, and it lacks corrective measures which could be used in case they do not.⁷⁹

Essentially, in MRRD programmes are not connected to or coordinated with the central gender unit and staff working for the programmes have little idea of even the basic functions of the unit.⁸⁰ This has significant implications on the ways in which the unit can (or cannot) impact the programme policies, and renders its scope all but internal.

The other two case-study ministries are more centrally structured, programmes being integrated within the central ministries rather than functioning as independent institutions. In MOPH, there are three key sectors into which departments are divided – Administrative and Curative Care, Policy Planning and Preventative Care, and Reproductive Health and Mother and Child Care. Departments within the Policy Planning and Preventative Care sector tend to influence ministry-wide activities and as such this sector would provide an ideal location for the gender unit, should the opportunity arise for it to be moved. Therefore the potential for gender to be mainstreamed in a more effective and integrated way within the existing structure of the ministry exists. The MOIA has a hugely complex *tashkeel* which is extremely hierarchical, militarised and has a large body of mid-ranking technocrats. The authority of these technocrats is limited

⁷⁷ Female international respondent.

⁷⁸ NSP Operational Manual (third version), 11, January 2006.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Some effort is being made to remedy this, as UNDP have mandated their NABDP specialist to coordinate with the gender unit. This, however, covers only one programme and its connection with the centre, and is also an external initiative (female international respondent).

and they consistently must obtain the permissions of superiors before acting on policy decisions.⁸¹ While this was also the case in the other case study ministries, it was more strongly emphasised in the MOIA. This contributes to a bureaucratic inertia which can considerably lengthen the policy-making process. For this reason, it is highly significant that the gender unit has been moved up a level in the ministerial *tashkeel*, as the closer to the FDM it exists, the more likely it is that gender-sensitive policies will be taken on board and in a shorter time period.

This being the case, in order to affect the policy-making processes ministry-wide, the vertical and horizontal position of gender units should be considered. A unit will have the most potential for efficacy when it is both accountable to the highest authorities and in a position conducive to the mainstreaming of gender awareness through all other departments. It is also fundamental that the individual structure of the ministry in question be taken into account when considering where to position a gender unit, as what works in one ministry (for example MOIA) may have little effect in another (say, MRRD).

4.2 Gender working groups/task forces

I-ANDS recommends that gender units be present in all ministries to facilitate gender mainstreaming. Contrarily, one representative of UNIFEM suggested in an interview that units lend themselves to segregation and sidelining.⁸² According to this representative, units as separate entities are reminiscent of the WID desks that were set up in the 1980s,⁸³ and have little capacity to influence the functions of ministry-wide activities. Inter-departmental gender working groups are given as a feasible alternative by the NAPWA, the Government's Gender Mainstreaming Policy.⁸⁴ UNIFEM also supports this position. One international respondent described the rationale behind this preference:

In NAPWA it is suggested that the ministries have gender working groups instead of units and I think this is a very good idea. This means that you would not have a unit that is staffed by specific women (and men) assigned to gender, but that you would have a working group made up of the staff of different departments.
(female international respondent)

In theory, gender working groups provide a fundamental link between ministerial departments. They are designed to ensure effective communication and coordination of gender mainstreaming initiatives between these departments. They also can be particularly useful mechanisms in ministries where the gender unit otherwise might be easily sidelined as a result of its position in the ministerial structure. There are therefore good reasons for this suggestion made in NAPWA. However, being by nature inter-departmental, working groups do not occupy fixed positions within an institutional structure. Indeed, it is likely they would sit outside the ministerial *tashkeel*, which raises a problem of status. If not given the status of a department or section to itself, any gender mechanism may well be marginalized, leading to work towards gender mainstreaming being placed even further down a ministerial list of priorities. One solution could be to have both a gender unit and a working group, as is the case in the MOPH. This does not however present a straightforward solution. Working group sessions presently held at MOPH are used primarily to discuss the current projects of the gender unit on external programmes and have little emphasis on gender mainstreaming across

⁸¹ This was reflected in the way in which interviews were pre-arranged for the research team as they were only allowed to be arranged by one high-ranking person.

⁸² Female international respondent.

⁸³ The existence of WID desks and gender mainstreaming initiatives overlapped in the 1980s – it has not been a case of one being categorically replaced by the other.

⁸⁴ GoA, Gender Mainstreaming Policy, Annex A, NAPWA, 104.

departments.⁸⁵ Instead participants are told what the unit is already working on. One respondent described the nature of working group meetings when asked about his participation in these, and coordination between his own department and the gender unit:

It is the rule of our ministry that all departments should coordinate with each other as we all work on the health issue. But [my department] and the HIV department have closer coordination [than my department and the gender unit]. But the gender unit is also working on the health issue ... and we attend their meetings. For example, we might be talking in a meeting and saying that a lady should have the right to have limited numbers of children, she should be able to specify how many children she has. Also, pregnant ladies should have the authority to go to community-based health clinics. We discussed these things in the gender meetings. These are the issues that we talk about, and then we talk about how to implement these things and suggest solutions to the problems, for example awareness-raising programmes, and health messages through the media so that people will be ready for women to have their rights. (male respondent, MOPH, emphasis added)

On the one hand it is constructive that members of other departments are becoming aware of gender unit activities through the working group. On the other hand the group is not at present facilitating the implementation of gender mainstreaming. The working group meetings are seen as the meetings of the gender unit – “their meetings”. This suggests that in spite of its interdepartmental nature, the group is de facto an extension of the unit itself, and that there is a lack of broad-based ownership. Furthermore, the examples given on the topics discussed in the working group (not surprisingly) all concern women’s reproductive health. Nothing is mentioned, for example, about how a gender-sensitive approach might be integrated into disease control programmes, or into public policy on immunization. It can be argued that gender working group meetings in the MOPH focus on reproductive health issues in part as a result of the positioning of the unit within the ministry and the fact that the working group is led by the head of the gender unit. There is also the assumption that gender is only a reproductive health concern, which explains its position in the department.

Having said this, these shortcomings could be addressed with focused guidance to the gender unit. While the structure of the MOPH is currently limiting the scope and reach of the gender unit, the working group does provide a potential mechanism through which the work of other departments can be targeted for gender mainstreaming initiatives. Indeed, the fact that this group exists and meets on a regular basis is no mean feat, and should not be overlooked. Indeed, MOPH is the only ministry of the three case study ministries to have a gender unit and working group functioning, and indeed functioning in a coordinated manner. A system of rotating leadership of the working group across different departments, or leadership of the group by the department for policy-making, might be means to combat the exclusive focus on gender unit activities in working group sessions. Supported (but not always chaired) by full-time gender unit staff, a working group made up of members of other departments, who work on gender in addition to their germane responsibilities, would be a potentially effective means of facilitating gender mainstreaming across ministerial programmes and policy.

