Women’s Economic Empowerment in Afghanistan, 2002 - 2012
Situational Analysis

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About the Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit

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Preface

In the recent socio-economic culture of Afghanistan, as in most countries since the industrial revolution’s introduction of the artificial division between production and reproduction, women’s participation in the labour economy, whether productive or reproductive, has been invisible and unaccounted for in much policy-making, planning and budgeting. In parallel, socio-cultural practices specific to Afghanistan—often an uncertain mix between the Shari‘ah and the customary laws followed by different ethnicities and tribes—have adversely affected the living conditions of women and girls. As a consequence, women’s practical and strategic needs have not been addressed by consecutive regimes. In parallel, the discourse of women’s human rights has not permeated much of the more recent rhetoric around “gender empowerment” to materially and politically improve the lives of women and girls in Afghanistan.

This report looks at community contexts and the gender norms prevalent within them in order to assess the ways in which women’s participation in governmental and non-governmental projects offering economic opportunity has affected their sense of empowerment, agency, decision making and status within their families and communities. It identifies barriers to women’s access to economic well-being and examines the ways in which socio-cultural norms are circumvented or not by women’s agency.

The report concludes with recommendations based on the analysis and offers an understanding of the ways in which policies and processes can often work in limited and limiting ways at both programming and implementation levels. While streamlining can offer greater efficiency, there is a need for greater emphasis on effective and accountable programming for longer-term strategies that could offer a more sustainable environment for the economic empowerment of women in Afghanistan.
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Thanks are due to the many respondents who gave their time and proffered information. Their opinions and views on women’s empowerment in Afghanistan form the bedrock of this research. In particular, the female participants in the projects under study and the men and women in their families and communities provided invaluable information on the ways in which women and women’s economic empowerment are seen in society. In tandem, I thank the representatives of the organisations that implemented these projects and those in the various departments of the government who made data available and shared their opinions on the ways in which structural processes direct women’s empowerment.

Finally, I express my gratitude to the reviewers of this report who so kindly took the time and trouble to offer comments and suggestions in order to improve its quality and clarity.

Any mistakes and misinterpretations remain my responsibility.

Lena Ganesh
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Glossary

Az dov Nicholson: of from the soil, native to the land.

Baqad: A practice whereby the female members of a family (female children, young girls, and women) are given as compensation for blood feuds. Such brides are generally seen to be of low status and are more susceptible to domestic violence, as reminders of the harm done by her natal family to the marital family. It is also practised and socially regarded as legitimate when an engaged woman or girl runs away (or elopes) and her family cannot pay back the expenses of the engagement borne by the groom or return the toyana (bride price); another unmarried female relative of the family is given or taken away as restitution. Women and girls could also be given in baad in lieu of non-repayable loans. All baad is usually decided by the Jirga or condoned by the community and seen as restorative justice to prevent further conflict or the escalation of a feud. Baad is a criminal office in Afghanistan.

Badal: lit. “exchange”; a practice when a female (sister, daughter, or niece) and male from one family are married to a male and female from another. Seen as involving unwilling parties and/or inappropriate matches; for example, a father marrying his daughter to a man and then marrying the other man’s daughter in exchange.

Badgoi: backbiting, gossip, slander.

Bazār: market

Besharm: The term behayā (without modesty) or besharm (without shame), mostly used for women, is analogous with the inappropriate behaviour that lacks zanāngi (the ethos of the zanana). Besides adhering to gender norms in soft speech and fully modest dress, and visually and spatially maintaining gender boundaries, women are also expected to display deferential behaviour to be considered with “sharm.” Being besharm is also associated with the phrase padar karda nabod (one whose father did not bring her up well).

Chaddori: The traditional Afghan, all-encompassing, loose and stitched outer garment worn by women, ideologically associated with Islam and with the honour implicit in “keeping pardāh,” i.e. maintaining gender boundaries. It covers the body from head to toe, with a latticed opening over the eyes. It has generally been de rigueur among the settled population during the past century and blue in colour since around the 1990s in Afghanistan.

Doniyā-dideh: “one who has seen the world”; worldly-wise, non-parochial

Gheirat: honour, self-respect, prestige, lineage, status of a household, quam or individual man.

Hambaq: co-wife

Hashār: community “duty,” performed by women and men through, for example, sending bread at times of death to a family in the community or settlement, cleaning the mosque for festivals, participating in shurās for ceremonies like fateha or khatm of the Holy Quran, in happiness and sadness ceremonies or other related problems. It is another form of normal traditional community participation for women.

Madrasa: School for training in religious knowledge.
**Mahr:** The amount of money given by the groom to the bride. While *mahr-e-moajal* is given at the time of marriage, *mahr-e-ma'ajal*, the amount set upon the finalisation of marriage, is, under Islamic jurisprudence, a contractual obligation to be paid by the husband to the wife in the eventuality of the dissolution of the marriage. Both types are observed more in their breach than in observance.

**Mahram:** Husband or other close male relative with whom marriage is prohibited and who is responsible for the well-being and actions of a woman.

**Malik:** Village or tribe headman; the position may be hereditary (in a limited manner) or elected.

**Maulavi:** A person versed in Islamic religious knowledge; teacher.

**Nang:** It can be described as male-specific social capital that is honour-based and adds to his *gheirāt* as well as that of the family, household and *quam*. *Nang* can be seen as a complex mixture of honour, courage, bravery, dignity and shame.

**Nāmos:** It could be seen as the private aspect of *nang*, dealing with inviolate and inviolable privacy, and best personified in the women of the family, household, settlement, village, *quam* or nation. It “refers to the integrity, modesty and respectability of women and to the absolute duty of men to protect them.” Preserving *namos* is a constitutive logic of *nang*; it requires control over and protection of women.

**Pardāh:** “Keeping pardāh,” “keeping hijab (wearing a veil),” *zanangi* (noun) or being “with haya (modesty)” and “with sharm (shame)” are terms encompassing a range of behaviours that help recreate the spirit of the *zanana*, which is, in physical terms, the part of the house in which women are dominant. It is recreated through spatial and physical segregation, the veiling of the face and body, avoidance of unrelated men, restriction of physical mobility, supervision and control over physical movements, avoidance of public spaces, gendered forms of address, and similar behaviours.

**Quam:** Ethnic group or subgroup, clan, tribe; an identity-marker.

**Qur'an, Qur'an-e-Sharief:** lit. “reading,” Holy Qur’an; teachings and practices of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) during his lifetime.

**Sarshār:** a woman with some influence or leadership within the family or community, and who could also be seen as one who can flout social conventions.

**Shari'āh:** lit. “path”; the legal processes within Islam that govern the believer’s relationship to the state, community and the Divine in adherence to the principles of the *Qur'an-e-Sharief* and *Sunnah* given the extant socio-political circumstances. Among its major schools of *madhaahib* (jurisprudence), *Hannya* and *Ja'fari* are followed in Afghanistan. The former, seen as the most liberal and followed by the majority Sunni population, emphasises the application of logical reasoning by scholars in applying Islamic rules to new situations.

**Shurā:** local council

**Siyāli va shariki:** A highly structured social exchange of concern, material gifts or help and support between female kith and kin to show solidarity in good times and bad.

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Siāsar: Wife, woman in general; sometimes it denotes significant female kin, like daughters and mothers.

Sunnāh: The teachings of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). It reflects the “normative practices” to which the believer must adhere. The Sunnah supplements the Qur’an, offering insights into some of its meanings.

Tiarkhor: freeloader

Ulemā: singular, alim; religious scholars specialising in theology and religious jurisprudence.

Wajib: proper, correct, normative.

Watan: homeland, point of origin.

Zanāngi: appropriate feminine behaviour, the ethos of the zanānā. Includes displaying modesty, deference and keeping pardāh.

Zan-e-khānā: housewife, housebound and non-income-generating woman
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<td>ANDS</td>
<td>Afghanistan National Development Strategy</td>
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<td>AWEC</td>
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<td>CDC</td>
<td>Community Development Council</td>
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<td>CIDA</td>
<td>Canadian International Development Agency</td>
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<td>DDA</td>
<td>District Development Authority</td>
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<td>FRDO</td>
<td>Female Rehabilitation and Development Organisation</td>
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<td>HAM</td>
<td>Humanitarian Assistance Muska</td>
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<td>IRC</td>
<td>International Rescue Committee</td>
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<td>JICA</td>
<td>Japan International Cooperation Agency</td>
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<tr>
<td>MAIL</td>
<td>Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock</td>
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<tr>
<td>MoLSAMD</td>
<td>Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, Martyrs and Disabled</td>
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<td>MoWA</td>
<td>Ministry of Women’s Affairs</td>
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<tr>
<td>MRRD</td>
<td>Ministry of Rehabilitation and Rural Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>NABDP</td>
<td>National Area-based Development Programme</td>
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<td>NAPWA</td>
<td>National Action Plan for the Women of Afghanistan</td>
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<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non-governmental Organisation</td>
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<td>NSP</td>
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Executive Summary

The unequal position of women in Afghanistan has been researched in many different contexts and has been particularly noted in recent decades. While much attention has been paid to women’s human, social and political rights, women’s economic rights—a key human right—have received less attention. With women’s economic participation in Afghanistan increasingly being viewed as part of women’s rights and as a force capable of contributing to developmental aims, the limited results of these efforts are cause for concern. Funded by UN Women as part of its broader strategy around Women, Economic Security and Rights, this research aims to study the socio-cultural contexts of women’s economic engagement in Afghanistan in order to understand how projects for women’s economic empowerment have been effected and how social empowerment may derive from gendered economic participation.

This report focuses on the views of women participants and their communities in selected projects. It investigates the processes that help or hinder women’s participation in income generation, which the policies and strategies of the Afghan government and international agencies seek to engender. The broader research framework also maps the information from various resources to the strategies and policies of the government and multilateral and institutional agencies working in Afghanistan around issues of women’s economic empowerment, with these findings being presented in “Women’s Economic Empowerment in Afghanistan, 2002-2012, Information Analysis.” A third report, “Women’s Economic Empowerment in Afghanistan, 2002-2012, Information Analysis and Situational Analysis” presents a consolidation of the two research reports.

This report, a socio-anthropological inquiry, studies the ways in which women perceive empowerment and how the changes related to participating in a project for economic enhancement may affect women’s lives. Socio-economic transformation may not be explained without linking it to personal circumstances and aspirations. Accordingly, and because women’s economic empowerment derives from a community’s understanding of gender roles, the themes investigated in this research relate to issues of the gendered self in Afghanistan. These include women’s femininity as sexuality as partly defined by dependence, the socio-cultural parameters for women, the “sexualisation of space,” and women’s general exclusion from parochial and public spaces. In this context, social and community-based variables in women’s reaction to and interaction with empowerment and agency are seen to shape their income-generating practices and gendered social identities.

The report identifies five projects undertaken by government and non-government agencies over the past decade in Kabul Province, and investigates the ways in which the five selected communities position women, their economic engagement and status. Focus group discussions with women and men in these communities present the ways in which changes in the roles and rights of women did or did not take place over the past decade, due to, among others, migration, the changing economy and the effects of the project’s intervention in the community. These discussions with community members help our understanding of how gender roles are positioned in communities and whether such perceptions affect women’s ability to participate in a project or otherwise generate an income. In tandem, in-depth interviews with key male agnates offer insights into the ways in which women’s dependence and autonomy are constructed and how modifications have taken place. Individual women’s perceptions of themselves, their insertion in the community as well as the gender norms and gender roles that they may subscribe to are detailed. Correspondingly, the views of the representatives of
the implementing organisation and donor agency clarify the aims and objectives of the project implemented in the community, its efficacy as they perceive it and the economic and social empowerment resulting from the project.

Methods used in obtaining information were the following: ten in-depth, semi-structured interviews with project participants and their male agnates; ten focus group discussions conducted with female and male representatives of the research participants’ immediate communities; 18 key informant interviews with representatives of the implementing and donor agencies and their government partners.

Key research findings indicate that a project’s efficacy derives from its contextualised location within the community. While the Islamic idiom validates a project’s legitimacy and acceptance by the community, the women’s enhanced income propels significant changes in their self-perception and abilities to the extent that gender roles within the family and community are altered. Such women are able to contest the accepted frames of reference for women and cause certain changes in the perception of women as “dependent.” Women’s income generation and their consequent lesser dependence on men lead to an intricate web of attitudes toward them, in turn bringing increased status and respect in the family as well as in the neighbourhood and extended community. Economic betterment and relatively greater independence, by the women’s own admission, would not have been possible without the active support and permission of their families. Although all women were unequivocal about the rights that income generation can or has conferred on them, those involved in the projects who did not see a visible economic enhancement were more circumscribed within traditional roles. The viability of projects was massively dependent on the provisions included in their planning, and their sustainability was reinforced by their capacity to create links to markets.

The study sample is in no way representative of women in Kabul Province or in Afghanistan as a whole, but it provides useful insights and indications of trends. It is relevant because the projects identified are based on activities that have been duplicated in much of Afghanistan through donor and government policies and programming over the last decade. As such, the themes and dynamics emergent in the analytical framework are pluralistic. These concerns relate to the contemporary engagement of gendered development using ideational structures in social practice. Strengthening women’s participation in income-generating projects and their gains derived therefrom will therefore require emphasis on the following:

**The Islamic idiom:** Providing greater awareness and acceptance of the legitimacy of women’s income-generating activities in Islam and continuing community- and male-inclusive approaches in mobilising women.

**Women’s public and political participation:** Ensuring women’s mandated participation and autonomy in Community Development Councils, including through their voices, knowledge of administrative guidelines and training in logistics, project oversight, accountability and similar skills.

**Women’s human development:** Ensuring women’s access to education and healthcare, including through addressing transportation needs, preventing sexual harassment and providing all-female educational and medical staff.

**Gender-informed programming:** Community-based and gender-friendly needs assessment prior to project programming, including through ecological, environmental and market-based considerations with regard to source materials and energy needs.
This should incorporate women-friendly practices, such as female field workers and senior staff in implementing agencies, creating women’s spaces for training, extension services, production areas as well as the transfer of equipment.

**Women’s economic knowledge**: Developing cross-sectorial business development services and models for women’s needs in the small- and micro-business sector, including credit orientation, production, marketing, management, regulatory compliance, delivery mechanisms and community-based enterprises. Providing cross-sectorial investment and national and international linkages for women in micro-, small- and medium-scale entrepreneurship with regard to input supplies and product reach.
1. Introduction

The literature available on Afghanistan’s political phases since 1973 strongly indicates that the issue of women’s status has played a key role in the ideological and subsequent political successes and destabilisations of regimes; gender and gender roles have thus had a strategic importance. Even prior to this period, in the various phases since the 1880s, faith and gender have interacted differently in qualitative and quantitative ways with regard to region, sect, ethnicity, urban or rural location, education, *quam* (ethnic group or subgroup, tribe), class, age and other factors. Generally, but not very uniquely, women’s status in Afghanistan, especially since the 1940s, has been linked to modernity and progress on the one hand and to the preservation of culture and identity on the other. In parallel, another key factor used to validate or delegitimise successive regimes has been “the” Islamic frame of reference, and both gender and Islam have been consistently used to gain or maintain political influence, especially in the politically crucial provinces.

Rural Afghanistan’s hold over the country’s ideology and fortunes is significant, contributing to the historically decentralised nature of Afghanistan’s political landscape as well as the hold of traditional gender roles over the social vista. During these different phases, many often territorially bound, ethnic Afghan identities were seen to take precedence over a wider claim to a more national, territorially bounded polity. The last three regimes over the past three decades have especially emphasised the restructuring of gender roles and relations. Each period has provoked a particular reaction, but also highlighted that any move to address women’s rights must necessarily focus on the social cohesion reinforced by traditional structures and the resistance to change commonly observed in the rural structure of power. Overall, much of Afghanistan can be seen as a habitually traditional, multi-ethnic Islamic country situated in the “patriarchal belt” and with a strongly feudal base.

Over the past decade, the governments of various foreign countries, chiefly from the Global North, that have been engaged in directing the reconstruction of electoral, infrastructural and ideological processes in Afghanistan have paid special attention to the position of women, particularly as a justification of their governments’ presence in the country. Local and national governmental and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in addition to bilateral and multilateral international platforms have participated.

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in legal, social, economic, ideological and other efforts aimed at a more gender-just society in Afghanistan. These efforts along with developmental initiatives supported by aid from the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) and donor nations have generally taken place through debates on human rights and gender,\(^5\) which have gained ground in many parts of the Global North, but have had limited influence in many countries including Afghanistan. The literature indicates that both historically and relatively, women’s agency in Afghanistan—as a parallel reflection of other nations in the region—is a dynamic agent that has undergone turbulent times. Studies suggest that today the (unoriginal) negotiation of women’s agency in Afghanistan is a balancing act between refuting the regressive (traditional and neotraditional\(^6\)) tendencies within Afghan cultures and resisting the non-indigenous or “alien” modes of self-representation.

In this overall context, questions surrounding the “essential” nature of “Afghāniyat,”\(^7\) in a land of diverse peoples that has witnessed many of its traditional foundations being eroded or cut, can often involve women’s particular adherence to their community’s “ways of being.” For example, a participant in this research described Afghāniyat for a woman in the following terms: “She should know and take pride in her culture of being a Muslim. She should keep her ezzat [honour, self-respect, dignity] and should care about the quam’s name, she should know that she is a woman, and she should have a clear idea about her zanānī.” On the basis of the points discussed above, the notion of what constitutes empowerment and the ways in which it is perceived or experienced within the framework of the feminine self in Afghanistan could now be contextualised and examined briefly.

### 1.1 Analytical approach

The social network and hierarchy at play within many of the different Afghani communities are informed by certain key concepts, which are relevant to any study on the social structures that shape women’s roles as economic agents. Interviews conducted with the research participants and their communities revealed key themes influencing women’s economic engagements: women’s hesitant movement to non-private areas, the understanding of the male as the breadwinner and the sense and power of the collective. In the first instance, these themes can be seen through the role of nang (male-specific social capital), collective customs and a woman’s secondary status in society compared with the male. Indicators of these themes can also be found in statistics and narratives, and so it is useful to examine them as a prelude to the research analysis.

**Community**

Tapper\(^8\) suggests that identity in Afghanistan plays out along three major axes in addition to deen (religion): quam, watan (homeland, point of origin) and mazhab (sect: Sunni, Sunni, Sunni).

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5. It must also be noted that “gender” continues to be a relatively vague term in Afghanistan as in most countries, including those of the Global North. Its strength has been lost in translation, not only in the langue of Dari and Pashto, but also in the parole of the different forms of constitutive logic in Afghanistan. While gender’s interfaces with power, resources and rights are often easily combined with women’s rights, it is frequently seen as a zero-sum game compared with tradition, culture and what is understood as wājib (correct, accepted, normative) for women and men in Islam.

6. Neotraditional can be understood as the interpretation of relatively recent practices as timeless; apt illustrations would be Pashtoonwali and the chaddori.

7. Diacritics are added to express the long or upper vowel “a” in Dari.

Shi‘i, Imāmi, Ismaili, etc.). Quam implies “common origins and basic cultural unity and identity; the most used markers of quam membership are stereotypes of language, dress, food customs, comportment and somatology,” but self-identification may vary from the regional to sub-regional and extremely local level. A person’s engagement in the community could well form a primary sense of self-identification. The gheirat of a man, which could be described as a mixture of honour, self-respect and prestige, reflects his lineage, the status of his household or quam; gheirat is diminished or enhanced by the behaviour and actions of individual members and the identity group. If we look at ethnic groups with a view to understand how gender is positioned, the interpretation of the conceptual bindings in the Afghan social framework(s) throw up certain common concepts, such as nang, nāmos, gheirat and ezzat among others. These terms suggest that the nature of belonging for women is most often mediated through the mahram, family and community.

Family

The kor (family) and koranay (household) with their strong tendency toward “unity” are seen as the basic unit within the immediate and extended quam. Accepted notions of kor and koranay may range from the senior male head of the family along with his wife or wives, living with married sons and their wives and children, and any unmarried daughters to a unit of husband/wife and their children. Residence is both patrilocal and virilocal. Three or four generations sharing a compound and, most often, a kitchen is not unusual, particularly in deh (rural, village-based) society in Afghanistan. Toyanā (bride price) is also a traditional practice, but it can vary among communities. Upon marriage, a woman changes her identity and residence to join that of her husband’s family and similarly transfers her allegiance to her husband’s senior-most male agnate; she may sometimes be given a new name. In turn, the rights and duties shown toward her, which were previously connected to her earlier quam and family and personified in the senior-most male head of her natal household, are now generally held by the corresponding figure in her marital home. This head of the household is, along with her husband, directly responsible for her well-being and actions. Although women and men are the mahram of each other in terms of licit familiarity and physical proximity, in practice, being a male mahram translates to control over and responsibility for the behaviour, welfare and interests of the household women.

A woman could thus experience a major displacement when she is married. Patrilocality can signify a lack of belonging, which a woman may experience in both her natal and marital families. This lack is also reflected in many family and quam traditions, which fully accept a woman as agnate when she is an elder, a grandmother and, sometimes, after she becomes the mother to many children. Age and seniority are given great weight in private

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9 Pierre Centlivres, “Identité et Image de l’Autre dans l’Anthropologie Populaire en Afghanistan,” Revue Européenne des Sciences Sociales et Cahiers Vilfredo Pareto 13, no. 53 (1980): 29-41, 36 for the quotation, cited by Tapper, “Ethnicity, order and meaning,” 28. A quam /qawm could also be described as “any segment of the society bound by close ties: it could be an extended family, a clan, an occupational group, or a village. A qawm is based on kinship and on client-patron relations; before being an ethnic group, it is a solidarity group, which protects its members from encroachments from the state and other qawms, but which is also the scene of lively competition between contenders for local supremacy.”: Olivier Roy, “The New Political Elite,” in The Politics of Social Transformation in Iran Pakistan and Afghanistan, ed. Myron Weiner and Ali Banuazizi (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1994), 74.

10 A newly married couple usually moves into the compound of the husband’s family; wives are generally considered as links between natal and marital families.

11 Among the followers of this tradition, toyanā is seen to give value to women in the eyes of both their natal and marital families; breaking this tradition may deem the daughter or wife as muft (free) and bring her great disrespect. If toyanā is given in a community that does not practise the tradition, it can equally be scorned, being seen as selling a daughter and causing her dishonour in her father-in-law’s house.

12 For example, she can receive a non-mahram male guest in the hujrā (guest room) while acting as a representative of the absent male head.
and parochial social structures. Boys and younger males and most women (until they reach relative seniority) are placed lower in the hierarchy than most males. This placement brings deference norms expressed both visually and verbally. Verbal restrictions may include not being heard, opinions and dissents not being expressed and similar situations. Visual restrictions may include not being seen, lowering the eyes, not making eye-contact, not sitting in the presence of a senior, walking behind a senior and so forth. Much of this deferential behaviour could be described as “showing *sharm* (shame, deference, modesty)” or being “with *hayā* (modesty).” These norms are particularly expected of women.