⁸⁵ Field notes, MoPH.

4.3 Women's *shuras*

Women's *shuras* exist in the majority of ministries, but, like working groups, do not fit into the institutional *tashkeels*. Rather, they exist as informal women's unions⁸⁶ and attempt to address the issues faced by female ministry staff. Women's *shuras* vary in size and role across different ministries. A common characteristic of these *shuras* is that, as a respondent from MOIA below notes, they are often long-standing institutions:

This *shura* has existed for a long time and their job has been to encourage women to join the police and to solve the specific problems of the women in the ministry (female respondent, MOIA)

Shuras – unlike gender units – tend to be historically grounded, having existed prior to the intervention of the international community and the start of the gender-equality policy process. This is an indicator that there has been recognition within ministries for a significant time that women have been marginalized by the prevailing attitude of male-preference in institutions. Indeed, *shuras* stem from the PDPA⁸⁷ era in which a welfarist approach to women and women's rights was adopted. Kindergartens were provided during this time and a focus on women's day (8 March) was encouraged. Those women cadres staffing the women's *shuras* during the PDPA regime have often been employed as gender staff in units and other mechanisms in the ministries now. This serves to explain a continued emphasis on women's welfare inside the ministries and a preoccupation with celebrations for women's day. The prioritisation of such events by staff working in both women's *shuras* and units alike evidently has an effect on the way in which gender mainstreaming is approached. Furthermore, it can be seen that the Soviet approach, with its focus on welfare provisions and celebration of women, appears more tangible than that of gender, with its abstract workshops and untranslatable terminology. These things considered it is unsurprising that Soviet methods of "dealing with women" are still commonly practiced. This will be explored further in the second phase of this study.

Shuras are not formally mandated with the promotion of gender mainstreaming, but in some cases (for example in MRRD) their tasks have overlapped with those of the ministry gender units. This occurs particularly in cases where a gender unit focuses more on internal staff as opposed to external policy issues.⁸⁸ The respondent from MOIA cited above went on to describe the relationship between the women's *shura* and the gender unit in this ministry:

[R]ight now [a General] is the head and we hope that in the future the work of the shura will increase. This shura investigates some problems of the women personnel in the MOIA, who are working both in and outside of the Ministry... The job of the women's shura is to explore the problems of women working both inside and outside the MOIA. The gender unit also has the same job. There is a difference but I am not sure what it is. But gender is related to men and women, whereas the women's shura works only for women. (female respondent, MOIA)

⁸⁶ This reference to a "women's union" is used to signify a body existing outside of the official ministerial structure, for the support of female staff working within the ministry. Its independence from the ministerial structure is an asset that can be used to hold the ministry accountable to its staff, and to act on any criticisms put across by this union.

⁸⁷ People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan, a communist party which ruled 1978-1991.

⁸⁸ This observation is connected to issues of formal and informal aspects of gender mainstreaming – as mainstreaming consists of both officially written policy concerning the infiltration of a gender approach through programmes and procedures, *and* the diffusion of gender sensitivity through informal means (such as conversations, informal meetings, etc) within a ministry. Such informal means of mainstreaming will be considered in more depth in the second phase of this study.

Clarification of the differing roles of women's *shuras* and gender units is evidently necessary. If gender units are given the task of organising events for women's day, they will be all the more associated with women only. Their role in affecting ministerial policy may well be submerged by a focus on internal staff issues, which should be under the TOR of women's *shuras*. Gender mainstreaming and celebrations for women's day are not closely related and should not be merged together under a blurred, combined mandate of gender units and women's *shuras*. It is however possible to see why they might have been so to date given the connections with provisions for women in the civil service during the PDPA period

In the MOIA the distinction between the two entities is further blurred by the name of the "gender unit", which, as mentioned above, has been referred to as the "women's affairs unit" by ministerial authorities. How these "women's affairs" should be split between a *shura* and a unit is an issue for debate, as is the question of where to allocate the task of gender mainstreaming. In MRRD, there is a problem with the way in which personnel have been allocated to the positions of women's representative (head of the women's shura) and head of the gender unit. Moreover, personality politics between those in charge of gender mechanisms have determined to some extent the limited nature of the work of the unit and the shura. As described by one respondent, there is a distinct tension between the two mechanisms:

They had the idea for [a women's shura] but it is not functioning. Basically there is conflict between the women who are responsible for the shura and the gender unit – the same few women are responsible for them both. (female international respondent)

Such "mission creep" could be highly damaging to the potential effectiveness of both entities, and provides another reason for their mandates to be clearly distinguished. An understanding that *shuras* should function as unions, using their independence from the ministerial *tashkeel* to their advantage in critiquing current practices that disadvantage women, would be highly desirable.

4.4 Gender focal points

Gender focal points are individuals allocated the task of being the link between the ministry and another organisation, such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), ANDS or MOWA. A significant number of national and international respondents from various external organisations and ministries talked about focal points, which apparently exist in all three case study ministries, and yet there was little discussion about how these people were assisting with gender mainstreaming. According to a number of respondents, there are focal points for MOWA and UNDP, and yet no one seems to be aware of who these people are or what in fact is their role. The following and similar phrases were commonly used when respondents discussed focal points:

Many ministries...have focal points between them and [MOWA]. (female respondent, MOWA)

All ministries have focal points. (female international respondent)

[Our organisation] is bringing in a gender specialist [in MOIA] and also we have a gender focal point there. ([different] female international respondent)

The nondescript nature of these references to focal points implies a kind of tick-box mentality – as if the most important thing is that these exist, but that it doesn't really matter what they exist for. This is possibly because to say that focal points exist implies a certain level of coordination between ministries and other agencies, which can appear

impressive in reports for donors and other stakeholders. An example of the lack of clarity or knowledge around focal points is highlighted in this statement made by a staff member of MOPH who was not aware of their existence:⁸⁹

In the MOPH we only have a gender unit, but it would be good to have focal points as well. These focal points could then report events or cases related to gender. This is happening everywhere, [things] like the violation of women. (female respondent, MOPH)

To this respondent, gender focal points would act as a kind of gender police, monitoring any kind of gender discrimination and reporting it to the authorities. Whether this is the role for focal points envisaged by those responsible for them is another issue, but it is clear that this particular mechanism, in its current state, is relatively redundant as a means to further gender mainstreaming. It could be used to far greater gain if its mandate was clearly articulated and activities coordinated.

4.5 Technical advisors

A final mechanism to consider is that of international technical advisors or gender specialists employed in the ministries to assist with gender mainstreaming. These exist in MOIA and MRRD (NABDP programme) but not MOPH. There is also a large contingent of international technical assistants in MOWA, representing six international agencies⁹⁰ (as discussed in Section 1). National respondents' opinions vary significantly as to how useful this kind of international assistance actually is, on a continuum of useless to indispensable. However, it was suggested by international respondents that without international technical assistants, in the current context of ANDS processes (in which some respondents report that deadlines are more important than results⁹¹), no ministry would survive. One international representative described the process of preparing documents for the I-ANDS:

Recently MOWA has been requested by the I-ANDS Secretariat to review the strategy papers of all the ministries from a gender perspective. MOWA has reviewed and commented on 44 of these papers. Now MOWA has also been requested to work on the sector strategy papers and is currently preparing 22 of these. MOWA was sent the templates of all of these and asked to review them again from a gender perspective. They are expected to finalise these by the end of the month, and then they will be sent back to MOWA for more comments. The reality is that this is not done by MOWA, it is done by [external agencies]. All the documents are in English, they are sent across to MOWA in English...I think the I-ANDS is like a picture of a cake – it is beautiful but you cannot eat it. None of the staff here know what it is about. We are trying to include the staff in the process but it is difficult as we cannot keep up with the pace of the ANDS procedures. Also there is always the risk of the MOWA being abolished, which creates extra pressure. (female international respondent, emphasis added)

It is not simply MOWA that is affected by these deadlines. Indeed, according to other international representatives, the ANDS process has emphasised the shortcomings of all ministries, given that all of their strategy papers have been written by international consultants.⁹² This in itself also highlights the unrealistic nature of ANDS' demands and the way in which the process appears to have ignored limited capacity in ministries. In

⁸⁹ Indeed, none of the national staff of MOPH interviewed talked about focal points in the ministry, and so it may well be that they do not actually exist, or that they are not active within MOPH itself.

⁹⁰ These include two programmes from JICA, TAF, UNDP, UNIFEM, GTZ and UNFPA.

⁹¹ Female international respondent and field notes (I-ANDS meetings).

⁹² Various international representatives.

MOIA, one international consultant appears to be the driving force behind most of the work on gender in the ministry. While the achievements promoting gender awareness in the ministry have been admirable, they have been to date dependent on the work of an individual.

Despite this, this “indispensable” international assistance is far from coordinated. Various different agencies have taken up gender mainstreaming as a significant part of their work in Afghanistan – UNDP are “modelling” it, UNIFEM implementing it, and GTZ involved in the establishment of gender units in ministries for the purpose of gender mainstreaming.⁹³ Each of these three organisations has a different strategy, and different (but overlapping) set of five or six ministries in which to focus their efforts, the choice of which is justified in different ways.⁹⁴ It appears that there could be much more coordination between these agencies on formulating a joint strategy for assistance with gender mainstreaming.⁹⁵

The biggest problem with ministerial reliance on international support is that gender mainstreaming – already seen as an international project – can also be seen as a temporary unsustainable one. With so little time to train gender specialists or practitioners, who are few and far between in Afghanistan at present, there is a substantial lack of national ownership of mainstreaming. This is not due to a lack of support for women’s rights within civil society – there are a number of NGOs, community service organisations and other bodies promoting women’s interests in Afghanistan. The problem however is that this very rarely translates into policy. Furthermore, as explored in Part I, “gender” is widely seen as an external concept and is not broadly used within the women’s movement, which focuses (justifiably) on women and women’s rights.⁹⁶ One potential means to increase national ownership of gender has been the commissioning of a Gender Studies Institute at Kabul University by UNDP,⁹⁷ which will be a means through which to train Afghans in gender analysis and awareness, and thus develop a pool of national experts to work in the field.

It is clear from the analysis of these gender mechanisms that there is substantially more to be done in terms of encouraging gender mainstreaming at ministry level. It is evident that individual ministerial *tashkeels* must be used as tools with which to map gender mainstreaming programmes strategically. The I-ANDS’s blanket prescription for gender units to be implemented in every ministry is more of a recipe for nominal, under-performing and marginalized gender outlets than an assurance that gender mainstreaming will be implemented. While it is positive that mainstreaming has been included throughout the documentation of the I-ANDS, this reference will remain all but lip-service unless some consideration is given to the significantly variable structures of the ministries in which it is to be implemented.

5. Further institutional considerations

Gender mechanisms and their positioning within ministerial structures are not the only institutional factors impacting upon the potential for comprehensive gender mainstreaming. The Priority Reform and Restructuring (PRR) programme, the institutionalization of positive discrimination for women, and the various and

⁹³ This information was taken from other international respondents as the researcher was not able to interview a representative of GTZ.

⁹⁴ Interviews, international respondents.

⁹⁵ This is an initial impression that will be analysed further in the second phase of this research.

⁹⁶ This is reflected in the names of national NGOs and NGO networks working for women – for example Afghan Women’s Network, Humanitarian Assistance for Women and Children of Afghanistan, etc. As far as the researcher is aware there is no nationally-owned NGO or CSO body promoting gender equity.

⁹⁷ Female international representative.

overlapping sets of "rules of the game"⁹⁸ which are currently at play in the ministries – all of which factors concern the capacity levels of ministry staff – also affect this process.

5.1 PRR

PRR is acclaimed in the I-ANDS as a principal method through which to improve the calibre of the civil service in Afghanistan.⁹⁹ It is in the process of being implemented in the majority of ministries. It involves staff members taking tests and interviews in order that their capacity for their positions might be assessed. If deemed necessary, staff are moved to other positions within the ministry to which their skills and abilities are perceived as being more appropriately suited. In the long term, this initiative may well be beneficial for ministries currently experiencing a lack of human resources. At present however, ministries are struggling to accommodate the new changes, with many staff filling positions with which they are unfamiliar. This was exemplified during data collection for this study, as many interviewees stated that they could not give detailed information as a result of having occupied their posts for only a short period of time.

In theory, PRR is a credible means of re-vamping a staff body to improve its efficacy and productivity. Its potential effect on gender mainstreaming is significant as, if those charged with the task of overseeing gender mainstreaming already have some experience in the field, and are well qualified for their positions, there is a stronger likelihood of it being implemented effectively. With more competent staff, the need for international assistance for mainstreaming may well be reduced, and a focus on national ownership of the agenda could be restored. However, this is making a variety of assumptions, namely that there are indeed specialists in mainstreaming to take the positions, and that, once in post, they will prioritise mainstreaming. Moreover, PRR is not the magic bullet that it is portrayed as being in the I-ANDS.¹⁰⁰ Rather, it is a new set of "rules of the game" superimposed onto previous (and often patronage-based) methods of securing employment in the ministries which have not disintegrated with the introduction of PRR.¹⁰¹ As such, the system could be manipulated easily by those with the appropriate connections. Furthermore, there are other factors contributing to the inefficacy of the civil service at present, one of which being the extremely high levels of bureaucracy which are slowing the pace of the policy process. One respondent described this problem, referring to the way in which MOWA is currently functioning:

In this ministry the administrative reform process (PRR) has started and finished. But still lots of things need to change in the system...The people have changed in the PRR system, but the other systems have not changed. For example in this department if we want something, I approve it, but it takes a long time and a long process to be approved by the other departments. In requesting one piece of white paper we would need to use 10 pieces of paper in stationery request forms to be approved by different departments. (female respondent MOWA)

It is apparent that the re-shuffling of staff will be only the beginning of a system of reform that is desperately needed if the ministries are to improve their performance and if they are to take mainstreaming on board effectively.