In general, the *aql* (sense, reason, social responsibility, “nurture”) of men is better developed socially due to their association and cooperation with the wider group of men in the village or settlement and especially through communal prayer. For example, *naqes-ul-aql*’ (impaired or deficient mental faculties) is commonly used to describe the perceived lesser abilities of women. Tapper writes that “this *akl* is used to explain the subordination of women in terms of their ‘natural’ weaknesses.”

**Nāng and nāmos**

*Nāng* may be explained as honour-based social capital available to both women and men, which affects the *gheirat* of the individual, family, household and *quam*. *Nāng* may be seen as a complex mixture of honour, courage, bravery, dignity and shame. However, since “[w]omen, seen as central to the family, the measure by which standards of morality are judged, the guardians of society’s values, the veritable symbols of honour, must be kept inviolable,” in this framework, *nāmos* may be described as the male-specific and private aspect of *nāng*. Thus, women could generally describe themselves as the “*nāmos* of this man.” *Nāmos* deals with inviolate and inviolable privacy, personified best in the women of the family, household, settlement, village, *quam* or nation. It “refers to the integrity, modesty and respectability of women and to the absolute duty of men to protect them.”

Preserving *nāmos* is a necessary part of a man’s duty toward his personal and collective *nāng*; it requires exerting control over women and protecting them. Writing in the 1970s, Azoy noted that the resources for the average Afghan male remain land, water, livestock and women. He observed that among these:

> [i]t is women, however, who are widely considered the most volatile cause for serious dispute. Without control over female reproductive services, a man can have no sons (to assist in economic activity, to act as the core of political support, and to provide security in old age) and no daughters (to be married outside the nuclear family and thus provide both bridewealth and affinal alliance)... [Women] serve as the primary embodiments of masculine honour. A man may suffer the loss of material property and still keep the core of his self-respect intact. But the mere suspicion of illicit access to his women requires an overt response: immediate and extreme.

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Fear of miscegenation should also be noted in relation to gheirat (including purity of lineage) and nāmos. The cognate identity of a group could be highly threatened by the loss or potential loss of control over the womb, and honour killings are one of the many ways to reiterate quam and family boundaries. As in some other South and Central Asian societies, women’s sexuality in Afghanistan can also be regarded as the potential source of social fitnā (disorder, anarchy) and seen as unmanageable. Among the Ghilzai Pashtoons, for example, even slight transgressions in the interactions between non-cognate males and females may be seen as adultery; the Qur’ānic injunction on lowering the gaze, for example, categorically links illegitimate visual interaction to forbidden fornication (zinā) with the eyes.

Combined understandings of aql, nāmos and sharm may constitute “an ideology of control that embraces relations of both production and reproduction: it applies to the control of all resources, including the sexuality, reproductive capacity and labour of women.” Narratives describing nāmos reveal its conceptualisation and subcomponents, socio-cultural significance and the ways in which it is performed. In the current situation, these range from contesting photo-identity voting cards for women and their limited access to micro-capital to restricting their mobility and performing honour killings as well as other crimes. While the visibility of women is regulated through highly stylised social norms described in greater detail below, their voices are also limited, as are other forms of their identity. Being known as the wife of so-and-so, for example, translates into the real practice of not mentioning a woman’s name, especially in circles that are non-mahram to her. The public knowledge of a woman’s name can in itself be seen to detract somewhat from nāmos.

18 Azoy, Buzkashi, 32.
20 ‘Ibn Al-Qayyim said in Ad-Daa’ wad-Dawaa: “Failing to lower lower one’s gaze is the basis for the problems that afflict man. An unlawful look generates thoughts, then thoughts generate ideas, then ideas generate desires, then desires generate will, which develops into resolve and determination, then the action inevitably takes place if there is nothing to prevent it.” And further on, “To make this act more repugnant to the souls, the Prophet called it adultery of the eyes. It was narrated on the authority of Abu Hurayrah that the Prophet said: ‘The adultery of the eyes is looking (at what is prohibited), the adultery of the ears is listening (to what is prohibited), the adultery of the tongue is uttering (what it is unlawful to utter), the adultery of the hand is doing (what is prohibited), the adultery of the legs is walking (to what is prohibited) and the heart desires and wishes for (adultery) and the private parts affirm that or contradict it.” [Al-Bukhaari and Muslim (this is the wording of Muslim)].” Islamweb, “The Arrows of Satan,” http://www.islamweb.net/emainpage/index.php?page=articles&id=175823 (accessed 10 June 2013).
21 Tapper, Bartered Brides, 16.
23 Regarding the photo-identity cards, a man in a focus group discussion in Herat relates: “At the beginning of the 7 Saur Revolution [April/May, 1973] when Taraki came and announced that he will give identity cards for men and women, when they came to our village and said we must register our women and bring their photos we all ran away and went to Iran. Do you know what happened? The Iranian police, in order to give us relief aid, registered families and would take the names and photos of each family member for that purpose. We said take our names first. There, neither our honour nor manliness remained” (emphasis added): Sippi Azarbaijani-Moghaddam, “A Study of Gender Equity through National Solidarity Programme’s Community Development Councils ‘If Anyone Listens I Have a Lot of Plans,’” (Kabul: DACAAR, 2010), 47.
24 This was highlighted in this research study when the female focus group discussants at four research sites gave pseudonyms, even to the female team members. The names at the fifth site (Nahe-e-darsan) were changed by the team to protect the women’s identities.
Zanāngi, chaddori and transaction

The social structures in many regions and communities in Afghanistan use significant tools to maintain social order and preserve nāmos in intra-communal and public relations, including through seclusion and avoidance behaviour. The creation of a personal space for women in a public area may be achieved through the chaddori and through avoidance behaviour; both can be seen as a highly developed and codified presentation of the female self.

The chaddori, an outer garment used by women to create a personal space in a public area, has been discussed in many studies from a variety of perspective. Generically, it offers many meanings: invisibility, freedom, obscurity, anonymity, security, opportunity, privacy, power, status, repression, erasure of individuality and many others. “Keeping pardāh” and “maintaining zanāngi”, however, are terms encompassing a range of behaviours that help recreate the spirit of the zanānā, which is the part of the physical house in which women are dominant. The spirit of the zanānā is recreated through spatial and physical segregation, veiling the face and body, avoidance of unrelated men, restriction of physical mobility, supervision and control over physical movements, avoidance of public spaces, entering the parochial or public spheres only when accompanied by a mahram, gendered forms of address and so forth.

The chaddori could thus be seen as “portable seclusion” or “symbolic shelter,” even as the mobility rights of women become similar to those practised in the kinship context as shaped by the patterns of the community, settlement, or neighbourhood. In much of Afghanistan, the more secluded the woman is judged to be, the higher her household’s status. A good family and one deserving marital alliance could be described as a “pardā-kardā” family, that is, one that keeps pardāh. However, women “keeping pardāh” generally remain segregated from any direct interaction with the public as well as issues regarding household consumption, expenditures, healthcare, visiting the shops and sundry situations.

In addition to the chaddori, avoidance behaviour between non-mahram men and women in public spaces of the settlement or community is another manifestation of the restrictions placed on transactional behaviour between non-mahram women and men. If transactional behaviour denotes the permitted interactions and exchanges between people, avoidance behaviour is that which introduces restriction and separation into human dealings. Thus, in opposition to the familiarity of kor and mahram people, women and men use “completely polite” (hajāh) behaviour to show formality and maintain social distance with non-kor and non-mahrams. These are seen as markers of civility to


maintain distance, create separation and avoid any possibility of interaction through behaviour. Avoidance occurs through a sense of increased and formalised povkhtā (reasonable behaviour and quality, showing restraint, composure and adulthood).  

Viewed in this way, seclusion is therefore an expectation from both men and women in the public, non-home space (beruni) between non-mahram women and men. It is equally incumbent upon men to maintain this pardā and modesty in their interactions in non-mahram situations with women. It contributes to constructing invisibility, in which women and men are equally responsible in disregarding the presence of the other, with similar restrictions used to prevent any interactions. Even in more threatening situations, the actions associated with veiling—not making eye-contact or speaking directly to elders or most males—and the related values of deference and modesty both dominate and direct the dress code, levels of veiling, modes of address and people with whom women can interact inside and outside the home.

The relative weakening of norms for avoidance behaviour, however, may be observed in many villages and settlements. Given that the, the “boundary of kor [or koranay, family] space ambiguously extends to the physical limits of the entire settlement [w]omen moving outside the physical confines of the walled house...are thus still marginally ‘in’ the kor.”

This also points to the strong emphasis placed on agnate and cognate identity, rather than between women and men as such (male/female=honour/shame=outside/inside). The importance given to avoidance behaviour and women’s consequent non-participation in the male public sphere has had an ongoing relevance in Afghanistan. It may be observed, for example, in the practices of traditionalists and conservatives in withdrawing girls from secondary and tertiary education, in women’s inadequate access to mixed gender healthcare and in the lack of economic opportunities for women in mixed or male-dominated public spheres. It also manifests in the many calls by the ulemā (religious scholars) to have gender-segregated services and workspaces and on their insistence of a mahram being with women in public spaces.

**Reputation and stigma**

Preserving sharm is a complex issue. The power of the collective in the construction of a woman’s hayā/sharm/ezzat is a tool frequently used for the social control of women. Gossip may be considered as a form of social networking that contributes culturally to the dissemination of information and establishment of cultural and behavioural idioms. However, gossip also contributes to creating an active form of control over women’s movements. The unavoidable implication of the community’s “eyes” keeping watch over the demeanour and activities of women leads us to the generalised image of surveillance. When people pay attention to the details of women’s actions, women and their families consider the repercussions of their movements, the nature of their visibility and its possible effects on “what people will say.”

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28 It is in this sense that young girls are trained to turn their backs on any approaching non-mahram male and project inertness to signal their invisibility, as observed in this research; similarly, men turning their backs on approaching women were also noted in this study. Furthermore, as Anderson observes, “for example, a man will at the very least avert his gaze and ‘not notice’ the woman. He may additionally, cover his face and turn away, even face a wall”: Anderson, “Social Structure and the Veil,” 402.
29 The effects of these different, comparable and tighter norms on education and work participation ratios or the world-views of Afghan women have not yet been studied exclusively.
30 Anderson, “Social Structure and the Veil,” 415 and similarly noted in this research.
Reputation is considered more pertinent to one’s immediate social sphere and constructed within it. This form of communal behaviour is strongly gendered by both the perceiver and the perceived, as evidenced by the fact that women’s behaviour is under the judgement of *chaukhat* (lit. threshold) norms regarding gendered behaviour and mobility. Gossip affects women’s physical mobility as the family, whose support is crucial for the freedom of movement required in employment and education among other activities, is sharply attuned to the adverse reputation of the woman or girl. Negative characteristics attributed to one member of the family can often leave their mark on the entire family, sometimes even the *quam* or town. Conversely, positive identifications may enhance the social capital of the family and *quam*.

Lastly, the non-fulfilment of household duties can bring into question a woman’s “character.” Because a woman’s *nang* is so strongly linked to her *zanāngi*, if she does not heed one of the basic duties of her sex, i.e. housework, which is seen as women’s inviolate and intimate realm, this could provoke the activation of another socio-spatial parameter situating women within the *kor* (varyingly home, house, household). It can thus invoke the morality-duty nexus.

**Women and localised power**

The image portrayed in the above pages of women’s restricted space, mobility and power may be complicated in many senses by the setting of women’s daily activities, which include life-cycle rituals and familial and communal rites around religious events. Women are bound together in physical and emotional intimacy through their routine activities of cooking, cleaning and other household chores as well as through the many commonalities derived from menarche, pregnancy, childbirth, nursing and menopause. These extremely private spaces of the home may thus be regarded as sources of women’s strength, identity and female bonding rather than situations of negation and social oppression.\(^31\) Overall, the demarcation and limitation of space can be seen as both disempowering in terms of restriction and empowering through gendered and *kor* solidarity. Both interpretations are correct.

Further, studies have shown that the power wielded by women in Afghanistan is through their roles of wife and mother, i.e. through their key male agnates in the household. A woman gains honour with age and seniority, by bearing sons and then nurturing them to adulthood. With seniority also comes the “*mahram*-ship” of the younger female members of the family, along with the transmission of family memory, increased consultations with regard to marital alliances, authority over daughter(s)-in-law and so forth.\(^32\) Not being able to have children, especially sons, can diminish a woman’s position and “value” and detract from her achieved status as a wife and daughter-in-law.

Decisions around marriage and future alliances are taken by men or in consultation with senior women of the household, especially the mother of the household head and the mother of the future bride or groom. In the wider community, senior women have core alliance duties; i.e. once a match is considered desirable, it is their task to convince the other party of the viability of an alliance with their household. Very senior women can

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31 The framing of the intimate being can be seen, for example, in Dossa’s sensitive ethnography in which she shows how women in Afghanistan engage in recreating memory as both narrative texts and culinary performance, Perin Dossa, “Structural Violence in Afghanistan: Gendered Memory, Narratives, and Food,” *Medical Anthropology: Cross-Cultural Studies in Health and Illness* 32, no. 5 (2013) 433-47.

32 Tapper, *Bartered Brides*, 16, suggests that some forms of marriage may allow the partial transference of rights over women, with the woman’s natal male agnates retaining the responsibility for her actions until her sons are grown up.
also act as peace negotiators. When blood feuds erupt, women’s locus as the nāmos of the household makes it permissible for them to approach the aggrieved party and ask for forgiveness on behalf of their male agnates.\textsuperscript{33} Repentance and reconciliation, however, often assume the form of the physical (younger) female body, as instances associated with poar (blood money) and ba’ad (female family members given as compensation for blood feuds) have demonstrated; despite now being criminalised in Afghanistan, they still carry customary force.

Further, melmastīā (hospitality), a key theme of nang and sheirat, depends greatly on women’s participation in ensuring that the codes of hospitality are maintained, as men in this study pointed out. Women are responsible for siyāli wa shariki (between women), a highly structured social exchange of concern, material gifts or help and support between kith and kin to show solidarity in good times and bad. Hāshar (community “duty”) is performed by women, for example, by sending bread to a family in the community or settlement after a death, cleaning the mosque for festivals, participating in shurās (local councils) for ceremonies like fatehā and khatm of the Holy Qur’ān,\textsuperscript{34} or in happiness and sadness ceremonies. This is another form of normal traditional community participation for women. Such spaces have traditionally been a locus for women’s self and community-based identity.

**Changes in non-parochial areas**

In the less restrictive urban settlements, like Kabul city, women may be more mobile, although they may still continue to use the avoidance behaviour that is practised more obviously and rigidly by their rural and other urban sisters. In such public arenas, women also actively follow the implicit rules enjoined by the sexualisation of time and place. In general, women who do not observe pardāh or only observe a limited form of it “can use public spaces differently from women who do subscribe to the ideology of seclusion, even though there may be an ongoing general expectation that ‘proper’ women should not use public spaces freely.”\textsuperscript{35} In the transgressive role generally adopted by women when venturing into most urban public spheres, the presence of a male mahram continues to be just as necessary as donning a chaddori (or an acceptable social variant). Women without a mahram deal with negative spaces, exclusions, spatial fences and infringements on the integrity of their personal rights and safety, these being the characteristics of the society and its territorial “male” predominance.\textsuperscript{36} In certain situations in Kabul city, women are seen to verbally and vocally respond to sexual harassment.\textsuperscript{37}

It should be reiterated that in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, parts of Afghanistan did not cater exclusively to a particular set of concepts relating to seclusion. The Taliban era

\textsuperscript{33} In turn, this highly charged and symbolic supplicatory performance—sometimes with chaddori hems extended in supplication or with chadors thrown down or by holding a dōman gireftān (i.e. by going to the enemy houses and holding men’s chappan hems) or to other houses with the Qur’ān-e-Sharīfe as witness, or simply by making a request—cannot be easily refused, as it would affect the other party’s nang (through the inability to forgive, lack of generosity, etc.).

\textsuperscript{34} The fatehā is a short condolence ceremony led by a mullah or other person versed in the Holy Qur’ān, while the khatm is a community-led reading signifying the completion of a phase (mourning, building of a house, birth of a son) and the beginning of an expected period of joy and well-being.

\textsuperscript{35} Papanek, “Purdah," 296.


\textsuperscript{37} Observations and personal communication with working women in Kabul noted between September 2012 and January 2013.
is not the sole reference for Afghan women, even if the effects of the periods between 1994-96 (latter parts of the Mujahideen regimes) and 1996-2001 (during the regime of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan) are seen to have harmed all human rights and caused an immense loss to women, including through human development, rights and agency. Even during these periods, there was a collective memory of female leaders in villages and quams and learned, educated women being consulted in community decision making.38

Seen in this light, when women manage public restaurants in Herat and Mazhar-e-Sharief where their clientele are families or women-only groups,39 when “a female student practises Kung Fu in an underground club,” or when a woman’s rights activist uses the chaddori to talk to religious leaders in rural areas,40 it may be argued that the hegemony of gendered norms is being resisted, even as agency is altered to become context-specific. There is evidence of women’s increasing public agency: greater mobility accorded to women at the sub-regional district and village levels to attend campaign addresses;41 aspiring female candidates to the provincial shurā in Sheberghān, Jowzjān who made “posters of their photos with a telephone numbers attached so that hundreds of men and women call them”42 and women in a village in Parwān solving conflicts through the working group of the National Solidarity Programme (NSP).43 These examples merely point to the specific instances when gendered agency has been brought to the fore. However, agency cannot be limited to visible, public or dominant acts that counter or challenge an existing hegemony, but it must take into account the subaltern and often nuanced challenge of oppressive norms.44

**Gendered agency**

Within the Afghan feminist discourse, women’s narration, resistance, critical analysis, subversion, negotiation and alterity have been detailed in personal narratives, fiction and poetry.45 Such work, while celebrating women’s contestations, also highlight the ways in which traditional structures of domination are potentially reinstated.46 Other feminist scholars47 have examined the concepts of self, autonomy, power and agency, and

38 For example, Jo Grace, “Who Owns the Farm? Rural Women’s Access to Land and Livestock” (Kabul: Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, 2005), 5.
40 Billaud, “Malalay’s Sisters,” 37.
41 On Dr Abdullah’s campaign in which “2000 women went from the villages of this district [Parwān] to participate,” see Azerbijani-Moghaddam “A Study of Gender Equity,” 47.
43 Azerbijani-Moghaddam “A Study of Gender Equity,” 55.
45 See, for example, Heath and Zahedi, *Land of the Unconquerable*.
explored agency’s context-specific and multi-directional character. In feminist research, it is thus imperative to recognise the “differential consciousness” of the subaltern. The creativity of action as observed in this loose matrix makes reference to the concept of performativity as linked to temporality in the habitus, to which we now turn in an attempt to understand gendered subaltern agency.

Regarding female agency in the context of the developmental matrix, the empowerment approach, for example, introduces new ways of organising social relations and political activity following the transformation of the entrenched and hegemonic meanings of politics, influence and power; Kabeer thus defines female agency as “the processes by which those who have been denied the ability to make strategic life choices acquire such an ability.” In this sense, women’s agency based on a non-stable subaltern identity that is constantly negotiating power and opportunity can be posited to exist in the spaces where a norm or its hegemony is resisted.

Bourdieu’s interpretation of habitus is useful in terms of understanding both community norms and the ways in which these norms are contested. He postulates that individuals are guided by the circle of each community’s gendered norms, which are internalised and unconscious; these are not fully determined by the circle, nor governed entirely by the situation, time or context, nor directed solely by individual or collective reactions. These individual and collective acts may thus be seen as involuntary, non-reflective reiterations of gendered norms that serve to sustain a particular form of accepted and normalised gendered identity while simultaneously altering it. Thus, “identity” and therefore “agency” evolves from the location of the self and cannot be located or judged by the standards or authoritative pronouncements of alternate world-views. While acknowledging that “some of the constraints that are imposed on what women are free or not free to do may relate to women’s own perceptions of legitimacy and appropriateness,” and despite the need for assessment and discipline, “the use of one’s agency, is, in an important sense, a matter for oneself to judge.” The agency of women as self-interested actors—albeit, possibly fragile and precarious individuals—

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55 Amartya Sen, Commodities and Capabilities (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 204.
takes into account their well-being. Seen from this perspective, it would be useful to situate agency in this research in terms of “what the person is free to do and achieve in pursuit of whatever goals and values he or she regards as important.” In terms of agency, it thus considers people as “responsible agents” who can direct their own well-being.

**Summary**

The above literature overview on *quam*, family, *zanāngi*, *nāmos* and agency contributes to the analysis of the research findings. How women perceive themselves in relation to the community, for example, is significant in terms of understanding how they interpret the conditions of their lives. It therefore offers a clearer picture of gendered agency as a generative narrative of subject formation and agency within the extant social structures. The analysis also keeps in mind that while the development and economic betterment of women in post-2001 Afghanistan are often constructed with the language of equality and rights, a woman’s everyday life stems from a far deeper connection with the *quami* language of seclusion and religious duty.

**1.2 Methodology**

This research was designed to examine the projects implemented to economically benefit both i) between 50 to 500 women and ii) less than 50 women in Kabul Province. To identify the relevant projects, introductory meetings were arranged with 42 NGOs working on women’s economic empowerment in Kabul, which were shortlisted from the more than 300 NGOs working on women’s direct and indirect capacity building and empowerment (the list being obtained from the Ministry of Women’s Affairs [MoWA]). The further identification of 23 implementing agencies and their projects was based on the following criteria: i) currently active NGOs; ii) NGOs focussing on women’s economic empowerment; iii) the ease of access to and availability of the project representative; iv) projects implemented in Kabul Province, v) projects implemented since 2002 and (preferably) completed before 2011; vi) a balance between urban and rural areas, and different economic sectors; and vii) security concerns.

Pre-fieldwork meetings were held with the 23 NGOs to re-establish the terms of reference of the research project, its non-profit nature as well as the voluntary nature of the participation of the project representative, project participant and her community. Among the 23 NGOs, 11 projects were excluded due to a turnover of project leaders and/or the present organisation representatives not being in touch with the project participants nor entirely familiar with the project. Of the remaining 12, pre-fieldwork meetings identified several potential project participants to whom the research purpose and needs were explained by telephone. The project representative ascertained the need for the participant’s time, consent and availability as well as the general availability of female and male community representatives for the focus group discussion. Five case studies with the project participants along with their *mahrams* and communities were accordingly shortlisted.

Semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with each of the five project participants and then with their identified *mahrams*. Ten focus group discussions were subsequently conducted with female and male representatives from the project participants’ immediate community. The focus group discussions looked at community

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57 Sen, * Commodities and Capabilities*, 203.
perceptions of gender roles and rights, and women’s self-perceptions on what “doing gender” meant to them in terms of economic activities and social acceptability. Each focus group consisted of an average of seven participants. The malik or project participant identified the focus group participants, with care being taken by the team member to achieve the greatest possible balance in terms of participant age and employment status. Finally, 18 semi-structured key informant interviews were conducted with representatives of the implementing and donor agencies and their government partners.

Topic guides were created specific to the six categories of respondents: the project participant, her mahram, female community members, male community members, project representative and donor representative. Topic guides examined the following issues: i) women’s perceptions of the kinds of socio-economic development roles that they could perform, their ability to access economic empowerment initiatives and the sustainability of these initiatives; ii) the changes to women’s sense of empowerment through their participation in the project; iii) community contexts and gendered socio-cultural practices; iv) the perceived (and generally self-identified) results of women’s access to economic power; and v) the efficacy of the project in terms of women’s participation and economic enhancement. Appendix 1 presents the issues that evolved from team discussions around agency, gender and economic empowerment in Afghanistan, which helped frame the Topic Guides. Appendix 2 presents a list of the female and male participants of the focus group discussions at each research site, with additional information provided. Appendix 3 summarises the basic information regarding the interviews conducted for the five projects.

A pilot study was conducted in October 2012, with the main fieldwork taking place between November 2012 and January 2013. Each community was approached as a unit, and all interviews and discussions, with the exception of two, were conducted in person and in Dari by two Afghan field researchers: one female and one male. To gain access and permission to work with the community, the team first met with village elders (including the malik (village or tribe headman), mullah (local clergy), male member or head of the Community Development Council [CDC]) to introduce themselves and discuss the research aims, and thus gain informed consent from the elders and malik (no female maliks participated in this study). Once the malik felt comfortable with the team, he generally agreed for them to meet and interact with potential respondents: the project participant previously contacted by the project representative, her male agnate and separate groups of women and men. Informed verbal consent was once again taken for each interview and focus group discussion.

In general, the fieldwork required a high degree of flexibility. One of the “cautions” given to the team was to work with Murphy’s Law in mind—all that could possibly go wrong would go wrong—and to think flexibly in order produce better results. Given this, security considerations (including obtaining the advice and consent of AREU’s Security Advisor) often led to rescheduling appointments for interviews and other forms of data-gathering, thus requiring a considerable reinvestment of time. Most interviews were recorded (with permission) and then translated by bilingual, non-professional Afghans. In this research, the translations are not necessarily faithful to “British” English sentence structure. The “fall-back” or “default” approach to the translations was spoken Dari and not English. The transcripts were reviewed and revised by the team members to ensure their validity and better data capture. Field notes, including observations, comments

58 Bearing in mind that age-related and socio-economic factors influence social hierarchy, it may be surmised that the voices of older or more influential participants come to the fore in this research; opinions, especially if conflicting, may not have been voiced in the presence of a senior person.
and some field analysis, were also added at this stage. These notes along with the literature review and data analysis contributed to the research findings. Data analysis was done manually though extensive coding and analysis.

Participatory field research involved sharing research data and information with all stakeholders in the process. Consequently, dissemination sessions were conducted with project participants along with community participants in the female focus group discussions. In addition, a workshop disseminated the research findings to the representatives of the project and the donor or implementing agencies and then solicited their feedback.

The limitations of this report include the following:

- The high turnover of project heads or representatives and donor representatives, leading to inadequate data on project implementation, output and monitoring practices; and
- The focus on men’s views of women’s economic participation permitted less time to understand men’s views about themselves with regard to the female participation and its effects on gender norms as they perceive them.
2. Projects and Participants

This section examines the ways in which women’s participatory agency in the identified projects brought about a transformation in, or otherwise affected, their lives. It provides a qualitative study of how the female participants in the identified projects, their male agnates as well as the women and men in their immediate communities consider the economic empowerment of women. These five studies trace the changes that the respondents perceived to have occurred in the lives of the women and their communities due to the project. The five community research sites are as follows:

1. Nahr-e-darsan, Guzargāh: Sports ball manufacturing project, Humanitarian Assistance Muska (HAM);
2. Police Township, Kabul city: Qur’ānic literacy training, Afghanistan Women Education Centre (AWEC);
3. Isārkail, Istālif: Animal husbandry and training, Female Rehabilitation and Development Organisation (FRDO);
4. Mousākhil Pāein, Qārābāgh: Training in jam making, National Area-based Development Programme (NABDP); and

The study includes the views and field experiences of the participants, their male agnates and communities, as well as those of the ground-level implementing organisations and donor agencies corresponding to these five sites. As per the objectives of this research, analytical emphasis is given to i) women’s understandings of how the projects benefitted them, and b) the socio-cultural and economic changes that may or may not have taken place for the women through their participation in the project.

2.1 Sites and contexts

2.1.1 Nahr-e-darsan, Guzargāh

Nahr-e-darsan is a semi-urban area situated between Dar-ul-Aman road and Guzargāh. It houses an estimated 200 families, mostly Tājik, as well as Pashtoon, Hazārā and some nomads; a few families are Uzbek. The earlier population fled to other areas and countries after around 1992, but many have since returned to the village. The population increased over the last decade following migrations from Panjsher, Nangarhār, Logār, Mazhār-e-Sharief, Herāt and Shamāli; others returned from Iran and Pakistan. The most recent migrants live in rented houses as do some of the older residents. It is one of the three areas of Kārt-e-Char; the administrative district extends from Nahr-e-darsan to Rābbhi Bālkhi.

Many men are employed in government institutions or NGOs in the city, or work as teachers or in the informal economy through small businesses like shops or services like masonry and daily wage labour. Some women also work in NGOs, in schools as teachers, and in government offices in the city. Some of the women have cars to collect them from home and drop them back, while others walk to the Dar-ul-Aman main road to take public transportation. The main source of income is through employment in governmental offices. As a peri-urban area, the community has relatively good access to government offices and public and private education institutes, which benefit many youths. Equally, many youths are engaged in income-generation activities, both urban and rural-based.
Three government schools for girls and boys are located near Nahr-e-darsan. The nearest health facility is situated behind one of the girls’ schools. The HAM project identified for this study trained women to make sports balls in 2007.

**For the male focus group discussion**, the team mostly met with members of the informal masjid council. The masjid council comprising 10-15 male elders meets to address common problems in the community, including domestic ones; they do not go to the police station in Kārt-e-Char. The council seems chiefly focussed on the maintenance and expansion of the masjid’s structure. A case of sard kard (elopement) was resolved by the council with the marriage finally being accepted by the respective families. The families had initially chosen to go to the police station to register the case, but the police roped in the maulavi (religious scholars) and a few of the members from the masjid council. Normally, family problems are resolved within the family; domestic violence is rife, “even in Europe and America” as the men in this discussion group said, but Afghans do not easily separate, much less divorce, over domestic violence. In their opinion, a zan-e-khānā (housewife, housebound and non-income-generating woman) is better than a zan-e-berun (woman who travels or works outside). While Islamic law contains provisions for women’s inheritance, no woman in their knowledge has yet inherited. The men said that women should be consulted in decision making, because “God has given them minds just as He has given to us men,” as Mohammad Anwar (52 years, Tājik, jobless) said. However, Zāki Ahmad (20 years, Tājik, jobless) feels that “Islam has said that until there is no need for women to work, they should not work...If I don’t see any necessity for my wife to work then I will not allow it.” The men consider that a woman’s income should be spent in consultation with the family.

The men in this discussion group had serious reservations about women seeking employment outside the community. Their main concerns related to the fact that the care and nurturing of the children would be neglected, that the job would require women to venture outside the community and that the women would face harassment and insecurity in the public sphere. The men also pointed out that many families have strong connections to their quams and ties to their lands in their watans, which they periodically

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59 The group consisted of five participants, all Tajik, of ages ranging from 20 to 52 years; one person was a government employee while the remaining were unemployed or retired.

60 This was the second male focus group discussion conducted in Nahr-e-darsan, as the participatory mullah all but took control of the first session, with the views of other men not being given enough space.

61 However, the men knew and spoke without hostility of a woman in their settlement, who was single with no children, a migrant-returnee with capital who had invested in and now runs a car-export business.
visit. They therefore did not want to put themselves or their families in danger from radical militia “outside of Kabul” who oppose women being employed outside certain specific parameters. A woman working outside their quam’s socially dominant norms when in Nahr-e-darsan could thus have repercussions beyond the immediate radius.

Suggested livelihood options for women were in a nearby factory, carpet weaving, livestock, poultry and tailoring, as were teaching and working in an all-female environment. The men said that projects should have participatory programming with the intended women participants. They perceived several advantages in ventures for women’s economic engagement: A family requiring additional income through women’s employment could use these opportunities (and there are many such families according to the men); the women could learn a profession while earning an income; and the employment would be a good change for women. However, as Abdul Hadi (48 years, retired, Tājik,) pointed out, “First there should be good security so that they can come out of their houses freely and walk outside freely.”

The community was generally aware of the HAM project in ball sewing. The men mentioned that the local police and local elders had visited the HAM office and verified the organisation’s purpose and credibility. After a discussion with a male HAM representative and the establishment of its “official” association, the project did not raise much concern in the community. However, the men still followed the comings and goings in the organisation. Not all community people agreed with the project; some discussion participants (both women and men) questioned women’s work there.

In the female focus group discussion, all participants felt strongly that women should have an income, with several reasons being stated: It would contribute to the family income and bring better economic balance or stability; there would be money for medical needs; children could study instead of earning money; women know how to use money better than men; women would need not ask men for money; their status in the family and community would increase; and women would not be considered as “bread-eaters” (freeloaders). The female participants believed that the government and NGOs do not encourage income-generating activities for zan-e-khānā or care about women. As Kamillā (36 years, teacher, Tājik) said, “They put the raw brick in the water and went away” (put materials to waste). No one in this discussion group had accessed microfinance; in general, they were somewhat wary about microfinance and would prefer an income that paid daily or monthly.

The oldest woman in the group, Mināgull (60 years, housewife, Tājik), observed a change in the community’s women: They now take more decisions and show more initiative than...
women did when she was younger. She said that women need courage to start earning money and that some women now show this. The women stated that those who work as hairdressers, for example, do not have a good social status, but they still have the courage to do it anyway; in their view, Morsāl (HAM participant identified in this project) has more courage than her elder sister and mother. The women felt that those employed in government institutions and NGOs (and other jobs) have developed a better sense of time-management and learnt to manage their zanāngi duties in the household along with the responsibilities of their paid employment. They considered that housebound women value their time less and are less knowledgeable about the value of money.

The women believed that women must work for the welfare of their family and community. The younger members (20, 23, 24 and 28 years) noted their mothers asking their fathers for money every so often and believed that their mothers’ illiteracy caused this situation. They said that all zan-e-khānā ask men for money, whether their husband, son, brother or son-in-law. But whether zan-e-khānā or not, the women felt that nobody took women’s problems seriously. Not only had the NGOs and the government neglected them, but families were often resentful of employed women; the female agnates remarked that household work is left undone or neglected by “working woman.” In a few families, some understanding and empathy is shown toward working women and their employment; in others, the women’s work is simply “exploited.”

One teacher also obliquely remarked about the domestic violence in her life, exacerbated when her husband was jobless (he is now an officer with a government agency), but she noted that the violence drastically reduced when she found a job. The discussion group also indicated that decisions are better if taken by men, including on issues relevant to the women themselves. This approach generally aims to avoid the repercussions of a “wrong choice,” which could include domestic violence. The women similarly favoured a joint or consultative lead-up to a decision in order to evade criticism.

There was general expectation that if or when a woman begins earning a living, her income and any relevant decisions would be hers. A husband’s income (among this group of women who also describe the general norms of this community) is not necessarily entirely or always seen as household income. The participants believed that a similar approach should be taken with a woman’s earnings, which, even if diluted by a male agnate’s decisions and authority over money, would still allow some level of ownership and decision making in the parochial domain (non-joint extended family, immediate neighbourhood or quam) as well as the public domain (outsider-researcher) regarding the authority over one’s earned money. The working women in the group may spend around 500-2000 Af’s (US$10-40) without feeling the need to consult the family or men. They inevitably spend it on household expenses, including clothes, stationary and books for their children or siblings and on siyāli wa shariki (for which husbands do not always give money). The men, often without the women’s participation, always pay for the larger expenditures. Further, the male’s breadwinner position does not always allow for a woman’s income to be presented as anything other than nominal, and in turn, it may be “masked” by both women and men. In parallel, women more frequently go to the local bazār (market) to buy household items if they earn an income; there appears to be a strong link for women between earning an income and going to the bazār. The dominant associative value of the bazār is consumption and the capacity to spend one’s earned income there.

65 One teacher said, “I know that with some of my colleagues, their husbands take their salaries and they, the poor women, cannot say anything. I heard that their husbands said, ‘If you do not give me your salary, I will not allow you to go to the school anymore.’ They, the poor women, cry and say that they stay silent because of their children...They say, ‘With whom can I share this...it will be a shame if this becomes public knowledge.’”
Housework remains a woman’s responsibility. This was varyingly seen as part of “Afghaniyat” due to men’s lack of knowledge about housework and as part of women’s zanāngi. Although some men may help with some of the household chores (sometimes at the risk of being called “not-a-man” or u mard nes), women shoulder all of the responsibility of the household’s running and the care of children. In this community, women have some access to television, noting that it broadcasts many encouragements about women being allowed to work. They also noted that women in parliament face sarcasm and ridicule from their male colleagues.

The women were very appreciative of Morsāl’s work. They felt that she has achieved something by having an income and contributing to her family’s expenses, even while continuing her formal education. Morsāl’s self-presentation and reputation has played an important role: She always covers her head, never laughs loudly, is unfailingly polite and speaks with a “nice smile.” As Mināgull said of Morsāl, “She goes directly to the office and directly back home; she does not look to her right and left side; she goes straight and comes back straight.” Morsāl’s behaviour and self-presentation may be seen to reflect the norms that women are expected to observe in the public sphere in order to reinforce their zanāngi, preserve their reputation and avoid gossip and stigma. Zarghonā hoped that her daughter would find a job at HAM or similar work when she finishes school; one of the students, Rahimā (20 years, Tājik), was applying for an opening in HAM.

For the working women and students, transportation was a major issue: Men rush forward to the approaching vehicle and some elbow women out of the way; a public (shared) taxi asks women for a double fare if they sit in the front and men sexually harass women on the roads and in the buses. Municipality-operated buses are in far less demand, but they are unreliable. Taxis are also an option for those who can afford them; however, the costs may absorb up to half of the women’s salaries.

On the street, the sexual harassment of women is an inevitable and daily occurrence, usually from groups of men, including older men, hanging around on street corners. Sexual harassment includes staring, lecherous looks, comments, singing suggestive songs, verbal abuse and even physical harassment. It may involve stalking and ongoing daily harassment, and need not be a one-off incident. Women are not expected to offer any retaliatory behaviour, but are advised to ignore the daily assault and remain silent in the face of all sexual harassment. Mināgull explained, “If a woman speaks out against this harassment in the community, people will blame her...Women should be silent and not offer any response to such men and their bad words.” Zakiyā (24 years, university student, Hazārā) pointed out:

*Even in the university, some of the male students use such bad language with girls. For example, they say, ‘Oh, today she looks so nice, I wish I could hug her.’ Or others say, ‘Sit at home, why are you coming to the university, tomorrow you will all get married, and must take care of the children.’ Most of the time, they use sexually insulting language.*

According to the participants, “good women” are pleasant and easy to talk to, and they take care of their household and children. If a woman is wise, patient and hard-working, and pays attention to her chores and children, she will be able to influence her family.

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66 The logic seems to be that men sit in the rear seats beside other men, while the front two seats are reserved for two women. However, if there is no other woman, a lone front-seat woman traveller has to pay a double fare. In contrast, if a man occupies the front seat alone, he only pays a single fare, not a double.
Such a woman, with some seniority, could thus be called sarshār.™ Regarding deference behaviour, particularly with men, most women in this discussion group thought that good women were obedient and docile, otherwise they risked being labelled besharm (shameless). They considered that it was unacceptable for women to ask for or accept an inheritance; even if women want to do so, they fear being cut off from their natal families as a consequence. A good man, according to the women, is one who “does not beat his wife and listens to her” and who “has patience and respect for women.” In turn, the woman should respect and listen to men.

The participant, Morsāl, and her family, originally from Parwān, were emigrants to Shirāz (Iran); they returned about ten years ago and lived in Doghābād before moving to Nahr-e-darsan around three years ago. Now aged 23 years, Morsāl completed Grade 12 schooling and currently volunteers in the Ministry of Youth Affairs in addition to continuing her work with the HAM project.

In around 2007, the family was living in Doghābād near the HAM office. She heard about the ball-sewing project organised by HAM from her (community) friends who had attended the training or joined the project. Curious, she and her mother walked over to the office to obtain information. They met Azizā Momand, the director, who explained the project to them in detail. With memories of Shirāz and Iran, Morsāl “felt great that Afghanistan was also a place with advanced people who work and think of their contribution to Afghanistan”; the novelty of ball-sewing also appealed to her.™ As a family of ten now,™ the family’s economic condition was very poor; Morsāl’s strong sense of empathy for her father and her sense of responsibility toward her family also influenced her interest in the project. She said, “I did not want him to give me any more money to buy notebooks”; instead, she wanted to ease his burden. Furthermore, many community women were already active in the project, which had been known and established for about three to four years at the time. The project office was situated only a lane away from her house so she “told him he can come and check on what I’m doing.”

Her father, Abdul Ishāq, had briefly worked as a cook at HAM,™ and he was well aware of the way it used a very Islamic idiom in its focus and processes. Morsāl’s extended family is educated, and several women already participate in income-generating activities.™ The family’s background of displacement and migration also contributed to a less rigid application of traditional gender norms. In this context, it helped that their extended family, which would have normally had greater influence over such a subversion of gendered norms, were not living in the immediate neighbourhood (mohallā). Quam influence was therefore weaker in some respects, and the community was relatively more mixed and cosmopolitan.

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67 One cited instance was a participant’s mother stopping her elder daughter’s engagement during the event itself when she learnt that the man already had a wife and children. This was against the advice of her husband and at the risk of their daughter being dishonoured and not finding another alliance.

68 Morsāl said, “…Tailoring and needlework and similar jobs have become very common and everybody does it, even a woman who can’t do anything else can do the tailoring. I wanted to learn a special profession.”

69 Two married elder siblings are still in Iran.

70 The work supplemented his employment as a driver.

71 The wives of Abdul Ishāq’s three nephews work as a nurse and beauty-salon owner, while another has travelled abroad to India. A niece also works at an NGO in Kabul.
Her father expressed very clear views about daughters and sons being equally able to learn, work and “make something” of their lives.\textsuperscript{72} For him, it was a matter of pride for his wife or daughter to work and earn legitimate money for their family. Furthermore, many women in the community were already associated with HAM and its projects, and most importantly, it was a woman-only workspace. With regard to money, he stated, “I am not sending her to go work and bring money, no, I don’t need her money. I am sending her because she should learn something and earn money for herself.” He did not pay much attention to “boiling-pots,” i.e. gossipmongers. He said that those who oppose women’s work outside the home:

\begin{quote}
are Muslim but like the shaitān [devil]...and I am praying that Allah shows them the right way. I ask every one—mullahs, educators and others—to show me a line in Holy Qur’ān that says women should not earn...We had a mullah, Abdul Qahar, he is dead now God bless him, but he always said to us, ‘Let your women work, work together.’ And he was right. Those who are illiterate do not agree that women should earn money.
\end{quote}

The five- to six-month training session was on ball sewing and sticker making. Morsāl said that the group, comprising about 20 young and older women, was also taught about women’s rights and how to address issues of domestic violence or household conflicts, while they were also given some business training. They were paid 500 Afs ($10) per month to cover transportation costs, which Morsāl mostly used to buy stationery and clothes for her siblings. Later, when a job order came in, she was asked to join in and continued on a project-to-project basis. Her monthly salary is now about 3500 Afs ($70).\textsuperscript{73} Regarded as sensible and level-headed, she has complete freedom to use her money as she chooses. She also contributes to her mother’s siyāli wa shariki, which her mother accepts with both reluctance and blessings. Inappropriate expenditure, according to Morsāl, would include attending a colleague’s party.\textsuperscript{74}

Morsāl has been somewhat of a role model for some of her classmates and cousins. Her specific status in the immediate and extended family as well as the community is high, especially compared to that of her older brother and sister. She and her family freely talk about her work to relatives and it is a source of pride for them. Despite being better off financially, some of her cousins with a higher level of education have not been able to find employment. Yet she does battle traditional perspectives with her male cousins and brothers; her forthrightness on women’s rights often puts her male agnates on the defensive, and they have learnt not to argue with her. She finds the differential control over her and her brothers’ movements to be unfair, but regards it in the context of her reputation, which gossip can tear apart. The women in Morsāl’s household do all of

\textsuperscript{72} Abdul Ishāq also said, “It’s not good if women are at home, their future is not good. Like, if give her [in marriage] to an engineer, he is well-educated, but if the girl knows nothing, it will cause problems and she damages her husband’s life. If she is knowledgeable, she will be happy with her husband. Someone who doesn’t study and knows nothing about the world, she can learn if she goes out of the house, they learn much about the society. But the [fathers] who don’t let their daughters study are damaging their children’s lives.”

\textsuperscript{73} She spends most of her earnings on clothing and books for her siblings, their school expenditures (teachers’ day ceremony or school reconstruction fund) and smaller household needs (mattress and pillow). She also gives money to her brothers: club membership for one and transportation for the other. The temporal changes in gendered household dynamics that evolve from such a power-play are interesting and merit further study.

\textsuperscript{74} “If my classmate throws a party, first we have to calculate the travel expenses, so that we can take a taxi...We have to take a present for her as well, which is an inappropriate expenditure...There is no siyāli wa shariki between us, she is my classmate today but not tomorrow: Why should I spend money on her? Though she is my friend...but this doesn’t mean that I should spend lots of money on her.”
the housework; her brother sometimes serves guests or heats up water if asked. Her mother also encourages her sons to participate in some of the housework. Her parents appear to practise a more inclusive form of decision making in which the eight children are also involved.

Her parents trust both Morsāl and the organisation to allow her to travel for work to other neighbourhoods in Kabul and the provinces to conduct training sessions. For her part, Morsāl scrupulously informs her family about her movements and asks for permission for anything out of the ordinary. She is subjected to sexual harassment on the streets and often takes pre-emptive measures to tackle it, ranging from evasion to aggression. Wearing makeup is disapproved, and her clothes must be fully modest; she covers her head with a scarf.