⁹⁸ D. North, 1993, "Economic Performance through Time," Prize Lecture, *The Sveriges Riksbank Prize in Economic Sciences in Memory of Alfred Nobel 1993*, Taken from http://nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/economics/laureates/1993/north-lecture.html, (accessed 23 October 2007).

⁹⁹ I-ANDS, 1:35.

¹⁰⁰ I-ANDS, 1:35.

¹⁰¹ A. Pain, pers com.

5.2 Positive discrimination/affirmative action?

The implementation of PRR also has evoked a strong response from female members of ministry staff, who overwhelmingly supported the institutionalization of positive discrimination to assist women in their re-application process. The following quotations reflect views of the majority of women interviewed on the subject of PRR:

Yesterday we had interviews in my department for the promotion of female staff. Also one male member of staff applied for the position, he was actually my relative, my maternal cousin. I told him not to apply because I would only support women and not him. He went to the committee to complain about this and they sent me a letter asking why I would not put him forward for promotion. I said if you ask me to go to Karzai to explain this I would say this: how can we reach our target within the ministry for 38 percent of women if only 8 percent are now women and we do nothing about it? (female respondent, MRRD)

I am a member of the administrative reform committee and I am trying to bring gender issues into this... I think that if men get 100 percent in these interviews, then women should be given at least 80 percent, because women have difficulties outside of work and they deserve a chance. For example they have children, housework responsibilities and other duties. ([different] female respondent, MRRD)

I have discussed with the PRR committee about hiring female staff and I suggested that there should be positive discrimination for women because the level of discrimination is different between men and women. Women spent six years at home during the Taliban and we need positive discrimination until the capacity of women has increased through courses, etc. (female respondent, MOWA)

Almost unequivocally, women interviewed supported some means of positive discrimination in the PRR process in order to compensate for their disadvantage compared to men in terms of education and training. Some, as demonstrated in the quotations above, are actively implementing schemes through which women are given an advantage in PRR assessments. This in itself is unsurprising, as many of these women worked in the ministries in the PDPA era in which similar kinds of policies were adopted. The arguments for this kind of approach are well-founded in Afghanistan, where women have been systematically marginalized by successive political regimes in recent years.¹⁰² There are very few educated women in the country as a whole, and many of these are concentrated in urban areas where they work for international agencies, earning higher salaries than the ministries could offer. As such, measures of positive discrimination, such as quotas, could be seen as highly necessary to build contingents of women in ministries. However, it is not necessarily true to say that women in the Kabul are educationally disadvantaged per se. Women do tend to have multiple duties outside the workplace in Afghanistan. Nevertheless, it cannot be dismissed that the rhetoric of domestic duties is commonly employed as an automatic response to questions concerning women's time constraints.¹⁰³ In many cases, women (and particularly those working in mid-high level ministry positions) have female family members and hired household assistants to undertake household chores.

The negative consequences of positive discrimination and its effect on gender mainstreaming must also be considered. In spite of the fact that a pool of qualified women does exist, measures of positive discrimination can sometimes involve the hiring

¹⁰² There is a much wider debate on the advantages and disadvantages of affirmative action policy which cannot be discussed at length here. Further discussion is given in Phillips, A., (1995), *The politics of presence: the political representation of gender, ethnicity, and race*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.

¹⁰³ See AREU's previous issues paper on the representation of gender interests in parliament (*Wordsworth, A Matter of Interests*).

of unqualified women, who are seen as such, resented by men whose positions they occupy, or pitied and treated as second-class employees. One international representative described the potential consequences of adopting positive discrimination without caution:

There are a handful of... women who are competent but there are also a lot of women who have been promoted past their competencies, as there is a lot of tokenism in the ministry. Women have been advanced, they have achieved more rank on their shoulders but their jobs haven't changed. They are still making tea and going home early. Women are given special privileges and they are treated like children, they are given indulgences, they are not expected to work, and if they are not there then no one asks why, no one challenges them, they are treated like spoilt children. People see women in... uniforms but they are not contributing to the organisation. (female international respondent)

Measures of positive discrimination can be detrimental to perceptions of women working, and can damage rather than strengthen women's reputations in the ministries. If as the government's Gender Mainstreaming Policy states, a required component of gender mainstreaming is "the actual participation and leadership of women",¹⁰⁴ positive discrimination could significantly affect its implementation. According to the respondent cited above, perceptions of working women will change only when women are able to prove their worth. This in itself is only likely to happen when there is a critical mass of qualified women employed in the ministries. As such, there is a trade-off between the hiring of women en masse, and the hiring of those specifically qualified for their particular positions.

There is a danger that if the recruitment of women is emphasised, this recruitment will replace notions of gender equality. In many interviews, respondents seemed to imply that their ministry was "doing gender" in trying to hire a certain percentage of women. This was particularly the case in the MOIA, where very few women indeed are employed in comparison with the vast numbers of male staff, and a commitment to the hiring of significant numbers of female staff was often emphasised by respondents. However, how they will accommodate these women once they are employed is another matter, as at the moment there are not sufficient women's bathrooms to accommodate the few female staff already.

This being the case, there are certain inadequacies with suggested policies. For example, NAPWA states that the security sector should be comprised of 30 percent women in 15 years' time.¹⁰⁵ The document states such a high target for a reason – that, if ambitious goals are set, more effort is likely to be put into achieving them, and they might be half-way achieved.¹⁰⁶ However, there is a distinction between ambitious, and merely unrealistic. One international respondent commented that the police force in Britain has existed in some form for centuries, and yet it is only in the last 35 years that women have been accepted within it.¹⁰⁷ This respondent went on to explain in an interview that at present women comprise approximately 23 percent of the British police force – a level which has taken 35 years to attain.¹⁰⁸ Whilst one would assume

¹⁰⁴ GoA, Gender Mainstreaming Policy, in NAPWA, Annex A, 103.

¹⁰⁵ NAPWA, 26. NAPWA suggests that this is an ideal target, and that if the country can achieve a 20 percent increase in the number of women involved in security sector service delivery after 10 years, it will be on its way to achieving 30 percent in 15 years. The benchmark is still, however, unattainably high.

¹⁰⁶ Female international respondent.

¹⁰⁷ Female international respondent. It is interesting that this respondent made reference to this point, and her doing so highlights the fact that individual internationals are all too aware of the shortcomings of policy recommendations in the I-ANDS and NAPWA. Such shortcomings appear to be a problem with the system, and not so much with individual players within it.