Morsāl is very clear that all women should work to earn an income. Although her father would like her to pursue her education and earn from it, she would like to be independent (“like Azizā Momand”) and head her own organisation for ball sewing so that she can train other women or run her own business; she is also considering a university medical education. Her work at HAM continues to provide her with the opportunity to meet a variety of people, including businesswomen at exhibitions; she also attends workshops on leadership and peace. She has developed great confidence and skills in networking, which she has effectively used in her current volunteer work at the Ministry of Youth Affairs; she recently met President Karzai.

The implementing organisation, HAM, runs projects to provide ongoing economic opportunities for women. The HAM office in Doghābād opened in 2003, and their participants are mostly widows, women from poor families, orphans and the internally displaced, particularly those whose families need an income; the age of participants ranges between 16 and 40 years. Participants in all of their projects are selected in consultation with participating MoWA, the malik and heads of the women’s and men’s shurās as well as other NGOs in the proposed neighbourhood. They use street flyers and the local masjid to spread awareness. The director, Azizā Momand, has experience in ball-sewing training since 1999. HAM has trained about 260 women in different types of sports ball sewing (football, volleyball and handball).

This 2007 project was funded by the World Bank and implemented through the National Skills Development Programme (NSDP) office in the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, Martyrs and Disabled (MoLSAMD) and the International Rescue Committee (IRC). HAM trained 40 women in ball sewing with a $22,000 grant from IRC. The women were from Dash Barchi, Afshar, Allaudin and 1st, 3rd, 4th, 6th and 7th districts, with a few from Arzānqemant. The trainer was a woman. Ball sewing requires both strength and skills, and a woman can sew about three to five balls per day; she is paid 50 Afs ($1) per ball. Women also work in stumping, sticking and cutting. Among the 40 women, 20 are still employed at HAM’s ball-sewing factory on a project-to-project basis, while the remaining 20 have married and since moved away.

75 An indication of the greater trust that the family places in Morsāl may be seen by the fact that her mother prefers sending her to the bazār rather than her brother in order to be sure of the quality of the goods and the value for money that Morsāl looks for when she makes a purchase. Further, according to a research team member, “to have trust generally means that she would not find a boyfriend or talk to namahram people.”

76 Morsāl’s father said, “Once when the Russians were bombing us and our women were escaping, they had no chaddori; the Russians saw then without the chaddori. One of my brothers (he is now dead) said that since all foreigners see our women without the chaddori, then what is wrong if our own relative sees them without one, and after that neither his wife nor mine wore the chaddori.”
HAM provided basic literacy and numeracy training along with skills training, but it simultaneously advocated a very traditional division of labour within the home and used the Islamic understanding of a “good woman.” It views female economic participation as a way for a woman to fulfil her responsibility toward her husband, father, brother and children. In a sense, this is a hybrid alternative introduced in the context of the traditional concept of the male as the sole breadwinner, although women’s responsibilities are seen not only within the čhār čhaukat (four walls or boundaries) but also beyond. Azizā believes that decisions over money earned should be taken in consultation with the husband. HAM sees the way to women’s self-empowerment through gaining the family’s trust and respect and contributing to the family expenses. For Azizā, the costs associated with siyāli wa šarikī and children’s education and health are presented as something that a woman could and should do something about. HAM consciously attempts to provide women with economic opportunities in such a way that their family life continues in harmony. Azizā felt that the first step is the most important one: Once the family trusts the woman’s activities in the outer domain and appreciates the economic advantage, they will be willing to allow her to work in other livelihood options too.

During training, the daily half-day schedule comprised a three-hour ball-sewing session followed by one-hour session on numeracy, literacy and gender issues. The six-month course ended with a three-day business training workshop conducted by the donor agency. HAM emphasises the need for the monthly $10 payment per trainee so that the woman’s participation does not stretch the family’s already strained resources any further and thus create another barrier. The reason that the project could be called successful is that capacity building and skills training are seen to have led to sustainable earnings due to the factory set up by HAM, which sources and obtains projects and orders. As Azizā says, skills-building in itself is meaningless: “If a donor is training someone in carpentry or they are training tailors, what will we do with all these tailors? Or what will we do with all these carpenters? The donor should rather build a factory.”

Azizā identified the following to be problem areas for women in trade or business: lack of access to family savings and assets; inability to use the home as collateral for loans; and a traditional lack of experience. To counter this, women need guidance, training workshops and awareness workshops conducted at the national and international levels, and opportunities for networking and sharing their business knowledge, experience and best practices. The lack of markets for products is another major obstacle. The

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77 They also adapted this understanding to suit the province. In this respect, Azizā said, “Gender is seen and understood differently Kabul, Paktiyā, Jalālābād, and Bāmiyān.”

78 She also noted that much of the donor money in Afghanistan “flies back, half of it goes to the military and the other half to the administrative costs of the organisation...if we are authorised 100 million, we do not really even get a million of it, so we want to invest that one million in an effective and fundamental way.”
online route can be taken, but location is a constraint. Markets like Bāgh-e-zanānā (a women-only market in Kabul city) do not attract enough female clientele unlike other markets in the city, such as Lycee Māryām, Shahr-e-now, Kot-e-sangi or Kabul Madawi. Azizā believes that there should be a substantial market complex specifically dedicated to Afghan products. Support for women’s economic engagement should thus include: technical training, business training, low-interest loans, development of sustainable and sector-based market complexes with exhibition facilities, far greater international networks and good websites.

The donor agency was the IRC and their representative for this HAM project, Abdul Shakoor Yousufzāi, was their Monitoring and Evaluation Manager. The IRC’s main task is in the areas of disaster relief and rehabilitation in 16 provinces of Afghanistan in coordination with the Ministry of Education, MoWA, Ministry of Rehabilitation and Rural Development (MRRD) and MoLSAMD; Abdul Shakoor said that the IRC also undertakes some social and skills development projects in cooperation with the Afghanistan National Development Strategy (ANDS) and National Action Plan for the Women of Afghanistan (NAPWA). The IRC’s policy is to empower women such that they can work in society and not be called a tiarkhor (sponger) by men. The IRC seeks to ensure a gender balance in its field staffing and participant selection. Its social protection section focuses on women and works with mullahs to promote an awareness of women’s rights in Islam. It provides health awareness and counselling to survivors of violence, literacy training and job opportunities for women, and it also monitors underage marriages. Women’s ideas are obtained through female shurās during community mobilisations, and gender issues are addressed in projects on water sanitation and health and in home-based schools that also provide Islamic teachings.

The human resources policies in the IRC follow processes to encourage gender balance and use strategies for gender equality: for example, providing women-only transportation. Resources are equally distributed to women and men in each project; one of their indicators is the equal participation of women. Field surveys are conducted by female field officers to determine the nature and extent of a woman’s potential economic needs and choice as well as the community’s views on it. Often, vocational training for women is preceded by literacy training, focussing on the Qur’ān-e-Sharief and women’s rights. As to the training sessions, the IRC ensures to provide female teachers, a safe training venue and sufficient resources. However, according to Abdul Shakoor, the expatriates who often programme and head the projects lack a contextual knowledge of gender in Afghanistan, and as a result, the projects tended to have an inadequate impact when implemented. The social protection unit working on gender has since closed due to budget constraints. The IRC also faces difficulties in recruiting female staff and security agents, as staff members face physical attacks.

The HAM project required small dedicated machines to cut the leather into four- and six-corner pieces, along with needles, thread and special leather. The IRC’s concerns related to the work facilities, markets and the fact that those trained should not be left unemployed. Crucially, the IRC selected sectors according to market surveys of job opportunities and recruitment chances. “We didn’t want to face the question that after this training, where is your market, where will you sell your product,” said Abdul Shakoor. Bāgh-e-zanānā and Koch-e-Mandayee were identified as markets, and the retail prices of the balls were made competitive with regard to Pakistani imports. The IRC

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79 Of the $1.5 million annual budget dedicated to vocational training, half, for example, is allocated to training women in the following domains: beauty salons, home decoration (i.e. interior decoration of hotels and guesthouses), cooking, food processing, trading, tailoring, carpet weaving, cloth designing, guldozi (embroidery), charmadozi (leather sewing), dairy farming and horticulture, including storage.
bought the machines and paid the expenses for the raw materials and salaries of the teachers. The first project was successful, and IRC and HAM collaborated on another project the following year.

The World Bank had a contract with MoLSAMD, the monitoring and reporting agency for this project. The monitoring conducted by MoLSAMD through its NSDP unit was, however, perceived as less than adequate. The NSDP male staff entered the female-only HAM space without notice or permission, which upset local sensibilities. HAM too suffered problems due to the lack of curriculum and technical knowledge for developing the training programme. MoLSAMD does not emphasise vocational training, and as a result, it has not developed teaching materials for vocational training. Abdul Shakoor further added that MoWA also lacks the capacity to implement such projects.

2.1.2 Police Township, Kabul city

The Police Township is situated in the north of Kabul city. It has 11 five-story buildings, with 408 apartments and a population of around 8,000 people. The families are mostly Tājik, Pashtoon and Hazārā, with migrants coming from many provinces, particularly Shamālī, Logār and Lughmān. The population mostly comprises families of killed, disabled or retired police officers, and many families have lived here for more than three decades. Many have lost a father, husband, brother, son or others in conflict. There is high unemployment, especially among the youth; there have also been instances of houses being claimed by local muscle men. The buildings, though surrounded by trees and greenery, are run-down (not evident in the illustration below), and most families are poor. At mid-morning when the interview was held, young men could be seen gathered in small groups on the streets inside the Township, with the occasional girl or woman.

Image 3: Police Township, August 2013, taken by Massoudā Kohistānī

The Township has easy access to city transportation. There is a high school for girls and boys, who generally continue their education until about the tenth grade; the health clinic is located a 15-minute walk away. The main source of income for families is the social protection pension granted by the state or upon the death (expressed as martyrdom) of a family member in the police force. Some working men are still in active police service, while others have shops for trade or services; many are daily labourers, street vendors and the like. A few women study or are employed in the formal sector;
there is, apparently, some gossip about them. Most women with an income work in NGOs and government offices; some widows do domestic work, while other women work as cleaners in institutions. The AWEC project described here, conducted in 2010, aimed to train women in basic literacy and jam and pickle making.

**In the focus group discussion for men,** the respondents had strong reservations about women’s seeking employment outside the community. They felt that employment opportunities should be provided for men rather than women. If women are to work, it should be in a women-only space; if they are to study, they should only be taught by female teachers; if they seek healthcare, they should only be attended by women medics; Islam should thus not be challenged. There was great anxiety that allowing women to earn money would introduce “Western ways” of life. *Gheirat* similarly does not permit men to allow their household women to be exposed to sexual harassment on the streets. As one young man (Abdul Qadir, 22 years, shopkeeper, Pashtoon) said about his widowed mother:

> I myself will not allow my mother to go to work, even if I have to polish shoes to earn a living...For example, when my mother walks from here to Lycee Maryam, ten cars will sound their horn for her to get in, and my gheirat doesn’t accept this. If a place [for working women] is opened somewhere in these blocks, I will allow my mother to work.

Among the men, there was significant opposition to a woman having any substantive authority or responsibility, and even more so, when the household has a man. This was especially true for important decisions, such as the purchase of higher value goods, marital alliances of children and land or property. According to the men, however, a woman should be free to make decisions around household chores. They did not approve of women going to the shops and speaking to non-mahrams like shopkeepers. The common view that emerged was that a woman should not work if her husband has an income. This is, however, linked to the civil, contract-based understanding of *Shari‘ah*: “If a husband cannot afford his wife, then there is no nekā [relation] between them, and the woman can go find someone else who can afford to pay for her [upkeep].”

Women should work according to religious norms and be modest by keeping *hijāb*. Keeping *hijāb* for this group of men, includes *zanāngi*, dressing simply and modestly, having demure body language and speaking softly and pleasantly. They said that the *chaddori* in itself is not important and that its use depends upon family norms. The women should have *ifat* (purity), which means maintaining *wājib* (proper, correct, normative) relations between men and women. A girl who is *berāh* (immoral, acting against social norms) brings disrepute to her community and town. One respondent said that in his *watan*, Laghmān, girls studying in school were considered a *nang* (stain) for men.

**In the women’s focus group discussion,** aside from one young woman who was studying until recently (the daughter of the project participant identified for this research), the remaining women were *zan-e-khānā*, including two widows. They were thus dependent on their brothers and husbands, and in one case, a brother-in-law. One woman lived with her daughter and her family. Two of the women’s co-wives were participants in the AWEC project.

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80 The group consisted of ten men, including a *maulavi*, whose ages ranged from 22 to 70 years. About half of participants were retired or jobless.
81 This Township previously conducted a project for women: Tailoring was taught for about four months, but there were no tangible outcomes or further inputs.
82 In the group, there were three Tājiks, three Pashtoons and one Hazārā. The women’s ages ranged from 20 to 50 years.
There were strong and contrary views to the men’s opinions on women’s income generation. Simā (50 years, housewife, Tājik) said, “Oh, my sister, I wish the elders and men should pour their heart and liver [a curse]...Most men think that if women work and earn money the world and women will be ruined.” Similarly, other women forcefully expressed resentment on the restraints placed on women. Freshtā (25 years, housewife, Tājik) said, “Those men who do not allow their wife to go someplace: May they burn in fire, if they were in my hand, I would kill them. And I will tell them, [do] you know better, or does your wife, about what she needs?”

The particular vulnerability of zan-beparast (lit. “women without protection,” destitute) also seems to have become more evident through the AWEC intervention, as shown in the case of Māssoomā (38 years, a widow now living with her son-in-law, Tājik). Māssoomā did not have any skills or income when she lost her husband. She and her two daughters were entirely dependent on her brother-in-law, and she just did not think that she could possibly earn an income. She spent her time crying and, as she said, “Looking at her brother-in-law’s hand to bring something to me...My life was in his hands...I did not have the right to drink water.” She and her daughters were seen as freeloaders and her brother-in-law married off her elder daughter at a very young age. After the jam and pickle-making course with AWEC, Māssoomā made contact with a shopkeeper; he occasionally supplies her with vegetables, and she sells them pickled to him. She now earns some money and, as she said, “now no one interferes in my personal life...I take my own decisions.”

The change in women’s attitudes is worth noting in this project. Firstly, before the project, the women said that their only local source of literacy instruction was the madrassa (school for training in religious knowledge), which they could not consider. Yet education was clearly of very great value to these women. As Sharifā (55 years, housewife and widow, Pashtoon) said, “For our hearts, that literacy class was like a trophy...There we met other women and they gave us an idea about the value of education.”

Secondly, AWEC’S literacy training empowered both the women who took part in the training and some of their relatives. Simā’s hambaq (co-wife) attended the AWEC literacy training and, after gaining courage through the course, sought and obtained an office job as a cleaner. Simā was thus inspired to learn by her co-wife (and their husband’s unexpected acquiescence to her employment) and is now attending literacy courses. She walks with three of her neighbours to Parwān 2 for the class, about 15 minutes away; she can now read. She said that she married off her own daughters who were illiterate and very young, but will now make sure her co-wife’s children attend university. It could therefore be said that one woman’s training facilitated her employment and potentially helped three more women: Simā (her hambaq) and her two daughters.

Thirdly, in looking at the sources of women’s economic engagement, the ripple effect of AWEC’s intervention can be noted through the transformation of women’s opinions and views, both in their personal estimations of women’s roles and in their confidence and ability to seek opportunities outside the Township and family or quam norms. According to Sharifā, for instance, “Other women also [now] dare to go and get jobs...Before the AWEC project, women thought that they should stay at home and do the household

83 The women were particularly appreciative of the fact that AWEC provided childcare to enable their attendance.
84 There was a suggestion that it was a highly contested, voluntary act; their husband did not stop her or “say anything” because “he’s afraid of her.” The co-wife travels to and from work alone, and returns alone from visiting to her natal (rural) family outside Kabul. Apart from small expenses, their husband, however, mostly takes the decisions regarding her income.
chores, that only men should work outside, feed the family, and earn money.” Zolikhā (57 years, housewife, Pashtoon) agreed with her, saying “We always thought that those who are good women should stay at home and do the household chores, that women who work outside are nasty. In reality, this is not true, yes...and now we know that it was not true.”

Unlike the men, the women were highly appreciative of the AWEC, Jamilā and the project. This group of women saw changes in the attitudes to women’s economic engagement from the time when women and men thought of working women as shameful; there is currently greater acceptance of income-generating women, and often their work is seen as desirable. Yet the less cosmopolitan nature of this community and its strong norms, most evident in the men’s focus group, made women particularly prone to gossip. The particular design of the Police Township also leads to a higher level of surveillance of the women. However, there is more solidarity among women based upon mutual self-interest. They were aware that they stood a greater chance for legitimate mobility outside the Township if they approached a mahram in pairs or more.

All women declared that they would like to earn money and that they needed an income. Tailoring and embroidery were hesitant suggestions with regard to livelihood options; women cannot vend on the streets, build roads or work on construction sites. They were well aware that working at home on a piecemeal basis brings in lesser money than through setting up a tailoring shop, as men can do. They also noted that women working in government jobs have equal pay and equal rights, including with overtime. According to the participants, the anticipated benefits of earning an income are as follows: not having to ask their husband or mahram for money or needing his approval to spend it; being able to take care of their personal needs; ensuring better access to health, education and nutrition for their children; setting an example for other women; and being able to help others. The problems identified in being able to generate an income are the lack of opportunities, the difficulties of a double shift and the alienation of children.

While the division of labour in homes remains traditional, women’s participation in mixed community affairs is non-existent. Given the men’s strong resistance to women having authority and decision-making powers, there is no women’s council in the Township. Community affairs are all-male events; men make the decisions and then inform the women. Similarly, the Police Township, as a planned, government housing colony, includes a few open spaces designed in the groups of buildings. However, only boys and young men use the play area for organised games and socialising.

Women in this community encountered similar problems to the women of Nahr-e-darsan in terms of transportation access: The Meli-bus (national transportation system) is not active nowadays; mini buses and other transportation vehicles are inadequate; and men “do not let women easily to get on the bus.” Women stepping out of their houses and girls going to school face sexual harassment from men of all ages; they are simultaneously told by many such men, “You are women and you should stay at home and do your household chores.” The women’s reactions were similar to those of the Nahr-e-darsan women: They stay silent and try to evade or ignore the harassment. Their reasons for doing so are also similar: They will be blamed for the sexual attention; people will question their being out of their homes and community; and they will be prevented from attending school.
All women in this discussion group described a **besharm** woman as one without modesty, who wears Western clothing and makeup, talks with non-**mahram** men, or talks loudly; women wearing Western clothes are seen to behave “like” Westerners. Such women, they said, also fight with their mother- and sister-in-law, disrespect their elders, disobey their husband, go to the **bazār** two or three times a week without purpose, visit relatives or neighbours frequently, talk rudely and show no fear. A **sarsḥār**, however, is a woman who can earn an income independently and who retains some authority over her income and life. Such a woman, they said, if she is worldly-wise (**shahr-dideh,** **donyā-dideh**), will be careful and intelligent, daring and wise, and will not lose her way (geographically). A **begheirat** (without **gheirat**) man is one who cannot keep his dignity or his word.

Overall, the group observed changes in women’s lives over the past decade: a decline in some of the dogmas on women and work; the increased presence of women in government offices and NGOs; better access to education for girls and to healthcare; far more women going to the **bazār** to shop; a better knowledge of women’s rights due to migration and the media; and a decrease in the number of levirate marriages. They also observed that some women have earned money and bought a car, many more women appear on television, women participate in income-generation projects and enjoy their benefits, young women record videos and female shopkeepers have set up in business centres. As one participant said, “If women know business, there is no restriction for them...They just have to have courage.”

All of the women said that they learnt a great deal through AWEC’s jam- and pickle-making course, but they indicated that the project’s time-period was too short, the raw materials supplied were not of a high enough quality for retail sales and they currently lacked the capital required to buy vegetables for pickling. The absence of cold storage facilities was also mentioned.

**For the project participant,** Shukriā, the project has led to a rise in her social and economic solvency. Her husband, Mohammad Aziz, is a retired police officer with high school education. They have six daughters and four sons, and are Hazārās. Their household size is 17 members, including two daughters-in-law and two grandchildren, all living in two rooms; their house is better kept than neighbouring houses. Mohammad Aziz now runs a welding shop with his brothers and two elder sons (high school dropouts). Their younger son will graduate from high school this year and is planning to go to the university. The eldest daughter discontinued school prematurely due to (sexual) harassment on the streets, which she could neither stand up to nor ignore; their other three elder daughters are literate and the two younger ones are studying.

Shukriā was a housewife who enrolled in the AWEC project and learnt to read and recite the Holy Qurʾān. Her husband participated in a short course organised by the AWEC on women’s rights and understood that “it was good,” i.e. nothing untoward or immoral:

> They called us [men] during the course for women and talked to us regarding their activities with women. It was the first time that we had such a direct discussion with one of the female activists regarding women’s participation in society... The AWEC staff tried hard to make a better environment here and they were very open and friendly with the male participants. At end of their workshop, they convinced the men on the issue of women rights and mutual respect.

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85 The name and other details were changed for the project participant and her husband, who requested their anonymity. The participant did not feel the need to modify her ethnic or occupational details.
The ideas that Mohammad Aziz understood from this short course for men were the following: Allowing girls and women to study is good and useful for each family and community; both men and women have the right to study and contribute to society; women’s work and income help the family and decrease men’s responsibilities; men do not need to give money to their wives; family conflicts over money decrease; and women’s work has value both inside and outside the house. He concluded that “what they said about women, work and income is exactly right.”

After this initiation in the rights of women and the value of their work, he and the other men, despite the sentiments expressed above, still had to be convinced individually by their wives as well as the AWEC representative. Amused at first when Shukriā asked his permission to join the AWEC literacy class (“at her age, 47”), he agreed because of several reasons: The literacy classes were held inside their community (AWEC had rented office space in the Township); the religious training provided moral benefits to women; AWEC offered her 500 Afs ($10) per month; and other women in the community were also participating. Leaving the house meant adhering to Islamic values, including the hijāb, and working separately from men. He wants his daughters to continue with their education since it is a right and a need for both men and women.

When Shukriā registered in the AWEC course with her daughter, they were taught to read and write and then given cooking lessons on making jams, pickles, chatni (condiments) and similar products. Her daughter’s sentiments about the women’s first steps have been echoed by many grassroots women’s organisations across the globe: “At least this class was an excuse to get out of the home...It was really interesting for all of the women who were in this class, because none of us had ever sat on a chair nor taken a pen to our hand.” Sitting on a chair and holding a pen—both viewed as symbols of male and elite power—were powerful moments for many women as both had traditionally been out of their grasp. The class comprising about 25 women was held in the mornings. Soon Shukriā went on to ask the mullah at the local mosque whether she could learn the Holy Qur’ān. Encouraged by his enthusiasm and after learning that there was a female teacher at the madrassa, she asked her husband’s permission and started learning to read and recite the Qur’ān-e-Sharief in the afternoons. At the ceremony to mark the end of the AWEC literacy training course, Shukriā recited the Holy Qur’ān in a microphone.

As people realised that she had become a reciter, her social status improved. Her radius of mobility increased as people started requesting her to recite from the Qur’ān-e-Sharief at the death ceremonies in their families; she has sometimes left home at a moment’s notice. She said, “Now I go to places that I never even thought about.” She takes her daughter with her everywhere. For her services, she is given food, clothing and money (about 1500-3000 Afs [$30-60] per recital), which is useful for household expenses and her children’s education. Her son was able to enrol in English and computer classes because of her income. Women’s rights in the Qur’ān-e-Sharief are evidently a great source of comfort to her. In this respect, Shukriā said:

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\text{A woman should obey her husband at all times and he must also take care of her needs. The Holy Qur’ān says that he should not to keep her like a slave. If the man is rich or has money, he should hire a housekeeper to serve his wife or even a nursemaid, not like Afghan men whose poor women do all the housework, take care of children and feed them only to have their husbands hit them. Some women do not even have the right to go to doctor.}
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86 Mohammad Aziz said, “My wife used to wear the chaddori before [she began reciting], but I told her not to wear the chaddori anymore. Because after that, she had to go to the Holy Qur’ān ceremonies and people saw her anyway. Why should she wear the chaddori when she recites the Holy Qur’ān in front other people, both men and women?”
For her, child marriage and marriage without the woman’s consent also constitute violence against women. The division of labour in her house remains traditional: “My son tells me, ‘You are the women...Even if you are away and return after a month, you have to do the housework, so no need to shout or yell.’ They are men, what can I say to them...”

Her literacy has helped her in innumerable mundane ways in everyday life, like reading billboards or using a mobile phone. In addition, since she is now regarded as knowledgeable, she has far greater authority inside the home and does not let her husband make all the decisions. He leaves the income and its spending to her. Her public visibility has increased as well:

> Before this, no one knew me, and not all people invited me...What is better than to have respect and a good name among people? I am very happy and proud of myself...Also, the way that I am talking with you, I did not have this courage before, I couldn't talk with any woman, and now I can recite among men and women, I have no fear.

Overall, she says, “I got courage and now I don’t have any fear and I have trust in myself.”

**The implementing organisation, AWEC,** has been working in Afghanistan and Pakistan for 24 years. It has 42 staff including eight men (mostly guards, office cleaners and drivers). Its manager for the project in the Police Township, Jamilā Zafar, said that “the goal of this project is to make women independent and to serve their children and society, to teach women about family rights and children’s rights, and to teach women something that they may use to generate income.”

AWEC worked through the community wakil (legal representative) and men’s councils and with permission from the local police. It rented an office in the Township during the project and Jamilā worked there daily. They began the project with a survey in the Police Township, which indicated that the women wanted training in jam- and pickle-making. The original number of women targeted was 600, she said, but they eventually identified 150 poor and needy women. Facing resistance from the men with regard to the women’s participation, AWEC began by teaching men about family relations; 1,000 men attended their training sessions on parents’ and children’s rights twice a week. Jamilā feels that “the training in Islamic rights and human rights was effective for the men and they permitted their wives to join the women’s training course.”

In total, 150 women, mostly aged between 18 and 35 years and from Sar Sabzi Square, Sarye Shamāli, Blōk Hai Sarandouy and the Tents, were given training in literacy, cooking, cleaning and child and parent’s rights. AWEC already had the plans, materials and teachers from previous projects. Other AWEC staff observed the teaching and asked the women for feedback. Jamilā attended the sessions once a month to learn about the women’s family problems. She evidently put much effort into understanding the context of the Police Township, as she met the project participants (individually and with their families) once a month at the office or in their houses to learn about their family problems and provide them with aid and advice. She was also able to resolve domestic conflicts and violence, for instance, in the case of a wife who only bore daughters. Jamilā’s personal participation and her daily presence evidently contributed to validating the project and encouraging the women’s active participation.

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87 AWEC also trained 60 children on parents’ rights; the attending children were given a toothbrush and toothpaste as an incentive.

88 Zorābād, where tents are situated for internally displaced people.
AWEC’s position on women is somewhat different from that of HAM. Although Jamilā thinks that a woman, for example, needs her husband’s permission to work outside the home, she says that “God has given women the right to work...If she needs money and her husband is jobless or his income is not enough for the usual expenses, then she may work.” However, the misuse of rights can lead to their revocation. “Whatever the husband says can’t always be true,” and a woman has the right to work outside the home and conduct her business or travel alone. Thus, when the participants objected to meeting a non-mahram male (the donor representative), she told them that “this project is not to train you so that you may then stay at home; it is to teach you how to become more active and how to deal with your daily issues.” This change in social norms was also presented in the terms that a woman’s employment was a better alternative to her child having to work.

The other challenge faced by AWEC was a certain level of harassment by the police on suspicion of running a prostitution racket. There is some indication of women doing illegal (harām) work in this area, as Jamilā said that through the AWEC project “women learned how to work in society and make halāl money, which indirectly caused a reduction in prostitution.” For Jamilā, if women were able “to learn to read and write and make something for sale,” that could be called empowerment.

On the financial level, AWEC was unable to source market outlets, and after the training, the women did not have the capital to invest in ingredients. AWEC proposed a follow-up project with the donor in which women working in groups could access loans for business investments, but this did not eventuate. Jamilā said that one-year or short-term projects for women were not effective and that projects should be extended in budget and time-span so that they may have a sustainable effect. Importantly, access to capital must be programmed into the project to guarantee the advantage of the initial training. She thus labelled the project as “50% successful.” Among the participants, some secured jobs, while a few others now work from home making jams or pickles. Women would instead benefit from three-year projects offering professional training in tailoring, cooking and managing beauty salons, restaurants, clinics, or small businesses with enough access given to capital and credit.

The donor agency for this project was the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA). Its representative (anonymity requested) was responsible for the project documentation from AWEC and said that it enjoys a good reputation among donors and other organisations. CIDA does not have a gender unit, but three people have worked on mainstream gender issues across its portfolio since around 2006; there is an emphasis on women’s economic empowerment. CIDA collaborates with the Ministries of Finance, Justice, Women’s Affairs, Health, Foreign Affairs and other ministries. It only funds projects through ministries and organisations that follow MoWA and Afghan government policies and procedures, particularly NAPWA and ANDS. The agency receives quarterly or bi-annual reports from the implementing organisation. The representative said that AWEC has a good track record of NAPWA implementation according to MoWA, and its vision and mission statement reflects the NAPWA. CIDA does not appear to allocate specific or equal resources to projects for women.

AWEC successfully implemented prior projects with the CIDA, but they could not approve AWEC’s follow-up project due to budget constraints. The representative pointed to the lack of markets for women as a barrier to their economic engagement.

89 Similarly in the male focus group discussion, a remark was made that “any NGO that wants to help, they should help these types of women so that they don’t go into prostitution and other illegal activities in order to be able to take care of their children.”
2.1.3 Isārkhai, Istālif

Isārkhai is said to have been named after Isā or Isār who left Istālif situated below and built his house on the top of the “Dragon Hill” around 300 years ago. For its inhabitants, they have been here “az dowr dehqani” (“from this soil,” “a long time ago”). Perched on a bare and rocky terrain, Isārkhai village is about a half hour uphill by foot from the Istālif main bazār. Around 90 families live in Isārkhai, all Tājik and Persian-speakers. This village is their watan, and they all belong to one sub-quam. The settlement is a tribe composed of four brothers, and with most marriages taking place within the village, there is an intricate kin network. Like Istālif and the surrounding villages, Isārkhai too was looted and burnt by the Taliban, including its mosque. During this time, many families moved to Panjsher, Kabul, Iran and Pakistan. Some houses were rebuilt in the past decade, but gaping holes of collapsed and abandoned houses are still visible. The houses are built with mud, mud-mortar and brick; many do not have yards around the house, which is unusual for Afghan villages; bringing construction material to this hilltop village can be difficult. A mostly treeless area, it is a very still and silent place with a view over the Shamāli plains.

A two-hour drive from Kabul city, this village is removed from many of the resources (material, technical and ideological) that the neighbourhoods in Kabul and its peripheral areas have access to. The isolation of the village is exacerbated during winter, which also excludes most livelihood options for the men in the village. Electricity is yet to make its entry here; firewood, tapi, sargin and pishqil (various dried animal droppings) are used for cooking and heating. Isārkhai has no health facility and the closest ones are located at Sar-e-takht in Istālif (about 1.5 hours away by foot) and the Qārābāgh hospital with a maternity ward (about an hour away by car). There is no public transportation in the vicinity and the nearest bus-stop is in Tangi Meyānā, reached by a two-hour walk down the goul (valley). A rental taxi from Isārkhai to Tangi Meyānā or Istālif costs 200 Afs ($4). There is no police station or any other governmental office in Isārkhai. Marriages are fixed by the male elders and usually by the fathers of the future groom and bride; child marriages are not uncommon.

The few land holdings are farmed; the sources of water for cultivation are seasonal and limited. Wheat, corn and beans are grown, and there are mulberry, walnut, grape, almond, apple, apricot, cherry and plum trees. An average landholding with 30-40 mulberry trees yielding about 120 kg of good-quality, dried black

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90 The hill is a natural phenomenon, a huge rock resembling a dragon. People in Istālif believe that the dragon was killed by Hazrat Ali, the fourth Caliph of Muslims. There is a spring under this rock and people believe in its healing properties.

91 Neighbouring villages on similar terrain, like Istergech, but with better transportation facilities and electricity, are more connected to each other and the nation as whole.

92 On the day of the group discussions, a badal (exchange) engagement ceremony was performed between four children.
mulberries, for example, if unaffected by wind, disease or rain, provides a daily income of only 25-30 Afs ($0.50-0.60) for the farmer. As a result, many men from Isārkhail village go to the mountains to crush stones, which they then sell to truck drivers for construction sites. Stone breaking is gruelling and dangerous work, but can pay about 150-250 Afs ($3-5) per day; however, this is an unreliable activity and depends on whether a sale to the truck-driver can be made. Selling stones has become a primary source of income, but it is a seasonal activity. The FRDO project for women conducted here in 2011 involved the distribution of livestock and training in bag sewing and tailoring.

The men’s focus group discussion93 was held at the malik’s house. The participants said that the only older literate people in the village were the malik’s son (a schoolteacher) and the village mullah from Badakhshōn who was taught in a Pakistani madrassa. The younger generation attends the Isārkhail Secondary School (up to seventh grade), built in around 2005. Approximately 350 children from Isārkhail and the surrounding villages (Gundi and Logāri) attend the school with one-third to half of students being girls as estimated by the men; the boys and girls study at different times. The school has three teachers, all male and relatives of people in the community. The secondary school, Yāqub Shahed High School, is situated in Sar-e-takht, Istālif, and is not attended by girls. To access higher education, the nearest school is in Tangi Meyānā, about two hours away by foot. A few boys from Isārkhail attend the school, and some of them have motorcycles to travel there. However, no girls are currently being educated above seventh grade, and the men say that they will not allow them to go to other schools due to the unsafe conditions. There is a madrassa in the mosque, and according to the men, some women learn from the Panj-Ketāb, Khawājā Hafiz and other holy books. The NSP has run a CDC programme, with the men’s council building a canal from the river stream using CDC funds.

In this settlement, issues around women going “out to work” were not prominent; the isolation of the village alone precluded much discussion around the topic, and the men held very clear views: “Women do not go to the bazār.” Or, as the malik Kamāluddin put it:

…I will not let the women of my house put a step outside of village…It is my Afghan culture and also the security situation is not good. We are near Istālif, and the other villages are very far from us. If something happens to her, then what should I do? Should I kill myself, fight, take on enmity with someone? No, if there is work that she can do at home, it is fine, otherwise she serves and has the family and that is enough. She washes clothes, cooks food, keeps livestock and sews.

In his family, if there is a wedding, for example, some women may be taken to the market to choose clothes, or a taxi (costing about 1200 Afs [$24]) may be arranged to visit a relative in Kabul.94

Agency, decision making and perceived ownership for women were far more nuanced in this village than observed in Nahr-e-darsan or the Police Township. Women owning anything caused amusement in the male focus group discussion. There was much laughter, and the common sentiment was “of course, they have nothing for themselves…They are our wives!” Gull Ahmad (53 years, labourer) clearly expressed the nature of gender relations in the following terms: “The women are under our authority and they belong to us. They have rights according to our culture…They are under our command and we

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93 The eight participants were aged between 35 and 70 years. They were all farmers and daily labourers.
94 However, Imāmuddin immediately added that if he lived in Kabul and was economically stable, he would allow his daughters to graduate, thus drawing attention to the habitus and the forms that it takes in a village like Isārkhail.
are at their service.” The authority of the head of the household appeared to be both in the letter and spirit in Īsārkīhāl. Violence against recalcitrant women is mentioned purposefully, yet casually. Not listening to one’s husband is one such cause: “I will get a bunch of sticks and beat them hard,” said Kamāluddīn. When asked by the researcher if this could be called violence against women, he replied, “No. She has to obey me. She is my wife.”

Men only nominally acknowledged the income earned from livestock (the animal or its produce) as women’s earnings. Since it is the man who sells the produce (milk or yoghurt) or the animals in the market, half or a percentage of the profit goes to him, they said. “What will she do with the money?” asked Kamāluddīn; any money that a wife may earn is inevitably given to the husband for household necessities. Amusement was also shown at the notion of men doing any household work.

The men’s council generated some income by renting out marquee items (200 utensils and 10 carpets) to outsiders for events; village members were not charged for usage. The men claimed that a women’s council was established through the NSP. The council has a president, vice-president and financial assistant, but it does not take any autonomous decisions.

The women’s focus group discussion also took place in the malik’s house. The women said that they were mostly busy with household chores and looking after some livestock. In the households with livestock, women cared for and managed the sheep, goats and cows. Men grazed the sheep in a pasture an hour away in the hills where there are some water sources. Sheep are generally sold before winter since their feed cannot be afforded. Families with livestock have between one and at most four or five sheep or goats; their produce, the women said, is absorbed by the household’s needs. Women

95 There were eight respondents aged from 16 to 45 years. All were housewives, including one widow; their household sizes ranged from five to 13.

96 The field researcher noted that sheep provided by the FRDO project may have been sold. Probing questions on the lambing and income were met with stalling, with the women saying that “the sheep got sick and died,” or that they were grazing in Faryā (at a pasture some distance away).
also collect their wool,\textsuperscript{97} which sells for around 400 Afs ($8) per bag of a \textit{ser} (about 7 kg). For those who own a cow, the surplus milk is processed into cheese, which the men then sell in the market; the weekly income is about 300-400 Afs ($6-8). The sale of milk and yogurt is seasonal. Some women keep poultry, about ten chickens, while others have sewing machines. Animal droppings, for use or sale, are also collected by young girls. Carrying water from the village’s water supply or natural springs is also young girls’ work according to the women.

Women do not show their faces to \textit{na-mahram} men and they only meet such men through the \textit{malik}, \textit{mullah}, other male elders, and the men of their household. When in the village streets, young girls and women practise inverted invisibility and inertness when a male passes by (described in Section 1.1). They use a veil to cover their heads in the village and wear a \textit{chaddori} when a male \textit{na-mahram} comes to the village. If they see an elder on the streets who is worthy of respect, they pull down their veils to cover their faces. Younger women, particularly daughters-in-law, are expected to show \textit{sharm} and defer to seniors in their opinions and behaviour. In this discussion, there were frequent remonstrations for the younger women to “be quiet,” especially when any views contrary to the community’s self-presentation were inadvertently expressed.

The women’s views were traditional. As Hajirā (38 years, housewife) said, “Allah created women for household work and for serving their husbands...Women can’t do anything else but give birth.” The women took great pride in their adherence to the “right way of life”: Women are to take care, sustain, obey and serve their men. In their daily lives, men decide or express their wishes and women obey, they asserted. As Dādā Shirin (42 years, housewife and widow) put it:

\begin{quote}
An unmarried girl has to obey her parents and brothers, and she is under their orders. When she gets married, her mother-in-law, father-in-law, her husband, her older brother-in-law's wife are her elders. If her father-in-law and mother-in-law are not at home, she needs to gain permission from her older brother-in-law to do something. Or if she goes anywhere, she needs her husband's consent. If her husband is not willing for her to do something or go somewhere, she should not do it because is it sin and she will be divorced by her husband.
\end{quote}

Most households are extended and joint. Altercations, if any, were said to be between senior women. Mothers-in-law direct and supervise all actions of the younger women, including what is to be cooked. Household supplies are generally under the control of the senior woman. Women do not routinely go out of the immediate neighbourhood, and younger women cannot go to another woman’s home without permission from their elders. Unmarried girls, especially after puberty, are kept under great control and monitoring; the women described them as “locked up.” However, women may move within the community for their other duties—weddings, deaths, births, illness, sijāli wa shariki, hāshar and so forth—and they extensively participate in all of these. The women and men prefer to give their daughters in marriage to families within the village, while some brides are sought from neighbouring villages. Matchmaking and deciding upon alliances is the domain of men; the women are then informed after which the women from the groom’s household formally approach the bride’s household.

The women considered the division of labour in their community to be fair and clear. Hawas Gull (30 years, housewife) expressed this division in the following terms: “Our men work outside...It is not fair that they work by breaking stones and then come

\textsuperscript{97} In pre-conflict times, women also made and sold \textit{soan} (a type of cloth) from this wool.
the home and work with us.” The women generally felt very sorry for their men and were grateful for the work that they did in order to feed and bring comfort to them and their children. However, Šaforā (25 years, housewife) highlighted the complementarity of labour: “Men know the value of women’s work and women know the value of men’s work.”

The women in Isārkhai do not go to the bazār; the men buy what they ask for and bring it back. They believed that a man with gheirat would not allow a woman to visit the bazār. Women do not go into the village mosque either. They very much felt the lack of a clinic in the village. Transportation to Qārābāgh and other places for healthcare is very expensive. An illness could entail seeking loans, and informal loans seem to be a prominent coping strategy. Most births take place at home with the help of other women. One participant, Nāzanin (25 years, housewife), was limping badly—the family cow had recently kicked her—but she had not received any medical attention. She had not been taken to the clinic as her husband was also sick, and she was now trying a berry pack for a cure.

On women’s education, the women said that it is enough for girls to study up to the second or third grade; there is no need to study any more. The women were not aware of the women’s council, but they said that the malik’s wife was the head of the women’s council for the CDC. One discussant, Arifā (37 years, housewife), added, “I think there is no need to have a women’s CDC, because women cannot do what men can. We accept what the men tell us to do.” Women felt their lack of income acutely. In their opinion, an income could at least contribute to their siyāli wa shariki needs. They found life to be hard; young girls were idle at home, while men could only labour at dangerous and uncertain stone breaking.

The changes that women saw in this past decade were as follows: less control, especially from mother-in-laws; more brothers living apart from their joint households; education for girls; and men’s greater willingness to attend to women’s healthcare needs. In much of the conversation, too, there was a repeated reference to Kabul women and their different ways; it was one of the aspects defining “otherness” for the women.

The women said that 25 poor women were identified for the FRDO project by the malik and his son. Each participant was given three sheep; a veterinarian came to train them on one occasion. The women claimed that many sheep fell ill while being transported to Isārkhai, and about one-third died in the first week. The animals were given, de facto, to the husband or son of the project participant, and those that survived were initially grazed by children. Later, most were grazed daily in a grape garden in Faryā by two hired shepherds. Some women who had backyards grazed them there. Very few sheep had lambed during the past two years. Limited areas to corral them as well as the scarce feed during winters were problems according to the women. Some husbands had also sold the animal(s) to meet pressing household needs.

As part of the project, the malik’s son had given the women basic livestock training and information on personal health matters. He also trained the women in basic literacy and

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98 The identification of participants was primarily based on the women whose families allowed them to participate, who were given time away from their household duties to attend the classes every morning and who were not senior in age. The malik’s wife also received three sheep.

99 The intestine of a sheep can, for example, pay for 1 kg of sugar, while a bottle of yoghurt from sheep’s milk can earn 30 Afs ($0.60). However, it should be noted that the men in the focus group discussion said that most of the sheep had been sold.
numeracy, and taught them to sew bags for a period of six months for four hours each morning. Many women rearranged their household work in order to accommodate the classes, which were held in the two front rooms inside the malik’s courtyard. They said that all of what they learned was new knowledge to them. Four tailoring machines were given to this community. The finished bags are still with the project representatives, and the women are yet to gain an income from their work. However, they were all busy and happy with the increased activity.

The project participant, Nāzānin, was ill-at-ease when she joined the focus group. Obviously poorer and with a lower status, she sat at one end of the room, near the entrance. She spoke less in the group and responded only when directly addressed; she seemed to take her cues from the statements made by other women.

In the subsequent individual interview, she was uncertain about the project and its benefits. However, she was appreciative of the literacy training (including some reading and reciting of the Holy Qur’ān) and was pleased that she can now write from 1 to 100, read from a second-grade book and write her and her mahram’s names; she also has a better knowledge in general. However, Nāzānin had hoped that the livestock would bring in some income. The sheep, she said, were too young for milk or reproduction. She hoped they would survive the winter. Her mother-in-law has a cow, so acquiring the sheep was significant for her.

Nāzānin anticipates that the sheep’s offspring will belong more to her in the household. At the time, the choice in spending her husband’s income was his; she could not question him. She felt that women’s income generation was an important factor in terms of power and rights within the household. If women could earn from tailoring, for example, “we would say, if you’re bringing a bag of rice and if we bought two bags of powder, in this case we would say we are equal.” Or, “if we sew a bag and sell it for 300, 500 or 400 Afs [$6, 10 or 8], then we can buy cakes, cookies, soap or washing powder. We women would not ask our husbands for money, and our rights would be equal.”

However, Nāzānin said that women did not know how to make purchases and were thus dependent on their men. Being under pardā in a fairly rigid sense, she was also entirely dependent on her husband to buy everything, so the control would still his, she said. The female-male disparity with regard to mobility is very high in the village. It affects, for example, Nāzānin’s knowledge of the bazar, and in this respect, she said, “We [women] go to Qārābāgh only when we are sick.” In her case, especially, with an injured leg, she said she would go to a clinic if she had the money and did not have to ask a neighbour for a loan.

Her husband, a potter who sells his pottery at Istālīf bazar, said that the women in Kulalan or Zeer-e-takht, villages adjoining Isārkhail, would not come to Istālīf or Isārkhail or any other village to participate in a project. The reason that he gave was that men would only permit their women to work if it were within the cultural and social chaunik (norms). The rocky terrain of the area also encourages less effort, and women are subject to badgoi (backbiting, gossip, slander) if their physical mobility increases.