¹⁰⁸ Female international respondent.

that Afghanistan will not follow the same path to gender equitable policing as the UK, this statistic nonetheless indicates the level of resistance to change that has been experienced in other contexts. It is an oversight to omit an insistence that the ministries prepare to meet such targets through the improvement of their institutional structure, facilities and training mechanisms to accommodate this incoming staff body. It is also unlikely that women who are brought in to the ministry through positive discrimination and without adequate training will contribute substantively to the gender mainstreaming agenda.

The persuasion of this paper, then, is that measures of positive discrimination are firstly not enough to combat gender inequalities, and secondly that they can be detrimental to the mainstreaming agenda if not combined with clear policies on how ministries intend to level the playing field, as it were, for their female staff. A focus on affirmative action as opposed to positive discrimination would involve a more comprehensive rendering of all systems, policies, programmes and services gender sensitive. This, indeed, is the ultimate aim of many technical advisors working on gender in the ministries studied and can be seen as an ideal towards which efforts can be channelled. However, the reality in ministries at present is that a very basic, superficial form of positive discrimination is being employed – namely, the hiring of women en masse whose qualifications do not meet minimum requirements. While this is a start and the recognition of the need for female staff members must be encouraged, it cannot be assumed (as it has been by respondents for this study) that “gender mainstreaming” is being implemented in this way.

5.3 Overlapping institutions: competing rules of the game

Competing “rules of the game” or institutional systems overlapping within ministries are affecting the implementation of gender mainstreaming. According to North, an institution is a set of rules by which social activity is governed.¹⁰⁹ While a ministry in itself is an institution, there exist other institutional systems within it. An example of an institutional process currently being implemented would be positive discrimination for women, and an example of an older, more established institutional system the patriarchal hierarchy that often determines means of promotion in a particular establishment. New policies and procedures regarding women working have been superimposed onto ministries but they have not completely replaced the more established older systems. These older systems themselves are not static, and may well have altered during the war years in which ministry activity dwindled somewhat. Those women who have secured their positions (and particularly high-level ones) through PRR, positive discrimination measures or through their rank and reputation as attained in the Soviet era, have at times faced opposition from male colleagues. One senior member of staff of a ministry talked about how her role had been limited by ministry authorities:

Unfortunately... people do not like women to be in power or work in executive positions. So they have limited my authorities here...We had an executive meeting in which the minister, deputies and minister's high authorities participated. I talked about my department's promotion and submitted all the reports. When the participants saw that this department had developed and that there was no corruption, they decided to limit my authorities. They did this just to show the president and the people that women cannot work in leadership positions. (female respondent)

This is a respondent's perception of why her authorities have been limited, and there may have been other factors contributing to this happening. Nevertheless, it can be argued that an older set of rules determining appropriate levels of authority for women

¹⁰⁹ North, Economic Performance through Time.

collide with the new system which apparently functions on principles of merit (PRR). These older rules of the game also clash with newly-introduced measures of positive discrimination. As such, while a woman may be able to navigate PRR or positive discrimination successfully, she cannot necessarily control how her terms of reference or employment might be altered or limited by higher authorities once in post, as a result of a predominantly patriarchal institutional culture. This has serious consequences for women's participation in ministry leadership and decision-making, and by extension for gender mainstreaming.

The way in which women are perceived in their work roles depends on the ministry (and indeed department) in question. For example MRRD appears quite progressive in its support for women in leadership. There are several female heads of department who appear to be highly respected within the ministry. However, it is interesting nonetheless that a senior male member of staff described why his female employees were respected in terms of biological determinism:

Women are always honest people. They will not get corrupt so easily. They have integrity. Women have this more than men. They are less corrupt and this is why I have two women heads of departments... The evidence is in the natural characteristics of women... If you put them in senior positions then it will be beneficial for the organisation. (male respondent, MRRD)¹¹⁰

In this case, reasons given for altering the rules of the game to allow women to take on positions of authority do not concern their equal capacity for leadership, nor their right to compete as equals, but rather their perceived sex-determined characteristics. This less transformative, less controversial efficiency approach allows an easier shift between sets of institutional practices.

ANDS is keen that ministries play along with the new mainstreaming rules. By doing so these ministries apparently gain kudos (and funding) with the international community. However, this is not to say that these rules are substantively taken on board, or that they replace the male-preference that has dominated the ministries and their policies since their establishment. One respondent from MRRD explained the lack of progression with the gender agenda in his ministry according to the nature of the civil service and its staff being closed to new ideas:

[T]radition and culture have an impact on gender here. People in the ministry have some knowledge about gender, but it is minimal, it is not enough. The contracted staff are more modern-minded than the civil servants, as sometimes the civil servants are old-minded and they do not accept new terminologies... [T]he contracted staff mainly come from different countries and they are highly educated... [While overseas] they were able to adopt a global mindset and when they came back to Afghanistan they were ready to introduce new ideas. As for the civil servant staff – if they were hired by MRRD then most of them have been here for 20 years, and they have not changed their environment. They haven't gone outside MRRD to see what happens in other places. This is a general occurrence in the ministries in Afghanistan. People are recruited once and then they stay in the same place, and don't get familiar with other offices or NGOs. This is why they are not active or moving forward [in gender]. (male respondent, MRRD)¹¹¹

¹¹⁰ The assumption that women are somehow less corrupt than men is an international phenomenon and is discussed at length in AREU's previous issues paper on gender interests in parliament (Wordsworth, *A Matter of Interests*, 31-32).

¹¹¹ This perceived difference between the attitudes of older civil servants and younger ministry recruits is reflected to some extent in the data. Differentiation between different groups of respondents will be

It is evidently that different rules of the game are overlapping here, and that, according to this respondent, those of gender mainstreaming would not be easily accepted by the “old-minded” members of ministry staff. Given the significant influence of this older elite in policy-making processes, these rules remain at present merely a cosmetic layer, lacking substance.

Another respondent described the problem in terms of a lack of time:

We cannot bring in gender mainstreaming in 1-2 years, it will not be sustainable, or at least not as much as if the desire for mainstreaming comes from the grassroots. (male respondent, MRRD)

Changing an institutional culture and replacing the rules of the game takes years of institutional development and change. Judging by the deadlines set in the ANDS process,¹¹² however, one could assume that the ANDS and international community (and particularly high-level donors) expect gender mainstreaming to be institutionalized and accepted in a much shorter space of time.

The question to be asked, then, is how can policies, systems and procedures affect and improve the current attitude towards gender equity within accepted institutional cultures, and in what timeframe? It can be argued that neither PRR nor positive discrimination, in the ways that they are currently functioning, can alone affect this institutional culture of patriarchy in a significant way. However, if they are combined with a commitment to the training of female staff and to the financial provision in ministry budgets to the increasing of gender awareness, the potential for change and acceptance of a substantive gender mainstreaming agenda may be increased.