The implementing organisation for this livestock project in Isārkhail was FRDO, an organisation that was established in Mazar-e-Sharief in 1995 and later worked in Pakistan,

100 See Azoy, Buzkashi, 37 on the implications of seating on hierarchy and status in a bala (guest room).
101 In contrast, the young daughter (about 16 years) and hostess of the malik’s house (along with the latter’s sister-in-law), even as they were busy with their duties, spoke freely and with confidence.
mostly in relief distribution. The Isärkhail project was implemented in partnership with the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) and MoWA. The organisation’s representative (anonymity requested) had previously worked in Omer Fāroq village in Istālif and had been approached by Isärkhail’s malik/CDC representative to implement a similar project in Isärkhail. JICA conducted a needs assessment in Isärkhail and following a request for proposals, FRDO was awarded the project.

FRDO identified 25 needy women between the ages of 18 and 45 with the help of the malik, who in turn convinced his quam-brothers at Friday khutbā (prayers) to “let their women learn Islamic lessons...be real Muslims.” The FRDO project initially distributed three sheep per participant, with one hour each of literacy training, Islamic lessons and livestock keeping skills. The programme was also under the remit of the Vital Literacy Programme of the Ministry of Health and followed its curriculum; the trainer (the malik’s son) reported on its progress to the Ministry of Education. Through the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock, FRDO sent veterinary doctors to check on the sheep and vaccinate them. According to the project representative, the project expenses amounted to $60,000. This project was followed by another adjunct project to train the women in leather sewing (coats and bags). FRDO female field staff supervised the project according to the representative.

Aside from some discussion on domestic violence (in which the general advice seems to have been “do as the husband says”), the project focussed on the two training areas (Islamic lessons and coat or bag sewing) in addition to some health knowledge and the sheep distribution. The training included a discourse on relieving men of their economic burdens and contributing to the family. The project representative also made a case for women-only initiatives, but distanced her project from gender relations, at least initially. According to her:

> if a wife wants to be self-sufficient, we [should] leave gender separate. We want to improve their economy, and we want to have paid jobs for women, companies for women where all the staff should be women, with only two or three men as guards during the nights. Ten or 15 women can work together, each can bring their hens from their homes to a farm and then they can work together. It will grow rapidly...We do not want women’s rights...We encourage them to work and then they slowly take their rights.

However, to date, income generation has been nil, except for the few (about four) women whose sheep have lambed. Women’s autonomy, empowerment, control over income and greater decision making in the household through economic engagement is thus questionable in Isärkhail.

The donor and programming agency for the Isärkhail project was JICA; its representative, Ikumi Ogiwari, is the organisation’s Gender and Development Advisor. JICA has a broad gender policy for all development, but no Afghanistan-specific gender strategy. The leather-sewing project in Isärkhail was part of two provincial projects to develop MoWA’s capacities in project cycle management according to Ikumi. JICA regards the livestock project as a direct benefit and the leather-sewing training as an indirect benefit. They followed the CDC guidelines in setting the budget and time span of the project.

For JICA, the initial six-month project was designed to build the capacity of MoWA; JICA monitored MoWA’s project cycle management. Ikumi pointed out that the changes brought about by the project in Isärkhail include the village’s attitude toward the
project and the perception of the utility of literacy, income generation, health and skills for women. According to her, “the behaviour of the community people changed. In the beginning, they didn’t want such a project for women at all. And now, they really want it to run. They also know it is important to run...This behaviour change is very, very important.” For Ikumi, this project can be rated as a success. After JICA’s experience of cattle distribution in Balkh, in villages that are “commandeered,” it might be a better strategy to invest in skills rather than material (livestock), which encourage the local elite to take control.

Ikumi also felt that the six-month vocational training course was not very effective:

> It is very difficult to see any changes in these six months. If you want to see the economic status change, probably you need one or two years. Especially in vocational training. I think one of the major problems in Afghanistan is that many of the organisations provide poor women with vocational training, such as tailoring, carpet weaving, jewellery making, etc., and the problem is quality. If you train for only six months what type of things can you create? You may know how to make something, but it cannot be of high quality.

The mediocre quality of the goods produced cannot compete with similar, but better-finished and higher-quality products from Pakistan, Iran and China, she said. Ikumi would also like to see a post-vocational training approach, “like employment opportunities or maybe connecting women to the market or creating markets for the products. And then, they will be able to earn the money...[but they must] make sure of the quality.” She notes that market studies are essential, as are studies of value chains.

### 2.1.4 Mousākhil Pāein, Qārābāgh

Mousākhil Pāein is a village located about half an hour’s drive on a dirt road from Qārābāgh Township. It has around 265 families, mostly Tājik, with some Pashtoon, and mostly az dowr dehqani. Most Tājiks migrated during the Taliban times, since non-Pashtoon property was particularly targeted during the conflict. The main source of income for the families is agriculture (wheat and maize) and livestock; there are a few orchards with grape, mulberry, black mulberry and olive trees; vegetables are also grown and sold. A season of raisin production earns around 30,000 Afs ($6,000) or about 80 Afs ($1.60) per day. In cattle rearing, a calf can be sold for 30,000 Afs ($6,000).

The village has a male shurā and a nominal female shurā in the CDC. A secondary school was built around 2011, but girls generally study until seventh or eighth grade, or until they reach puberty; there are no female teachers. The high school in Dan-e-maidān is attended by boys. For healthcare, centres at Qārābāgh, Charikar and Bagrāmi are favoured; the local health clinic, about 10-20 minutes away by foot, does not have a female doctor and is not regarded as effective. Pregnant women or women in labour have died en route to Bagrāmi. The bus stop is about 45 minutes away. Child marriages are not uncommon. There is no electricity, and the lack of water is a major concern in Mousākhil Pāein.

The project in Mousākhil Pāein, part of NABDP and implemented in 2011, comprised a three-day course teaching 20 women how to make jam in order to profit from unsold apples from their annual produce.
The male focus group discussion\(^{102}\) was held in the DDA office in Qārābāgh Township. In Qārābāgh district, the men said that most people in the villages had emigrated and since returned to their homes; the double displacement left them homeless when they returned as everything had been fired or burnt. Their time spent in other places was a learning experience. Many who had previously commuted to Kabul from Qārābāgh chose instead to move to the city and live there. Those who stayed back or returned were engaged in agriculture and animal husbandry. Travel routes in the region can be highly insecure with conflict-related armed killings. However, the streets have been paved, schools built and clinics constructed, pointing to an overall betterment in the quality of life in the Shamāli plains region. The population of Qārābāgh is about 170,000. The men found the quality of the schools and clinics to be worrisome. In Qārābāgh, there are 44 schools in total, with mixed education in primary schools, one all-female high school and four boys’ high schools. In their opinion, the younger generation has gone “soft”: They cannot relate to agriculture and the soil, and they are not inclined to responsibility and hard work.

According to the men, the earlier view of girls who attended high school as behayā (without modesty) has in this past decade given way to an acceptance of girls’ education, but sexual harassment can inhibit many girls. They pointed out that physical sexual harassment causes gheirat to activate in men, contributing to girls discontinuing their education. In addition, the human and civil rights discourse around self-determination in marriage has had some negative effects, with parents preferring not to educate their daughters rather than risk the potential dishonour of couples eloping. They added disapprovingly that women were now aware of the presence of shelters (khānā aman, “house of peace,” “secure home”), but they were amused that running away from home could be termed “not a crime.” As Bashir Ahmad Bāi (45 years, malik, Tājik) said, “If a woman is a threat to your [one’s] honour and dignity, she is killed.” Domestic violence was condoned among this group and seen as vājīb. However, some observed a similarity between human rights and Islam, but that the latter should be followed. They agreed with child marriages if the bride physically resembled an adult.

A good woman was considered to be one who obeys her husband, maintains her siyālī wa shariki with neighbours and relatives, and takes good care of her in-laws’ needs. A bride should respect and obey her father-in-law just as she obeyed her father. Abdul Ozitr (59 years, malik, Tājik) referred to a surā (Qur’ānic verse) stating that “if worship is allowed of any except God, then women should worship their men.” They were very aware of beliefs in international community that women do not have rights in Afghanistan. They referred to the Deputy Minister of the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock who, at a function for Women’s Day, had said, “Husbands provide food and clothing for their wives, and in return they ask their wives to just stay at home. Is there any other important right than these [for women]?” This same government official apparently described women who “roamed” in the bazār without a hijāb as “rotten fruit.”

Among the men, there was full approval for the monetisation of women’s home- or community-based labour, and a general enthusiasm for projects providing such opportunities. The advantage that they saw was a decrease in male responsibilities, since the income contributed to the household’s expenses, younger children’s needs and

\(^{102}\) The group consisted of seven men between the ages of 28 and 67. There were three maliks (including two landowners from neighbouring villages), two farmers, one former NSP staff member currently working in a ministry and one landowner’s bodyguard. As such, this could be considered an elite group of men, who were, by default, the decision makers for their communities. The men were generally wary and discreet; significant pauses acted as pointed reminders of the public domain of this discussion and the research study as well as its public nature.
women’s siyâli wa shariki. By their norms, women do not work outside the village. If women work from home, they should not be allowed to sell their products in the bazâr, and nor should they drive or be shopkeepers. Working in an office, while possibly acceptable, was not necessary in their view. The division of labour was traditional in their communities; if women work, then who will do the cooking, asked Shayeq Khân (28 years, NABDP staff, Pashtoon). On spending women’s income, they said that if there was a surplus, then a woman could ask her husband to buy her something, like a new chaddori or a pair of shoes; the husband would generally decide what is bought and when.

On the NABDP project, their view was that the project proposal did not take into account the time (three to four months) needed to launch a new product in the local market nor did it provide buffer costs to absorb an initial low price and pay for suitable packaging costs; it also made no provision for storage. The trainer was paid one-fourth of the project’s budget. An aviculture venture some time ago did not succeed either. They considered projects for rearing cattle and other livestock as well as carpet weaving and handicrafts to be very suitable for women.

The female focus group discussion was held in the malik’s house in Mousâkhil Pâein. The women in this group appeared to lead very traditional lives aligned with practices such as obedience and duty to their husband and in-laws. Most keep pardâ and are sater (covered); they do not show their faces to na-mahram. Yet, unlike in Isârkhal, they do not uniformly endorse the value systems of their habitus. They pointed out many gender-based contractions: A man has the freedom to earn a living, but a woman is restricted to housework; women are limited to learning the surâ-e-namâz, but men can study the Holy Qur’ân at the masjid; many boys from Mousâkhil Pâein go to Qârâbâgh to study, but girls cannot; and a married woman cannot take another husband, but a man can have four wives. Malalâi (45 years, housewife, Tâjik) expressed the overall restraints in the following terms: “Women are blamed until they are three days in the grave, but men are free in every situation.”

The women do the household chores as well as some farming and agricultural jobs. They gather wood for cooking and heating, and collect, clean and dry some fruits, like grapes and mulberries. They go to gardens and fields to collect vegetables. The men usually take the livestock to the pasture, while the women take care of it at home. Senior women can also take the livestock to graze. Women do the milking and feeding and keep the barn clean. The women claimed that no one in the village has tailoring or embroidery skills.

Many in the group had televisions and watched serials and other programmes. They were aware of, but cynical about the discourse on women’s rights. Fribâ (30 years, housewife, Tâjik) asked sarcastically, “Didn’t you hear on the TV? They say men and women have equal rights...Now men love their wives...They don’t beat them.” Domestic strife and violence is kept private and resolved within the household: “If a woman’s hand is broken, it should be kept under her sleeve.” They felt that their daily lives had little connection with what was broadcast through the media. Television made them aware of many discussions around women’s inheritance and land ownership. Mujâhidâ (38 yeras, housewife, Tâjik) said that she and other women hear contrary information: “The maulavi asks what is the use if women study a lot. On the other hand, TV, they say on...”

103 The eight participants were all Tâjiks and housewives, including two widows (one dependent on her son-in-law, but living in her husband’s house). They were aged between 30 and 65 years, and their household size ranged from five to 25.

104 Designating a few verses from the Qur’ân-e-Sharief, thus limited knowledge.
the television that women should study and that they have the right to an inheritance... We are confused which one is correct.” This sentence was debated within the group and the dominant opinion was that the maulavi was right: If he says so it is because Islam says so. Women do not claim or receive an inheritance; they are taken care of by their father or husband.

The participants were aware that women in Qārābāgh Township generate income through tailoring and that some even have shops to retail their products, while other women own and run beauty salons in Qārābāgh bazār and that some in Kabul even drive and own shops. They noted a greater presence of female shoppers in Qārābāgh bazār; one respondent said that she sends her daughter to shop at the bazār while another’s daughter-in-law sometimes buys items there. Some women were allowed to travel to other villages for ceremonies in a group and without a male mahram; others protested, saying that a male mahram is a must. All agreed that women should not go anywhere without permission from their household head or husband, otherwise she will be divorced. The women were very involved in siyāli wa shariki; they saw it as an outlet for networking, female camaraderie and fulfilling social obligations. In their view, a man who allows his wife to work while he is jobless is begheirat, but a woman too should have gheirat and look for an income source.

They said that there was no women’s shurā in the CDC. They suggested quilt making or tailoring to be income-generating options, and were also keen to receive literacy and Qur’ānic lessons. They considered projects around livestock to be a natural option. The NABDP project was uniformly considered to be non-productive and unremarkable. As they already had fruit trees, making jam was not new to them; they also watched such programmes on television or their mobile phones. If they had the money for sugar, other ingredients, utensils and jars, they could have done the project anyway. They pointed out that outlets for the products were not identified or contracted by the NABDP project. Furthermore, they would have liked to test their products’ marketability and quality against those already on the market, especially jams from Pakistan, Iran or other countries.

The participant identified for this project and her husband requested anonymity and confidentiality. The interaction was not allowed to be recorded or noted. In short, the NABDP project on jam making gathered 20 women from this village, but the project participant said that there had been some tension with the NABDP implementer/representative. They were provided with money to buy fruit, sugar, jars and utensils from the market. Over three days, a trainer taught them how to make apple and cherry jam. The goal of the project was unclear. The women made jam, and each family kept two jars for the initial sale. However, the men were not able to sell them in the bazār (Maidan, Qārābāgh), and eventually about 200 jars of jam were bought by the MRRD.

The participant said that her life had not been affected by this project on an economic or social level. On average, there were at least three to four girls in each household in the village, and according to the participant, they along with all the women were “idle.” Girls were married off by men without asking for their consent contrary to what is said in the Holy Qur’ān; “They don’t ask,” she said. There was a certain difference in the way that she presented her control within the household and the active authority that her husband claimed that she exercised. She does not travel unaccompanied or without permission, she has no income, no control over her husband’s income and no say in her children’s marriages, and in her opinion, has no decision-making authority other than with household chores. She was extremely unwell, but had no money to travel to the clinic or health centre to buy medicine. She concluded, “Men are in power in this land. Whereas women don’t have any rights or power at all...Women are frozen in this country.”
The implementing organisation for this project was NABDP. Its representative was the Monitoring and Evaluation Officer of the Local Institutional Development Programme of NABDP. NABDP has a gender department and a gender policy. The gender unit, she said, implements women-focussed projects.

The project in Mousākhil Pāein village was a part of a nine-district project in Kabul province budgeted at $360,000 and channelled through the District Development Authorities. It targeted 360 women and was based on the representative’s three-month training in Japan on making the best use of local agricultural products. The project was planned since money remained from NABDP’s annual budget; her goal was to transfer her newly acquired knowledge. They first educated men about women rights and the importance of women’s work, and then asked them to identify the two poorest women from two villages of each district.

A pilot project was conducted in Paghmān and Charasiā, where according to the representative, she “taught women how to make tomato paste and how to package it, or how to make jam or pickle from their fruits. The problem was that there is no market for these local products.” Although a needs assessment was conducted for the seven other districts (including their capacity for providing raw materials), it is evident that the lacunae found in the pilot project had not been addressed in the Mousākhil Pāein phase of the project. Raw material (fruits and vegetables) were supplied to the women, and the majority did not have the resources to buy their own materials. The few who did buy more ingredients were unable to find outlets for sale. However, the representative felt that the project empowered women economically, although its sustainability was poor and many women could not continue their activities since there was no market for their products. The donors, JICA and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) monitor the overall performance of NABDP once or twice a year.

The head of the Local Institutions Development Department of NABDP, Dr Abdul Sāmi Jalālzāi, was well aware of these issues and also indicated other problems, including inadequate packaging and poor quality. He also felt that protectionist measures should be in place for such small-scale products so that they not need compete with similar imported goods. He also said that some projects distribute livestock or poultry, but the participants tend to sell them or use them for household purposes. He felt the need to improve the awareness and training of participants in making better use of the investments from projects such as these; selling or personally using the chickens provided by projects rather than breeding them for income generation is an example.

There does not seem to be evidence of women’s economic empowerment through this project in Mousākhil Pāein nor of any income-associated enhancement of social empowerment and agency.

2.1.5 Adam Khān, Bagrāmi

Bagrāmi, nestled at the base of the Shamālī Hills, was the scene of particular Mujahideen activity in the 1990s, resulting in a large outflow of migrants to Pakistan. The migrations began around 1990-91, but most people have returned during the last decade.
Adam Khān is a village located near the larger village of Now-borjā and 3 km south of Kabul city limits. It is a verdant village with small canals of running water and culverts. It houses around 80 families, Tājik and Pashtoon; they are mostly az dowr dehqani. Each ethnic group originates from a common ancestor, i.e. they consider themselves to be from one quam. Most households are joint families. Many families in the community have moved from using hurricane lamps and gas lanterns (mostly for reading) to solar lighting. Gas is used for cooking instead of animal droppings. There is now a well-fed spring in the village, and the river is no longer the sole water source for households. Although some families still cut and cart firewood from the mountains, the majority buy gas and firewood from the bazār. The main source of income is agriculture and livestock, although some men are employed in small retail or government jobs. The closure of a factory in Bagrāmi, which had employed many from Adam Khān, has caused further unemployment. Roads and rivers continue to freeze in winter.

A school for girls and boys teaching up to sixth grade is located at about 20 minutes’ walking distance away in the next village; the students, however, study under tents, as a building has not been constructed. Further studies up to Grade 12 are found in Qamāri village about 3 km away; most boys, but very few girls study there. The average grade reached by girls is sixth grade, after which education is “khatem” (finished), said a male participant. The school lacks female teachers. The mullah does not allow girls to come to the madrassa in the mosque after about the age of eight or nine years. There is a small clinic in Qamāri village, but the female doctor does not come regularly; people generally go to Kārt-e-nau or Kabul city. Transportation is by taxi or van from the main road, which is about 10 minutes’ walk away, while there is a bus-service from Qamāri. Some families own cars. The NABDP implemented a tailoring training course here for women through the NSP in 2007.

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105 A family with two or three cows can normally sell milk and yoghurt in the bazār; 7 kg of yoghurt earns about 280 Afs ($5.60).

106 As a male participant said, “If a woman even gets her PhD, someday someone will come and take her. Then she is finished. They are siāsar [wife, common term used for women]; they will get married someday and should stay at home for the rest of their lives.”
The male focus group discussion was held in the masjid. The men’s council has been part of the NSP 2 project; they built protection walls and a culvert and received solar generators. The last project was jointly funded by the female and male shurās, and the solar systems are said to be “outstanding.” Given the money spent, the men said that they would have preferred a mosque or a sustainable project around livestock or agriculture. They were hoping that the NSP 3 project will also select their village. According to this group, the men’s council comprising about 15 members aims “to implement programmes and projects, to solve people’s problems, including violence between groups...The women’s council is about their [NSP] tailoring project.” The female and male shurās do not meet together. Some of the men in the men’s shurā have friends whose wives are in the women’s; communication normally occurs through this channel. The female NSP member holds separate meetings with the women’s shurā on projects.

Most non-government projects emphasise literacy, although the men believe that livelihood courses on carpet weaving, poultry or nursing and midwifery would be more effective. They would also like women to be involved in health courses, since according to the men, women need it the most. They readily stated that women are always working—14 hours compared to a man’s 8 hours—and interestingly, they felt that “work is not only if they work outside and have an income.” However, as Massoud (35 years, retired army officer and male CDC head, Tajik) said, “We have a traditional division. Since the men work outside, women should do the household chores. Work that is in the bazārs and cities, society will not allow women to do that. People will talk behind one’s back if she works in the bazār or an NGO.”

Sexual harassment is common outside the radius of the immediate four to five communities or villages, and it is a concern for the men. According to Mohammad Akram (50 years, army officer, Tajik), “Nāmos is our women, our country and our Islam. We must protect them against any offense and at any cost, even with our blood. And gheirat is the sense of feeling this responsibility in keeping our nāmos safe.” As in Qarabagh, the men in Adam Khan village were sensitive to the more recent discourse on gender, women’s rights and violence against women, but felt that this was a scare tactic promoted by foreign NGOs. If there were serious issues between a daughter-in-law and her husband and in-laws, the two families met. If unresolved, the men’s council may be approached, with some members of the men’s council adjudicating. Thus far, no woman from the village has gone to court. Some families practise toyana, but spend the money on the bride according to the men. Decisions on marital alliances are made by parents, but the men claimed that women carry the most authority in these decisions.

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107 Seven Tajik and Pashtoon participants aged from 19 to 50 years.
The village has adequate land for pasture. For those families with livestock, the animals along with their produce are entirely in women’s control. Many families have a cow, sheep or goats; they are considered to be assets. However, many families do not have the money to invest in livestock or buy more; they wished that the NSP had approved money to buy livestock. Any income generation for women within the home or village is acceptable; in the men’s opinion, training women in carpet weaving and poultry farming would be good. The SDO project did not generate any income for the women, and, although many women turned up in the beginning, their interest faded after time.

The women’s focus group discussion\textsuperscript{108} was held in a woman discussant’s home as the women refused to meet in the malik’s house.\textsuperscript{109} They all lived in extended families, generally in a joint compound. In their families, girls study until about second or third grade, rarely until fourth or fifth grade. There was apparently a recent story of a girl who eloped from school; this led to more families withdrawing their daughters from school. The women considered it besharm for post-puberty girls to be in school, while families that allow this are also seen as besharm. Alliances are decided by the senior women and men; girls tend to be married at 13 or 14 years.\textsuperscript{110} Often, the girl’s mother is not consulted and only informed after the decision has been made.

Grandmothers-in-law and mothers-in-law have tremendous authority in all these decisions as well as over the routine movements of younger women and girls. There are probably four to six generations of women on average in the families of this settlement. The deference structure in these families appears very strong, even when compared to Isārkhail and Mousākhil Pāein villages, while it is definitely very different from the families encountered in Nahr-e-darsan and the Police Township. However, the emphasis on sarshars, and their greater presence in this village reveals a situation in which strong senior women assume their “rightful” place in society after the fertile and nurturing period of motherhood and grandmotherhood, subsequently wielding great power and authority in the fortunes of the extended family. This power, however, is being challenged, as has traditionally been the case, by the younger women in this (and other) social structures.

Although no longer covering their faces in front of their father-in-law and elder brother-in-law, the participants said that women show great deference behaviour (sharm) to all elders, whether female or male. They did not visit their natal homes very often after marriage, otherwise they along with their family would face badgoi. The women and their immediate female kin and kith do not go to the clinic or bazār without a mahram and nowhere in the village or community without prior permission. They also felt that domestic violence has decreased over the past decades, because women no longer keep quiet, probably as a result of migration in their opinion. Girls are sent to school, and this trend would continue and become stronger according to the women, with the exception of the one girl who eloped. Changes will come with education, as “women sitting in

\textsuperscript{108} The group comprised seven women aged from 18 to 50 years, all Pashtoon and Pashto speakers, and all housewives, including one widow.

\textsuperscript{109} In this village, the field researcher knocked on doors and requested for women to participate in the focus group discussion. There were differences in opinion between the current malik and the community that he represents. Not only was he unable to convince his village men for their household women to participate in the focus group, but the women in his household told the team that other women would refuse to meet in their house.

\textsuperscript{110} One participant, Shaimā (26 years, housewife, Pashtoon) said, “I was 13 years old when my mother engaged me to an elderly man in Pakistan. My husband is older than my father. I cried a lot on the day of the engagement. I was not yet 14 when I married. Now I am 26 years old; I have five children, three daughters and two sons. My husband is a hired labourer and he is not a very rich.”
the corners of the home cannot bring about change.” Inheritance and property rights for women are not practised or expected. Dāghgull (18 years, housewife, Pashtoon) asked, “Who will give legacy rights to women?” She added, “If we say something [about inheritance], they say, ‘Shut up...just eat the rice and waste your time.’” According to the participants, a man with gheirat is one who will keep his word, not look at or abuse a woman, not give his daughter to non-Pashtoons in marriage, not be jobless nor send his children to work.

Caring for livestock, cleaning the barn and milking are generally the responsibility of senior women; they can also take the animals to pasture with a male child. Some women with cows and surplus milk make qrut (dried yoghurt), which is bartered or sold to neighbours; they acknowledged that feed for the livestock is very difficult to obtain in winter. Others work on vegetable patches owned or leased by their families. Women also tend to almond, peach and apricot orchards. Destitute (beparast) women (widows with no income and no brothers) struggle and patiently have to wait for help from others. All would like to have Qur’ānic lessons, and the younger women would like to read and write. They were entirely unaware of women’s shurā in the CDC and the CDC itself. About ten girls and women participated in the SDO project, which provided tailoring training along with five sewing machines to the village women. The women did not know where the tailoring machines were now.

The project participant, Royā, was Pashtoon, unmarried, and living with her parents and brothers’ families in their joint parental household. She was the malik’s sister. Aged around 28 years, she was able to study until the third grade before the arrival of the Taliban regime (the family had stayed back), after which time she was considered too old (post-puberty) for school.

Her elder brother lives closer to the city, and her mother has the most authority in the household; on most family-related matters, her views are upheld. In some matters, like her sisters-in-laws’ visits to their natal families, their husbands decide. Routine household purchases are done by men in Qāmāri or Now-borjā bazārs. If her brothers are at home, one of them goes to the shop for any unexpected small needs. However, Royā seems to have greater mobility due to her strong personality and age, in addition to the fact that she is unmarried, with her mother being the de facto household head. She said, “If my brothers are not at home and if we need anything at home, I wear the chaddori and go to bazār alone...There is no problem if my mother agrees.” She can do this, she said, because everyone knows her and she is not a wife.

She and her sisters-in-laws are allowed to go to Kabul city together, but her sisters-in-laws cannot go to the local bazārs close to the village; her brothers would be called begheirat. Similarly, two of her elder brothers live separately closer to the city, and their wives work in government jobs. This could be seen as indicative of parochial spaces being sites of surveillance, the decreasing of which can encourage greater opportunities for women.
Her unmarried third brother (her nominal *mahram* in the absence of her eldest brother), said his future wife should be educated and work. The brother called non-earning women “*tiarkhor,*” i.e. “she will just eat, sit and dress-up, and she can do nothing else.” Royā also feels that women in the community are *muftkhor* (freeloaders) because “men work and women eat.” This wording and reasoning, also used by the women in her community in the group discussion, could be seen as an awareness of the lesser contribution made to the family than with the women’s traditionally equal labour roles in the areas of agriculture-based production. As Royā’s brother pointed out, “Before *Inqilāb* [“revolution,” used for regime changes], all these women were working in the field and doing farming in these lands. In every house, there were three or four livestock, they were busy with that and with housework like cooking, washing and tandoor [baking bread].” Now, the revenue from the land has decreased and they do not have enough livestock relative to the household size. If Royā were to earn an income, he said, it would be entirely hers to use.

The SDO project was the first project to be implemented in the village for women’s income generation. Royā said that the men’s *shurā* decided on tailoring; no NSP staff asked the women about their preference, and they do not have a women’s *shurā*. The men’s council monitored the women’s attendance. Her sister-in-law taught the women tailoring. Royā participated because the training was held in her house, and because she wanted to learn tailoring and earn an income. Five tailoring machines were brought to her house, and five to another *malik*’s house in the neighbouring village; issues around *nang* prevented the men from allowing the women from the two villages to learn together in one or the other village. Royā said that there were 28 students initially, including very senior women who believed that the machines would be distributed. In the end, only ten or 12 women were trained, most of whom are now married.

The NSP staff monitoring this project were all men according to Royā; they therefore could not come inside the house and check on the progress of the training, but instead they would stand outside and ask questions. The number of machines distributed was also low, and the 20 women could not gain adequate practice on the five machines. Since the project was implemented six years ago, she and her sister-in-law sew clothes for family members as well as curtains, mattresses and other things. They sew on the machines that the project delivered. Other than this, “she learnt a skill and didn’t lose anything.” She is happy with the skill that she learnt and said that it saves her money on new clothes. She also sews gratis for some of her immediate and extended family.

The project has not altered her social status in the family or community in any apparent or self-identified way. Household work remains traditionally gendered; Royā does not have an income and the radius of her physical mobility remains gendered, but contextual. She retains the limited authority of her position as an unmarried daughter of the house in a community context where senior women have power in the family. Her brother felt that focussing on livestock would be a far better option for women’s income generation. In his opinion, if tailoring were pursued as an income source, outlets should be sourced beforehand and regular retail sales should be negotiated and contracted. However, money to buy good-quality cloth is a problem; local shopkeepers buy finished clothing from China or Pakistan, and as he said, “The clothes made here are not comparable in quality and price.”

**The implementing agency** for this project in Adam Khān, the SDO, has been a Facilitating Partner of the NSP within Kabul province since 2003. The SDO staff are all male, and they find it very difficult to recruit and retain female staff. Samiullāh Naseery, its director, said that its capacity building department prepares training material on peace-
building, gender and other issues, and conducts training sessions for the staff. Project monitoring was conducted according to the Operation Manual of the MRRD for the NSP, which has a reporting system at district and provincial levels. The director seemed unaware of the NAPWA. He said that the tailoring project in Adam Khān village entered “into the failed-list of the ministry [MRRD], because people could not prepare a proper business plan. After completing the project, they could not do proper marketing for the products.”

The donor and programming agency for the project in Adam Khān was the NSP. Its three representatives requested anonymity. They said that in general, the projects identified in the NSP as directly beneficial to women and indirectly beneficial to the community relate to tailoring, livestock, literacy training and beekeeping; some women’s councils have also identified a clinic, generator, buying utensils and dishes to rent out to other communities, etc. as potential projects. They added that traditions and culture sometimes preclude the establishment of a CDC or women’s council and the active participation of women. Frequently, the heads of the female and male shurās are from the same family unit.

An NSP representative said that in many villages:

*The real picture is that women do not have the authority to make decisions on their own through the NSP and CDC projects. Men’s shurās take decisions on the election and activities of the CDC and also decide when and if to involve the women’s shurās. The men’s shurās also tend to appropriate the material resources provided through and for women’s shurā projects...The benefit goes into men’s pockets.*

However, he said that women’s (nominal) right in decision making is recorded because the NSP and CDC processes require their signatures to validate projects and verify their expenses and execution. The NSP representatives nevertheless felt that the CDC has generated an awareness of women’s public participation in the affairs of the community. In places with greater insecurity, the NSP monitoring staff sometimes hide their NSP identity. The representatives also attributed women’s low or absent participation rates to the short-term nature of NSP projects.

The NSP monitoring staff are aware that Adam Khān does not have a female shurā and that the malik and male shurā decided on the tailoring project and the placement of the five sewing machines in the malik’s house.

### 2.2 Analysis

The information gathered from this primary research on five research sites relating to five projects conducted from 2007 to 2011 for women’s economic empowerment brings some important points to light. Some of these issues are framed within the socio-cultural aspects of women and their communities, while others are relevant to project programming and implementation. However, other issues need to be addressed at national and policy levels. These concerns are relevant for the future programming of projects aimed at enhancing women’s economic engagement and enhancement in Afghanistan. Further, the connotation of the material that emerged from the interviews and discussions offers a depth of understanding on the ways in which women’s economic participation is hindered or facilitated.
Based on the research findings, gendered agency, empowerment and decision making need to be contextualised before reaching a better understanding of their nature. In villages like Isārkhail, these issues could be far more nuanced than those observed in Nahr-e-darsan or the Police Township. This primary research identified some key issues on women and income generation, which include a range of changes affecting women in their participation in the public sphere, the radius of their physical mobility, access to training and skills enhancement, family and community expectations of them as women, awareness of “women’s rights” and access to healthcare, education and transportation. Some of these changes, such as the effect of economic empowerment on the construction of zanāngi or the altered perceptions of nāmos, require further analysis to better understand their pertinence to policy, as they go beyond the limited scope of the present study. The following pages therefore offer analytical perspectives on three aspects of immediate importance to future policy reappraisals. These issues relate to the positive indicators and the impediments for women’s economic participation, namely: the project and its impact on the participant; the home and community (including access to education and healthcare); and the public sphere.

2.2.1 Projects

The projects under study showed varying levels of understanding in programming and planning for women’s economic empowerment as well as in contextual resource utilisation and capacity building. While the Nahr-e darsan and Police Township projects were implemented by NGOs that were directly funded by donors with some overseeing by ministries, the Isārkhail project was quasi-governmental with the strong involvement of MoWA being on a par with that of the donor. The NABDP and SDO projects in Mousákhil Pāein and Adam Khān, respectively, were government-led projects with a long-term potential and had the direct involvement of the government strategies and ministries. All organisations involved in these five sites struggled to have the men permit “their” women—mothers, wives, daughters, daughters-in-law, sisters, and sisters-in-law—to attend a training course or participate in an income-generating activity. It was observed that unless the men were certain about the nature of training or employment being offered, the women were not allowed to join. As said in an interview with a male agnate, “men pave the way for women.”

Implementing agencies

Among the project implementers, some, like the HAM and AWEC projects, seem to have greatly benefited the women. The inherent advantage of such initiatives is that they approach the community in the language of the wider agnate, i.e. Islam. In doing so, they circumvent or negate potential alienation by presenting the project within the Islamic idiom. For example, in all focus group discussions, women and men showed an acute sensitivity to women not being able to read the Qur’ān. There was a “thirst” for religious literacy among younger and older women, which was satisfied to some extent in the HAM and AWEC projects. Moreover, the presentation of women’s rights from within the Islamic framework has two positive effects: Islam is not “challenged” and male gheirat is not threatened. Using the Islamic idiom thus appears to allow sufficient space in praxis for girls and women to access to employment and literacy.

Secondly, the other common denominator between these two organisations was their physical location within the community: HAM’s office is situated in Guzargāh, while AWEC rented office space in one of the houses in the Police Township. This enabled a greater level of interaction, as project representatives were able to involve themselves in the daily problems faced by female participants. Both project implementers were
seen to have gained credibility among the family and community members of the female participants. Trust building is thus a very important aspect when dealing with gendered socio-cultural barriers. Having a physical presence and developing trust promoted greater attention to context, which yielded results for both HAM and AWEC in mobilising women and gaining acceptability for their participation.

The monthly payment of 500 Afghani ($10) that both organisations gave to the women during training was well conceived. This amount, though relatively small, represented an immediate and attractive incentive for families to allow their women to participate. Keeping in mind the large household sizes and very poor economic conditions, it may be viable for other projects, as it offers some relief to families because they do not have to wait for training to end and products to be sold before seeing some tangible and monetary benefits. It simultaneously contributes directly to the sustenance of the participant such that she and her family no longer feel that her nān-o-chai (basic needs) come from the family resources. This particularly holds true for women whose husbands are jobless or who are dependent upon other mahrams.

AWEC, despite being a short-term six-month project, opened possibilities for women who now demonstrate subjective as well as objective agency. The widow who has secured a contract with a shopkeeper for pickling and the housewife who was inspired to travel some distance to learn are just some examples of the ripple effect that AWEC has created in the Police Township. HAM has been consistent in providing its female employees with a source of income, because its senior management sources markets in other countries for the project and its factory’s products. The AWEC and HAM projects have enabled and witnessed a rise in women’s public participation, self-perception, decision making and autonomy. These are important factors that exemplify agency in terms of “what the person is free to do and achieve in the pursuit of whatever goals and value he or she regards as important.”

The FRDO project seems to be still in its gestation period as far as income for women is concerned. The sheep have not lambed nor have the bags and coats sewn produced any income thus far. The evidence from the project and donor representatives is not clear in this respect, and community evidence suggests very little income enhancement. However, learning (Qur’ānic lessons, basic alphabet and math, knowledge on personal health) has brought about levels of self-identified empowerment.

The NABDP and SDO projects exhibited a certain lack of planning and monitoring. For instance, the NABDP project aimed to spend $360,000 to teach 360 women in nine provinces how to make jam from seasonal local produce. In Mousākhil Pāein, the general initial training of men on women’s rights (through Islam) was a good approach adopted by the organisation. However, the project supplied the raw materials, the skills were already known, and the product did not have a market; the MRRD ended up buying some of the jam. The pressure to spend the allocated budget perhaps led to a lack of perspective on the results.

Overall, the implementing organisations seem to have inadequate project management skills. The organisations’ current capacities may not match the more rigorous monitoring and evaluation standards of donor agencies. Processes and procedures in monitoring and evaluation by donor and programming agencies need to be tailored to the reporting capacities of the implementing agencies. Capacity building in the implementing organisations must also be initiated and maintained. All donor agencies in this research

111 Sen, Commodity and Capabilities, 203.
issued a call for proposals and selected the most promising project. It is unclear whether 
the agencies undertook any capacity assessment, capacity building or impact analysis 
of the implementing organisation regarding the context-specific locale. This issue is 
also linked to the high staff turnover in donor institutions and the subsequent sporadic 
institutional memory, which hampers structured project implementation.

Currently, the money flow is from the donor plus relevant ministry to the implementing 
agency and then to the participant. In the coming years, the process may benefit if 
the monies were channelled through the ministry, which would also take the lead in 
implementation, either as a longer-term government strategy or a two- to four-year 
project implemented by civil society or NGOs. Either way, the donors need to ensure 
that the lesser monies anticipated in the coming years are cost-effective and that the 
capacity building of ministries is more streamlined in terms of project programming and 
implementation. An effective joint impact analysis by donor agencies before rollout 
along with sufficient flexibility and back-up options for programming needs would also 
be useful and avoid future pitfalls.

By far, one of the weakest links related to women’s economic engagement in the projects 
under study was their graded monitoring and evaluation. While government and donor 
positions on gender greatly reflect international understandings of gender, many are 
perhaps not able to contextualise this perspective. Ministerial understanding varies 
between a measured agreement with the newer knowledge promising to benefit women 
and a more cynical view of multinational and non-Muslim socio-cultural perspectives. 
Further, there is a struggle in the development of policy and strategy at various levels 
of the government. For example, the government provides limited initial training 
and dissemination of information about the newer strategies used for women’s public 
participation, but it still needs local-level community-embedded trainers to push these 
newer rights forward. The lack of trainers and field staff, especially women, tends to 
hinder the impact of projects for women.

Project effects

In Mousākhil Pāein, Isārkhaul and Adam Khān, it was sometimes unclear whether the 
women were project participants in their own right or as adjuncts to their male agnates. 
The projects seem to have relied totally upon the men’s abilities to direct women’s 
activities, and material resources were regularly handed over to men who then distributed 
them to the female participants. The programming, therefore, did not encourage the 
enhancement of women’s autonomy and work, and in many ways, it entrenched the 
current power structure within households and communities. The construct of women as 
economically dependent has not yet been sufficiently reviewed. Yet, even if evidence 
from Isārkhaul, for example, demonstrates women’s poor understanding of the project 
in addition to its processes and aims, it could still be seen as “successful” because of its 
novelty in introducing women to previously unknown skills and knowledge.

In Isārkhaul, Nahr-e-darsan and the Police Township, the women who led the project 
were regarded as role models of knowledge and economic achievement. The influence 
of the middle-class, better-educated, urban, but not “Westernised” or “modern” 
women who came from a socially respected group and led these interventions cannot 
be underestimated in such ventures. However, SDO did not have an adequate presence 
among the women, while NABDP’s representative was not well received by the community 
members who were contacted for this research.
The projects in Nahr-e-darsan and the Police Township included literacy education in their project programming. At both sites where the project participants had a comparatively higher level of education, women's rights through Islam were also addressed. In Isārkhail, the basic alphabet and numeracy skills were taught along with Qur’anic recitations. Mousākhil Pāein and Adam Khān projects, evolving from NABDP and NSP policies, do not seem to have addressed this aspect in project planning; this merits some reappraisal. In this sense, JICA and MoWA's project programming for the FRDO project in Isārkhail had primary and secondary objectives, in a manner whereby the first project (livestock, personal health and basic literacy) was backed by skills training (leather sewing) in the follow-up project. Literacy, especially since it includes Islamic education, is an effective way to establish the credentials and validity of the project, while building self-confidence and awareness among project participants. In the Police Township, women who earlier did not allow their daughters to enrol in schools, now regret their own and their daughters’ illiteracy; some older women are now trying to learn to read and write. Education for and among women therefore has a greater value.112

Morsāl in Nahr-e-darsan describes the changes that she experienced:

First I gained lots of self-confidence and I found out that I have the ability to work. And I am not like those women who feel depressed and say ‘I cannot work, oh I wish I could do it.’ In my life, the words ‘I wish’ have gone away, like how I was saying that I wish I could earn money, I wish I could go somewhere, I wish I could go to an organisation, and all of those words that I used to say, I wish I could, are now gone. And a lot of changes have come to my life and I was able to meet with lots of people. The interesting thing was that I was introduced to many women and I gained lots of experience from their lives. If it were good or bad, I learned lots of thing from each one of them and understood about what is right and what is wrong, and I took the positive and left the negative. And it was very effective for me.

For Nāzanin in Isārkhail, the FRDO project was good “because we learn Islamic studies and the Holy Qur’ān...We wrote the alphabet and did maths…”

Shukriā is more reflective about the effects of the AWEC project on her life:

...Sometimes, I think about why our elders were fools and didn’t let us study. I never thought that I could study and have any other activity. And I was so narrow-minded and I was wondering why women are going out when they should stay at home, and I thought that those who go out are not good women. Believe me, I had these foolish thoughts because I had never been outside...Now it is because of the blessing of that course that I am a Holy Qur’ān reader and I can read and write something, especially the signs of shops and other places too. Every day I go to the madrassa to read the Holy Qur’ān, and now I say that those women who are at home are not good women, they can’t do anything...Now I don’t wear chaddori, I have an activity at home and outside too...

112 In alliance-seeking, however, an educated bride is not valued, although the education in a groom is desirable. Educated and employed women are generally asked by their fiancé or in-laws to discontinue working.
2.2.2 Home and community

For most male respondents across the research sites, as long as women were offered enhanced economic engagement within the community context of acceptable gender roles, the project was acceptable and used to greater effect. Repeated references to Bibi Fātimā (PBUH) notwithstanding, women in the three villages positioned themselves as home-bound and, in a sense, incapable. Women in Isārkhal are far more restricted in their access to economic opportunity. In Mousākhil Pāein, women with relatives in Qārābāgh and Kabul have learnt about the newer opportunities for women’s income generation and remark approvingly of the material status of these families. However, gendered agency, empowerment and decision making need to be contextualised before a better understanding of their nature can be achieved. In villages like Isārkhal, these aspects are far more nuanced than in Nahr-e-darsan or the Police Township; ethnographic insights into women’s daily lives would be useful in this respect.

For example, across the sites, siyāli wa shariki matters were heavily linked to women’s self-identification and community status. Siyāli wa shariki uses and builds on fairly traditional systems of acknowledgement that reveal goodwill and mutuality in a demonstrable and urbane manner. This is similar to what Ricoeur described as an “inclusive concept of solicitude, based principally on the exchange between giving and receiving.” As a recognition of joint benefit that requires adherence to a mutually accepted code of reciprocal conduct, it is generally a two-way exchange charged with varying shades of obligation, duty, debt, inclusion, reciprocity, honour, status and social positioning. The ability to contribute to community-others and to have others participating in one’s life events is a sign of generosity, empathy, identification and position. The exchange is both material and non-material. Women lose face if they cannot contribute materially to the collective network of group reaffirmation through giving and taking (e.g. Mousākhil Pāein), but they gain honour when they do (e.g. Nahr-e-darsan and the Police Township). If a woman cannot participate, a man and the family may also lose nang. The adequate performance of siyāli wa shariki by women thus bring nang to a man and the family as a whole through the perceived generosity and inclusiveness. It is a means to reaffirm group identity and uphold kor (household) worth.

Women are well aware of the immediate community norms that prevent their physical mobility, unlike those concerning their female relatives in urban areas. In Adam Khān, a largely Pashtoon settlement, there was a sense of resignation among the women who believed that they could only take up a job or some employment if they left the settlement. The Nahr-e-darsan women had a far greater awareness of the possibilities available to women and believed that a working woman could only have positive effects. In the Police Township, the accent seems to be on sourcing and expanding potential avenues for income generation as well as maintaining a sense of autonomy. As one participant Freshtā (25, housewife, Tājik) said, “Today if I spend the money of my husband, I will still have to tell him how much is spent and where, but if the money is mine, then I do not need to tell him.” For the women, a husband’s income seems to be identified as his personal income, as he need not entirely nor necessarily spend it on family or household needs.

Further, ethnographic studies provide evidence from sites like Adam Khān, where the very strong authority of senior women can be better used to modify male access to resources, while keeping in mind that the patriarchy of the community is upheld by

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113 The wife of the Holy Prophet (PBUH), renowned for her business acumen and skills.
114 Paul Ricoeur, Oneself as Another, trans. Kathleen Blamey (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1992), 188.
these senior women. Single (older unmarried or widowed) women are an audience to address in economic engagement. Men seem to view them as being “with more time” or “with more need.” Either way, it may be considered more acceptable for a single woman to earn an income than a ʿsilṣar, even if it means a larger permitted radius of mobility. The cultural spaces made available to women need to be capitalised in programming.