6. Nature of policy-making in ministries

Gender mainstreaming is essentially a means to influence policy from a gender perspective. This being the case, the potential reach of mainstreaming in the current ministerial context is greatly affected by the policy-making processes themselves. The way in which policy is made and by whom will affect the extent to which gender can be mainstreamed through it. This Section considers the nature of international influence in policy-making along with issues of coordination, the top-down nature of policy-making, and the highly problematic question of funding for the implementation of gender-mainstreaming policy.

6.1 International influence in policy-making and issues of coordination

It is common for ministerial policy in Afghanistan to be guided by international (often donor) organisations and influenced strongly by ANDS processes. All three case study ministries and indeed MOWA have been allocated substantial international assistance (both financial and technical) in the building of their ministry policies. This influence directly contributes to the extent to which and how gender and gender perspectives feature in these policies. The following quotations highlight the ways in which international bodies and the ANDS are perceived to be involved in ministerial policy-making:

Gender issues are in the I-ANDS and this has nine aims and goals in terms of women’s issues. As well as this, before MRRD had gender issues in its policies

referred to in more depth in the Issues Paper produced at the end of the second phase, when more data have been collected. Disaggregating groups of respondents in this way could lead to concrete policy recommendations, such as different kinds of training for different staff groups.

¹¹² This can be seen for example in the deadlines set for the Sectoral Strategies, as outlined in *ANDS Internal SSDG Action Plan, September 16 (2007)*.

and procedures, but after the I-ANDS was published, we improved our plans according to its guidelines. (female respondent, MRRD)

In the Interim Government interim strategies were developed and this was a very participatory process, all the stakeholders were involved, the implementing organisations, the donors, other organisations and representatives of MOPH, they developed a policy. A group made up of men and women was assigned to work on the draft. They had coordination meetings and the draft was finalised, it then went to the CG on Health and Nutrition, which then went to the Technical Advisory Group, and then to the executive board for approval. (male respondent, MOPH)

International groups were involved in making the policy for the MOWA...UNIFEM was involved in making the policy of MOWA. [They] worked on making the 10-year plan for women...JICA and GTZ also support MOWA in making policy. In making policy for this department an Iranian lady...was involved and also a woman from Pakistan. Together they made the advocacy strategy of this ministry. And one Japanese lady...also worked on making policy of this department. MOWA also acts as a policy-maker for other ministries. (male respondent, MOWA)

This level of international involvement is unexceptional in a post-conflict context and is in many respects a necessary factor in the re-building of the Afghan state. Having said this, it can be seen that the extent of policy transfer of best practice in other countries – particularly on the subject of institutional reform – to Afghanistan is high.¹¹³ The question of how decisions are made by the international community, and whether they are indeed appropriate to the Afghan context is pertinent. One respondent from MOPH talked about international policies being “pasted” from other countries into Afghanistan without using “paste special” – meaning that policies (and particularly those on gender) had not been adequately adapted to the national context.¹¹⁴ Moreover, with the “international community” comprising so many different actors and organisations, the level of coordination between them can be called into question. Indeed, it appears that GTZ, UNIFEM and UNDP have all proposed separate (but overlapping) policies for gender mainstreaming initiatives in the ministries for MOWA to take on board (see section 4.5). This is combined with a problem of coordination between ministerial departments, as a respondent from MRRD described:

[W]ithin the ministry [policy-making] is not very coordinated, it is done in different ways across the ministry... What we lack is a department to coordinate all of these, to check that one policy made by one department does not affect another policy made in another department negatively. (male respondent, MRRD)

As such, while gender mainstreaming policies do exist in ministries, the likelihood of them being implemented substantively without coordination between international actors or between ministerial departments is slim. This is particularly the case when ministries are without means to monitor or evaluate the extent to which gender mainstreaming policies are implemented. There do not appear to be any means of monitoring the gender mainstreaming initiatives in the three case study ministries, and staff working on gender issues are often unsure of the authorities to whom they are accountable. The area of monitoring and evaluation will be discussed more in the second phase of this study.

¹¹³ Kandiyoti, pers. com., and A. Pain, *Concept Note for a study on policy procedures in Afghanistan*.

¹¹⁴ Interview, male respondent, MOPH.

One effect of the extensive involvement of international parties in ministerial policy-making is that mid-level staff appear to have very little information about the policies of their ministry. Indeed, when talking to heads of department in this study, it was extremely difficult to gain any kind of information about departmental policies.¹¹⁵ Little documented fact was given concerning departmental or ministerial policies, and there is a level of confusion between what has already been achieved, and what is currently being worked on.¹¹⁶ Such a blurring and unavailability of policy detail could prove a significant stumbling block for the actual implementation of the gender mainstreaming which may be written into ministry-level policy.

6.2 Top-down structural frameworks

Methods of policy-making are also an important consideration for the promotion of gender mainstreaming. While in one of the case study ministries, MRRD, a participatory process is apparently encouraged, most respondents perceived policy-making to be the role of high-level ministry staff. The following quotations reflect a significant proportion of respondents' answers regarding responsibility for policy-making:

Policy in the ministry is made by the higher leadership levels – by the minister, the deputies, and they do not ask any of the other staff for their ideas. They do not want anyone else in the MOIA to be involved in making policy. I have never seen them ask for the ideas and opinions of the staff members of the MOIA about policy. (female respondent, MOIA)

Policy has been made by the heads of all departments, by the deputies, the minister and national/international advisors. But no one asks about the ideas and problems of the lower staff. (female respondent, MOWA)

I am new here in the ministry, and no authority is given to the lower staff members to change policies. There is a top-down system of management in all the ministries. (male respondent, MOPH)

We have policy but it is not made inside the department - people above us make policy and the ministers make policy. But the head of our department is called to meetings with the consultants of the ministers and then they make the decisions. (female respondent, MOWA)

This kind of top-down institutional structure is not unusual and especially not in the more "militarised" hierarchical ministries such as MOIA and MOD. However, it does have implications for the gender mainstreaming agenda, as it implies a necessary reliance on certain senior members of staff and a need to harness their political will to implement gender-sensitive policy. Attempts to further the gender mainstreaming agenda in this context could be best targeted at high-level policy-makers. This is supported by the fact that, as the following quotation describes, MOIA has recently established a steering committee for women's affairs, which is comprised entirely of senior staff:

[The women's affairs steering committee] is all staffed by men and it is headed by the deputy minister...It is made up of senior level staff, and we are pulling them in to support the women's affairs unit. The idea is to get them involved in the development of gender policy in the ministry and then to implement these

¹¹⁵ This could also be due to the fact that heads of departments were also unwilling to give out ministry documents in case rules of confidentiality were breached.

¹¹⁶ This could be due to translation problems or respondents wanting to appear productive in interviews. However, many times in interviews, after initially stating that a particular policy had been implemented, respondents changed their story on being asked how this particular policy had been implemented, going on to say that it was still in the process of being approved or drafted.

in their own areas. It seemed to go well in the first meeting, however it is very hierarchical and so people won't express opposition outwardly. But I think eventually they will be comfortable enough to voice disagreement in the meetings if they need to. (female international respondent)

A culture of unchallenged authority is outlined here – one which is likely to be common in ministries in Afghanistan and which is reflected strongly in the data for this study. It is difficult for middle-ranking staff to challenge the statements of senior officials, and thus if those officials are keen to promote gender mainstreaming they may be able to further the agenda significantly within policy-making. However, the quotation given above implies that the situation is conducive to change. Steering committees or other such bodies may provide forums in which a culture of debate can be encouraged. Furthermore, if members of staff do indeed “get... involved in the development of gender policy in the ministry and then... implement these in their own areas,” steering committees on gender may contribute to the bridging of the current gap between ministerial- and departmental-level policy-making.

6.3 Gender mainstreaming: issues of funding

A final aspect of policy-making and its propensity to accommodate gender mainstreaming initiatives is funding priorities. There appears to be no direct bureaucratic procedure in any of the case study ministries for acquiring funds for the implementation of gender policies.

There are budget problems for [gender units], because when they want to conduct trainings they do not have their own budget for these, they have to ask the training department from their own ministries... I heard this about the gender unit for the ministry of commerce. Then the training departments in their own ministries have to fill in forms and ask the MOF for some money for their programmes. As I have heard, there is no code for gender trainings on that form, but every other kind of training has a code. (male respondent, MOPH)

The gender unit in our ministry does not have any budget for training and workshops. The expenses for the trainings and workshops are paid by other departments within the ministry. I do not know why the gender unit does have any budget for the training. I think it is because the Ministry of Finance only recently established a gender unit... and maybe this section is very small and the leadership department does not pay attention to it. Our ministry never feels that this unit needs such kind of things. Whenever we want to receive some funding for training and workshops we have to follow a long process to get it. First we should make a request and submit this to the finance department and all the time they say there is no money and you have to wait before they will give money for us for the training... It is a long process to get money. If the gender unit had its own budget then there would be no need to follow the long process. (female respondent, MRRD)

Even if a gender-sensitive approach is integrated into macro-level policy, and even if it is transferred down to departmental strategies, it may well be hindered by difficulties in obtaining funds for implementation. If this is a problem for gender units themselves, whose very existence centres around the implementation of gender policies, it is likely to be even more of an obstacle for other departments whose incentive to implement these policies is already minimal. This will have a direct bearing on the success of gender mainstreaming, which relies on the trans-departmental adoption of gender-sensitive policies. Financial (dis)incentives carry significant weight in determining

whether or not a mainstreaming agenda is implemented, irrespective of how gender-sensitive the policy-making process.

7. Increasing gender awareness: an emphasis on workshops

A key area to assess within the current context in ministries is the way in which information about gender and its implications is being disseminated internally. It is necessary to look at how national and international actors are attempting (if at all) to raise the gender awareness of ministry staff, a necessary precursor for gender mainstreaming. By far the most common means of “training staff in gender” is through workshops (also called trainings, “awareness raisings” or seminars). Given that this capacity building technique is so widely used, it can be assumed that it is considered effective by those choosing to provide them. However, a number of problems are identified with this approach, such as the vague discourse with which they are described, and the brevity of workshops.

7.1 Gender workshops: empty rhetoric?

The language of gender training is often vague. When talking about workshops, respondents – both those who had participated in and facilitated them – rarely gave details regarding the content and format of these workshops. The following quotations are representative of the general trend to avoid detail in describing them:

We need to give awareness about the law and rights of women to all people and we can do that through training and workshops. (male respondent, MOWA)

We will have short-term seminars to raise awareness and we should try to spread gender through the ministry in this way. (male respondent, MOIA)

They are not gender experts, and so we invite them to many trainings, and we try to help with capacity building to increase their knowledge. (male respondent, national representative of international agency)

This is the case for workshops of any kind, but it happens particularly with gender as a result of its being an abstract concept. In this study there has been a distinct lack of concrete descriptions of gender workshops and this contributes to the abstract nature of the concept of gender itself. This ambiguity appears to affect both internationally and nationally planned training events. In one meeting, in which a gender workshop was being planned in MOPH, a series of “buzzwords” were used, such as “brainstorming”, “snow-balling”, “group-work” – but nothing was said about what these are, why these particular techniques had been chosen and what the expected outcomes were¹¹⁷ (let alone what kind of follow-up might be provided).

7.2 Workshops: quick-fix solutions?

A further problem with workshops which contributes to their being perceived as superficial and cosmetic is that they are extremely brief in duration. While they are relatively easy to implement, workshops and their questionable outcomes were criticised by many respondents:

We do not necessarily need more trainings because trainings just happen in one day and then people forget what they have learnt. (female respondent, MRRD)

If [MOWA] combine training with other mechanisms and have a history or background of trainings, then the workshops will be fine, but if they are one-off

¹¹⁷ Research team observation notes, MOPH.

events then they won't do anything. This is the same for the gender trainings in the ministries. They need a continuous development programme and human resources. (male respondent, MRRD)

Today there is a one-day workshop from USAID and they invited all of our provincial staff just for one day from far places. In my opinion one-day workshops pass for Afghan people like the wind blows, they are gone very quickly, and no-one can learn anything because they pass very fast... There are some traders who export unripe bananas from Pakistan. They bring unripe bananas here and then for two nights they put some carbon on them, and after this time they ripen. However although they look ripe they do not have any taste or quality like the naturally ripened bananas have. People are also like these unripe bananas and in the course of a one-day workshop donors want to give them awareness and send them back to their province, but the knowledge they get from the workshops will not have any quality. (male respondent, MOWA)

The Gender Training and Advocacy Department in our ministry has many plans but they do nothing – they have workshops but they do nothing else. (female respondent, MOWA)

Both national and international efforts to provide gender training in the form of workshops were disparaged by many respondents. The ambitious nature of attempting to train people in gender sensitivity in a short time was strongly critiqued. The practice of raising awareness through workshops perpetuates the notion that gender can be “done” in a series of short sessions, and that it is not something that needs to be considered from a long-term perspective. There is rarely any follow-up from workshops, and it is difficult to see how this method of raising gender awareness can be sustainable when funds usually come from international donors. Indeed, one respondent at MRRD complained about how, due to a serious lack of funds, MOWA were charging other ministries for the use of their gender trainers:

When we have training we ask MOWA to provide trainers and they ask us to pay money for their trainers. They should help and support us because we are trying to raise the awareness of women and we help them in their work. They should support and help us without asking for money. When they ask for money for their trainers, we prefer to hire some trainers from the NGOs because the NGOs also ask for the same amount of money, but the NGO trainers are more qualified and they are experts. (female respondent, MRRD)

There are no data to suggest that this is always the case, but if MOWA is charging other ministries for gender training services, it may discourage them from utilising these services. Alternatively this could discourage other ministries from seeking gender training at all. This problem with funding workshops, along with the serious lack of national gender specialists, is a serious issue which needs to be addressed.

Workshops, then, appear to be a far from effective means of promoting gender mainstreaming. There is a largely empty rhetoric surrounding workshops, and very few means to make them or their intended effects sustainable. This is particularly due to a lack of funds. It could therefore be argued that workshops are relatively redundant in their role of promoting cross-departmental gender awareness and mainstreaming.

PART III. Conclusions and Recommendations

8. Conclusions

Gender mainstreaming has been identified as the government's main strategy for achieving gender equality in Afghanistan.¹¹⁸ Policy documents such as NAPWA and the I-ANDS prescribe that mechanisms (including gender units, working groups and focal points) be established in the ministries to implement this strategy. However, there has been little analysis to date on exactly how these mechanisms are currently functioning.

As a relatively new concept in Afghanistan, gender has been conceptualized in a variety of ways and there has been a degree of misunderstanding of its meaning, largely because a suitable translation in Dari or Pashtu has not been found. The implementation of gender mainstreaming is proving difficult in a context in which gender itself is often considered foreign or un-Islamic.

This report considers the way in which gender mainstreaming has been introduced into national-level policy in Afghanistan and argues that international influence over the incorporation of gender equity goals in policy is significant. It finds that the expectations of the I-ANDS and NAPWA for the implementation of gender mainstreaming are highly ambitious. They do not take into account the few resources available for mainstreaming in a post-conflict, economically unstable, and unconsolidated state. Expectations outlined in these documents are for transformative change, when the attitudes of the international community in introducing mainstreaming in Afghanistan have been cautious and integrational. Moreover, there is little acknowledgement of the ways in which the high level of international assistance in Afghanistan might affect the sustainability of the mainstreaming agenda.

The assessment of gender mechanisms in three case study ministries (MRRD, MOPH and MOIA) in Part II of this paper finds that crucial to functioning of a mechanism (such as a gender unit) is the consideration of its vertical and horizontal position within a ministry. Furthermore, an understanding of the way in which an individual ministry is structured as a whole is necessary when determining where a mechanism should be situated for maximum potential efficacy. As such blanket recommendations for gender units in all ministries, with no further guidance as to where they should be located, is somewhat redundant. Women's *shuras* should not be overlooked – they are a potentially useful, nationally owned resource. Their position outside ministerial *tashkeels* can provide a vantage point from which to critique internal ministry practices if necessary. Other factors influencing the implementation of gender mainstreaming include PRR, measures of positive discrimination and overlapping institutional rules of the game. The ways in which ministerial policies are made – how and by whom – is found to affect whether mainstreaming is considered within those policies. This paper also critiques the emphasis in ministries on workshops as the principal means of training staff in gender.

Overall, this study finds that the adoption of substantive gender mainstreaming agenda in Afghanistan is an ambitious task which will require the lengthy commitment of national and international actors. Currently benchmarks are too high and deadlines too soon, with international agendas and processes running parallel to Afghan needs and expectations. Substantially more time than has been allocated will need to be given if I-ANDS and NAPWA targets are to be considered anything more than superficial indicators.

¹¹⁸ I-ANDS, 1:91.

9. Policy recommendations

Mechanisms

- **Gender units:** gender units should be established at the highest vertical position possible and in a horizontal position conducive to the influencing of ministry-wide policy. Official ministerial organigrams should be used as mapping tools in order that units may be positioned in the most strategic locations possible. Units should be established according to the varying structures of individual ministries.
- **Working groups:** inter-departmental working groups are useful and their formation under the support of a ministry gender unit should be encouraged. They could be more effective, however, if a department other than the ministerial gender unit (for example a ministry-wide policy-making department) chair their meetings. They also need to be made directly accountable to a senior ministry official.
- **Women's shuras:** Women's shuras should be encouraged as they are national entities and could prove an important connection between the push for gender equality through mainstreaming and the issues of marginalized women on the ground.
- **Mandate clarification:** The separate mandates of gender units and women's shuras need to be distinguished and clarified to avoid overlap of tasks. Shuras should function as women's unions, and should have a solely internal focus. Gender units should be concerned with gender mainstreaming both inside the ministry and through ministerial policies, programmes and budgets, but should not deal with the problems of female staff. While they may well become involved in the oversight of affirmative action policy implemented in the ministries at a later stage, which by nature deals with the issues of female staff, it is important that their policy-oriented role is first solidified with a clear and single-focused mandate. The role of focal points should also be clarified if they are to be considered an effective tool for gender mainstreaming. Greater coordination between the focal points of different agencies needs to be implemented.
- **Funding:** processes for the allocation and disbursement of funds for gender activities should be simplified and clarified. Gender units are currently waiting too long for their work to be budgeted, which contributes to the perception that they are not functioning.
- **Positive discrimination/affirmative action:** Recommendations for positive discrimination measures need to be combined with a commitment to increasing the quantity and quality of training for women and amending institutional facilities to accommodate female staff. A more holistic, "affirmative action" approach to human resource management should be taken, involving efforts to make all systems, policies, programmes and services in ministries gender-sensitive.¹¹⁹ Gender mainstreaming or "doing gender" should no longer be equated and limited to the increasing of quantities of women in ministries.
- **Gender workshops:** these are largely redundant, as gender as an abstract concept cannot be easily applied to the work and attitudes of ministry staff. Instead gender issues should be integrated into other training courses for ministry staff (such as in management, leadership, team-building) with practical suggestions on how to approach these subjects in a gender-sensitive manner.

¹¹⁹ With thanks to Juris Luna (UNIFEM-Civil Service Commission) for her comments on this subject.

Policy

- **I-ANDS draft Gender Equity Cross-Cutting Strategy benchmarks:** current vague “benchmarks” on gender in the draft Gender Equity Cross-Cutting Strategy need to be replaced with concrete targets which ministries can work towards. If they cannot be replaced, then these benchmarks need to be clearly operationalized in order to make their prescriptions implementable.
- **NAPWA review:** When the NAPWA is reviewed after one year, its targets and benchmarks need to be more realistic, and need to take into account the limiting aspects of the Afghan context.
- **Realistic expectations:** If the international community is going to take an integrational and incremental approach to gender mainstreaming in Afghanistan, they cannot expect transformative results (such as those prescribed in the NAPWA) in a short time. Expectations need to be adjusted according to contextual limitations.

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