**Rural and urban**

Families at all sites had strong attachment to their quam of origin and extended networks of province-based quam groups, reinforced through strong kinship ties and mutual visits. Women (like men) were also connected to their network of extended kith and kin through lineage and qrsta ties. They were attuned to their extended quam’s rural situation and its accentuated, more rigid ethic of seclusion, to the quam situation in other villages, the gendered nature of work and the divisions of labour, the sectarian character of the region and its political and practical implications. Women in non-rural areas also struggle against highly negative conceptions about women’s work. A female participant from the Police Township, for example, said “My sister-in-law says that men who live in Kabul are not really men; their women work and they don’t react to it, and they are mordā gow (pimps).”

For women in or closer to the city, like the Police Township and Nahr-e-darsan, women in villages were considered to be uneducated, regressive, housebound and unable to contribute to their family. For example, Morsāl said:

*The women who are in the home are like our grandmothers, uneducated, and under constraint, like...in Shamāli [her watan]. When you go there and talk to a young boy, then he will say something like ‘how impudent you are,’ and the girls from villages are also like that...These issues are important to them...In our case, when someone goes out to talk to someone, we understand that she might have a problem or some work that she wants to talk to him about, and for us women who work outside, there is nothing like it, but these issues are very common among women who are at home.*

When combined with the often desperate lack of material resources in many villages—for example, access to piped and potable water or the arduous labour often part of women’s life in peri-rural or rural Afghanistan—the distance between Kabul and Isārkhail, for example, is often farther than the kilometres that it takes to travel. For the women in the three villages, the city and city-women are generally seen to be without shame or modesty. Women’s ability to travel alone and to meet with men and work alongside them as well as their lack of zanāngi are all traits that they disdain and criticise, viewing such women as not being good Muslims, even though their ability and capacity to contribute to their families is acknowledged.

The situation is more problematic because of the high incidence of child marriage and the tendency to not allow girls to study beyond third or fourth grade. Girls, by default, not only fall back on traditional options like domestic work and livestock for work and income, but they are married off at a young age and give birth early with the accompanying maternal and child health problems.

The lack of health clinics and access to healthcare for women in Isārkhail, Mousākhil Pāein and Adam Khān communities is alarming. The lack of accessible health facilities that provide free medicine and have female doctors for women is a massive problem: Women are thus forced to “make do.” The project participant in Isārkhail, for example,
is obviously in an injured condition, but has no recourse except to the most basic care (berry packs), the efficacy of which for her injured leg is doubtful. Children in Isārhkail have visible rashes on their faces that are being ignored. Women in Mousākhil Pāein relate their pain at losing three women during this past year due to pregnancy-related complications. Lack of access to transportation in these communities exacerbates the poor opportunities for women to access healthcare.

**On women’s “rights”**

There is both immobility and change in the understanding of what rights of or for women can be. While the men’s focus group discussions revealed beliefs such as, “In Islam, it has been said that obedience of men is women’s farz (obligation),” with allusions being made to an acceptance of domestic violence, women’s understandings greatly ranged from a reflection of the above view to dissent founded on Shari‘āh-based rights but with a resigned acceptance of the present circumstances and even to an outright contestation and modification of normative understandings.

In Nahr-e-darsan and the Police Township, the women were aware of marital rape and its construction as a violation of women’s bodily integrity; a preference for sons was also an experienced and admitted reality. For example, Kamilla (38 years, teacher, Tājik), had discussed this issue with her teaching colleagues. However, she said:

*The mullahs say that it’s not rape because a man has rights to his wife, anytime he wants he can have sex with her. I heard from illiterate women that their husband has sex with them during their periods, which is not allowed in Islam... During women’s periods, men shouldn’t come close to their wife, they’re to sleep separately from them.*

Social pressure is fairly high with regard to bearing children, and women do not seem to have much say in reproductive issues, reproductive health or the control over their bodies. There is a high degree of son preference, and women relate instances of domestic violence in its many forms following the birth of a daughter.

Women show sadness and resignation regarding their lack of inheritance and consent regarding marriage and polygamy, but they are also critical and angry about these issues. Regarding her share of the patrimonial house, Simā (50 years, housewife, Tājik) said:

*...We are five sisters and three brothers, and we have a house from our father and my elder brother lives there. They never say that our sisters have right to this house. If we say so, our relatives will blame us and my brother wouldn’t come to my home and they will call us chashm safed [one who doesn’t care for others]. Once I was at my brother’s house when there was a programme on TV regarding women’s and girls’ rights. My brother said, ‘Now TV creates fights between brothers and sister,’ but I said to myself that you men don’t care about women’s rights. Always men ignore their sister’s inheritance, they don’t even like that other people talk about that inheritance issue.*

While aware that Shari‘āh recognises women’s right to inheritance, both patrimonial and at widowhood, the women see that in practice, contrary to Shari‘āh injunctions, land and property are rarely owned by women.
Freshtā (25 years, Tōjik housewife) discussed consent to marriage, inheritance and polygamy in the following terms:

Whenever a girl reaches puberty, the parents engage her without asking her agreement, or if there is something about a division of inheritance they do not take the name of a girl or sister...Islam says that you should give a part of your legacy to daughters and sisters, and whenever a girl is engaged we should ask her agreement...If my husband gets married for a second time I will kill him with my own hands, which is why I take his money because I don’t want him to become rich and get married again. I count every penny he spends. Why should a man marry twice? His financial status is ruined as is his family life.

Those in polygamous marriages in Nahr-e-darsan and Police Township, for instance, take turns in “hosting” their husband and they will not feed him, for example, if it is not their turn. With the bride price being both traditional and high, women are keenly aware of the social and economic costs associated with a second marriage and co-wife (hamboq). This also leads to the issue of a man appropriating his wife’s income only to use the money to pay the toyana and bring home a co-wife. In such cases, it could be said that a woman’s own labour is being used to devalue her position and status in the family and community as well as the resources available to her and her children. In more traditional communities, like Isārkhai, however, there is far greater acceptance and, sometimes, willingness for the husband to take another wife.

As regional and global movements of change interact with more localised views, there is a greater questioning of issues that are common to women. As a consequence, ideas are reviewed and redefined by combining traditional concepts with newer meanings. Morsāl, for example, has a broad definition of violence: “Violence is when we take someone’s rights and we don’t let them talk or make a decision.” She is very conscious of domestic violence in her friends’ families, and especially around marriage and consent. Interestingly, she also has a different understanding of concepts like “betars.” According to Morsāl, betars is a person who acts fearlessly because it is the right thing to do, as opposed to the conventional understanding of a woman who is daring or transgressive and therefore shameless. This is a reversal of the more traditional portrayal of argumentative women as betars, strongly linked to idea of being shameless, forward, impudent and not a good Muslim woman.

Similarly, Zakiyā, the university student from Nahr-e-darsan, overturns the accepted understanding of a “good woman.” According to most people interviewed during the course of this research, a good woman is normatively seen as demure and compliant, preferably a zan-e-khānā. Zaharā, however, feels that:

women who have work and an income are good women...Women should not blindly accept other people’s views that they should stay at home...She should share her ideas and suggestions with the rest of her family members...If the woman sits silent, she is not a good woman.
On whether women should earn

All women were unequivocal about their need for an income. Differences were observed as to whether income generation should be within the home or community and whether a woman could access such opportunities outside the parochial areas. In the former case, the passivity that it entails is exacerbated by the lack of marketable skills and local opportunities.

A recurrent phrase in the discussions around women and income generation was “we are blind.” Blindness in many communities in Afghanistan is used as a metaphor to express a lack of knowledge (skills, education, literacy and awareness). The women in Isārkhail are isolated in many ways and thus far more restricted in their ability to sense potential earning opportunities than those with greater access to other ways of life. In Mousākhil Pāein, the women with relatives in Qārābāgh and Kabul have not only learnt about the greater opportunities for women’s income-generating activities, but also witnessed the material betterment that working women bring to their families. Yet they are equally aware of the immediate community norms that prevent their physical mobility, unlike for their female relatives in urban areas. They see tailoring as a viable option, but also want to earn money through livestock. In Adam Khān, a largely Pashtoon settlement, there was a sense of resignation. The situation was more problematic because of the high incidence of child marriage and the tendency to not allow girls to study beyond third or fourth grade. Women thus fall back on traditional options like livestock.

The Nahr-e-darsan women had a far greater awareness of the possibilities available to women and saw only the positive effects of women’s income generation. Morsāl, for example, was very clear that Islam accords women the right to work and to be independent. She was critical of the control that brothers exert over their sisters in deciding whom they can visit, where they can go or what they can wear. In the Police Township, the accent appeared to be on sourcing and expanding potential avenues for income generation as well as maintaining a sense of autonomy. For the women, a husband’s income seems to be identified as his personal income and its spending too is seen as personal. One respondent thus said, “Even though I have authority over my husband’s money, but again, I say that it is my husband’s money.”

Women in Nahr-e-darsan and the Police Township seem to have a greater sense of dynamism. Such women proportionately discuss the restrictions placed upon them much more than the women of Isārkhail, for example. While the latter are not exposed to other ways of living given the remote location of the village (with intra-village marriage also being the norm), the women in Nahr-e-darsan felt “the need to change men’s idea about women and work [to] encourage and pave the ground for women to work in the community.” They also felt that women had no opportunities and were deliberately kept behind in a patriarchal society.

In general, the decision as to whether a woman may participate in an income-generating activity, whether within the home, in the community or outside the settlement, is taken by her mahram. The mahram usually has direct control over the income, and the money is at his disposal; in some cases, like in Morsal’s, there is indirect control. Overall, women’s lack of access to their income and control over it detracts from the self-identified value of the earnings and significantly affects many aspects of a woman’s life, including her safety from domestic violence, accessing potential economic opportunities and increasing independence in general.
**Masking**

There were instances of men in non-parochial spaces (like the male focus group discussion in the Qārābāgh DDA office) presenting an understanding of gender and women’s status that was attuned to a more “cosmopolitan” discourse. In these cases, the men were guided by the policies of the government in which they, as DDA representatives of their communities, were invested. Such acts of “re-presentation” were clarified by both the women’s perspectives and the views of the community’s corresponding implementing organisation. On the other hand, an implementing organisation’s claim to having fulfilled its project objectives was countered by the community’s expectations of the project, which remained unfulfilled. Thus, some “saving face” was apparent in the narratives of various actors and agents.

There were also instances of a far more nuanced sense of “masking” within household dynamics. Morsāl’s income, for example, was understood by her father to be “her money.” He was happy when she used it to buy her siblings clothes, books, knick-knacks and other things, and termed it as “entirely hers to do what she likes.” On the other hand, Morsāl, whose primary reason for this employment was to help out her family, said that she knew that her father would not directly accept money from her. Instead, she would pay the electricity bill (about 600 Afs [$12]), for example, using her income with her mother’s knowledge, but the latter would not “acknowledge” it either, instead blessing her. Despite the family being relatively progressive, “eating from a daughter” can detract from a man’s nāmos. Even though her father currently applies the same principle to his son’s earnings, a qualitative difference can be gleaned. Morsāl, for him, is positioned as a marriageable daughter whose skills, training, and knowledge that were acquired while at his house will help her in her future husband’s family and household. Similarly, although Morsāl is publicly allowed to travel alone to work (with permission) and within the community on a routine basis, she has a mutually agreed radius of physical mobility with her family. Daily purchases, for example, from the bazār are done by her father. On visits to the extended family (weddings, ceremonies), the daughters always have their mother, brothers or father chaperone them. In another context, in Nazanin’s case in Isārkhail, the lack of money in the context of a fairly serious injury was presented in the focus group discussion as a husband being too sick to take her to the clinic, but this was made more evident in the in-depth interview as a lack of options. Here we find the double masking: one to the parochial group and another to the outsider (researcher).

### 2.2.3 Public sphere

Women’s shurā participation and their authority and power in the CDC seem suspect or absent; their participation in the CDC is, in the words of the NSP Director, “trivial” across the NSP. Women’s CDCs were not operative in Isārkhail, Mousākhil Pāein or Adam Khān. In Adam Khan village, some of the men in the male shurā had friends whose wives were in the female shurā; communication was normally through this channel. However, this is highly dubious when the balance of power and control is evidently located in the male shurā. It does not encourage political participation, but instead perpetuates a replication of the traditional joint family chain of command in a platform that seeks to discourage women’s entry into the public sphere. Even if women in traditional areas like Isārkhail are not aware of the non-traditional public participation of women, those in Mousākhil Pāein and Adam Khan share a more donyā-dideh (worldly-wise) perspective, which needs capacity building by the NSP. This includes greater monitoring and training for women’s shurās in CDCs to make them functional in spirit. Mainstreaming women’s perspectives and enhancing their participation in development and governance thus need to be pursued.
**Mobility**

There are evidently very strong restrictions placed on women’s physical mobility radius, and in parallel, equally high levels of monitoring and control. In all five research sites, but especially in the three villages under study, there seems to be strong resistance, and more so among men, about women moving beyond the family or community domains.

For all women and community respondents in this research, socially (st)ratified anticipations provoke anxieties that prevent mobility. Mobility for women depends to a large extent on a community’s perceptions of what is permissible, the particularities of a family’s socio-economic placement within the community, the individual strength of its members and lastly, on women’s “presentation of the self.”\(^{115}\) While social invisibility is still (but to a lesser extent in some gendered situations) equated with respectability for women, freedom of movement remains very restricted by the constructed norms of propriety, femininity and (im)morality.

Areas with inadequate transportation, like Isārkhail, sorely test the ability of women to venture out of the socio-spatial community radii. Norms in communities with better transportation than Isārkhail, like Adam Khān and Mousākhil Pāein villages, seem to allow a greater number of women, sometimes in women-only groups and without a male mahram, to travel to the nearby bazār (Bagrāmi, Qārābāgh) or city (Kabul). However, in these three communities—based on the spatial territorialisation and segregation described in Section 1.1 and the related factors contributing to seclusion patterns—control over women’s mobility is more intense. On the other hand, in areas with better access to transportation, like Nahr-e-darsan and Police Township, the evidence showed women’s far greater ability to travel alone to places of work and education and the consequent lower surveillance by family members.

Mobility evokes strong feelings among certain women. Apart from the traditional perspective of women’s physical mobility being seen as inherently restricted and the physical public space being out of bounds, a counternarrative seems to be emerging. For example, with regard to women and their perceived independence as an indicator of identity, Morsāl said:

... those women who are in homes and their lives, an example is my cousins in Shamālī. Believe me, when we go somewhere and on the way they see some boys, then become very shy, saying ‘I know them’ and then I tell them, ‘So what if you know them, they are just boys passing through and it does not mean anything...’ They are boys and we are girls, there is no big deal about it... We people think that if we don’t let our daughter out of the home then she is a bibi [respectable] girl, but it is not right that if a woman stays in the home she is bibi, but if she goes out then is not bibi.

Younger women and new daughters-in-laws introduce natal family or community traditions that can precipitate some change. Migration too has had its effects on women’s physical mobility. For example, the women of Adam Khān village, with their stronger historical attachments to the land and settlement, experienced certain changes in their perceptions when most of the village migrated to Pakistan or Iran. They now seem to have a greater willingness to travel and earn an income. They are not averse to the potential (like the women in Isārkhail), but rather appear circumscribed by both the lack

of opportunity and the social risk that they would face if they were to contest the social norms by seeking employment in Qārābāgh, for example, while living in Adam Khān.

Yet, women who are relatively more mobile have far greater access to information, knowledge about opportunities, and awareness of the world around them.

**Bazār**

For women, there is a strong link between earning money and the *bazār*, mostly perceived as both a place of consumption and a site to exercise autonomy. In some ways, the *bazār* is also a “forbidden place” and a world full of mystery. In practice, we therefore saw that the earning Pashtoon woman (teacher) in the Nahr-e-darsan group consciously adhered to *quam* traditions (perhaps especially because Tājiks are the socially dominant group in this settlement) by not going to the *bazār*. It is interesting that she mentioned *quam* tradition first and her consciousness not to break these *quam* norms. She also claimed to be scared of *getting lost*, adding that her husband too would not permit it. The students and the other teacher in Nahr-e-darsan were mobile with reference to the destinations accepted as legitimate by their families and households; they were able to go to the *bazār* occasionally without giving rise to much comment by others. However, they need to ask permission, as they cannot go out on their own.

In Isārkhail and Mousākhil Pāein, women express a sense of danger once they step out of the community space. A car accident and being kidnapped or attacked (including by armed militia) are some of the fears of women. On several occasions, though, stepping out, especially going to the *bazār* is allowed in the company of another woman or women. There seems to be an element of mentoring on such occasions, with a more experienced friend, colleague or relative providing spatial and other knowledge. That the *bazār* can be viewed as a different world to women is fairly evident. In such places, if seen as a woman without a “caretaker,” she could be subject to the vulnerabilities of being female in Afghanistan. If movement and free movement can also be “constructed as a social phenomenon—as a human geographical activity imbued with meaning and power,” then women’s lack of knowledge about male-dominant and relatively alien spheres like the *bazār* could be an indicator of the ways in which power is constructed.

The negative positioning of female mobility and visibility, which the women in this research continue to contend with, is not just contextual, but also an overarching positioning of the self. Despite the attractiveness of financial improvement to move about “freely,” the construction of the female self as inherently “immobile” has a significant effect on education, health and access to economic opportunities. The constraints that women experience in the parochial sphere in order to be perceived as a “good woman,” whose good character has been preserved (or not) despite being familiar with the *berun* (public sphere), is also reflected in the power of the collective in the construction of a woman’s reputation. Stigma is a much used tool for social control over women, and all five female participants detailed a variety of reservations regarding their movements outside the home, community or neighbourhood space.

**Chasht o pesht (sexual harassment)**

Besides their entrenchment in household duties, women across the five sites were restricted from dealing with the “outer,” male space in various other ways. From the point of view of female mobility, the presence of a woman in the public sphere can provoke questions about her chastity and make her seen as an “open” person, the cultural
opposite of the female self in *zanāngi*. Thus, conditional access to the public space may be seen as brokered through a respectable self-presentation (*chaddori*, headscarf, completely modest dressing, *hijāb* or variants, presence of a *mahram*, etc.).

Men in the focus group discussions across the sites strongly evoked the public-private divide. Emphasis was placed on the perceived unsafe public or non-community space. When travelling outside the private-parochial spaces (*dākhili*, inner) and into the more public domain (*beruni*), women encounter a strong level of control through sexual harassment, which seems to be legitimised as routine, “low-grade” harassment. Sexual harassment was repeatedly mentioned in the interviews and discussions. Such intrusions are not necessarily seen as a breach of public civility or a violation of the rights of privacy. Since visual, verbal and physical harassment are present, women feel the need to shield themselves from this openness, an openness that is the cultural opposite to both *zanāngi* and *nāmos*. Time and space are also sexualised and gendered.

Sexual harassment is a serious barrier to women’s economic empowerment, since movement and mobility are basic requirements in acquiring knowledge, skills and opportunities. When women face a daily infringement on their personal dignity and safety, with men regarding it as an important detractor of their *nāmos*, it is women whose human radius becomes curtailed. The high insecurity that being outside the home and community triggers in women and their families impedes their hesitant foray into the wider public sphere and reinforces their dependence on men in multidimensional ways. In tandem, women’s access to education117 is halted due to their perceived vulnerability to sexual harassment and the consequent stigma and loss of reputation. Consequently, at the sites where girls discontinued education at a young age, this premature stunting of their access to skills and growth can also be correlated with child marriage and early child bearing.

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117 The average age for girls to discontinue education was third or fourth grade in Adam Khān, seventh grade in Isārkhai and sixth or seventh grade in Mousākhil Pāein, corresponding to an age range of 8 to 12 years.
Gendered collective norms of a community or neighbourhood have repeatedly surfaced in emergent studies on women. Depending on the individual’s affiliation to and bond with the wider quam’s rural universe, these general morphologies are affected by wider and interlinked behavioural patterns, which are considered normative for women. Such discussions highlight the continuous importance of individual behaviour in a structure that is both familiar and comfortable, a structure to which one belongs and from which one derives identity, i.e. the (extended) family, quam or neighbourhood. Rather than freedom from the family and community, freedom within a less patriarchal family and community offers substantial dividends in terms of women’s status.

By asserting that earning capacity automatically brings autonomy, we need to be alert to the individual quam or community norms of women’s families and communities; these have a hold over the behavioural patterns not only of the men and women in their families, but also over the activities and conduct of the participants themselves. These norms may not always allow incomes to translate directly into independence or rights. The variables that also must be accounted for are age, household composition, education, rural or urban context, marital status and so forth. When women go against what is considered acceptable, and when such actions are viewed as individualistic rather than as decisions made by the family or authority figure, it is often contrasted negatively with the interdependent network of culture as institutionalised through quam and family.

Equally, income generation and its vitality have allowed earning women greater mobility than their non-earning sisters who instead conform to older patterns of seclusion. For women like Morsāl and Shukriā, their previous radius of mobility (i.e. the parochial areas, mohallā, neighbourhood or travelling further afield under the watchfulness of a mother, female friend(s) or male mahram) has given way to far wider circles. This culture of travel for work purposes exposes women to other worlds. Even though she is seen as a woman and an individual in such travels and thus subject to the vulnerabilities of being a female in Afghanistan, within this “culture,” the forms and codes of invisibility that were previously seen as necessary are now less rigid. For example, Morsāl shows great ingenuity in dealing with the berun (e.g. her ability to get a good bargain in the bazār, tackling sexual harassment), while Shukriā has discarded the chaddori and can travel at very short notice, even at night, to visit clients with her daughter.

However, the negative positioning of female mobility and visibility that the women in this research continue to contend with is not just situational, but also an overarching positioning of the self. Despite the attractiveness of economic betterment, moving about “freely” or “roaming” (and being seen as “rotten apples” as asserted by the Deputy Minister and referred to by the male focus group discussants at Qārābāghi), the construction of the self as inherently “immobile,” among other aspects of zanāngī, has a significant effect on education, health and access to economic opportunity. The constraints that women experience in the parochial sphere in order to be perceived as a “good woman”—a woman with zanāngī, whose good character has been preserved (or not) despite being familiar with the berun (public sphere) —is also reflected in the power of the collective in the construction of a woman’s reputation. Stigma is a much used tool for social control over women, and all five female participants detailed a variety of reservations regarding their movements outside the home, community or neighbourhood space. From the point of view of female mobility, the presence of a non-local woman in the public sphere provokes questions about her chastity and makes her seen as an “open” person, that is, a woman who is open to invitation and who does not follow the gendered boundaries of her zanāngī. Simultaneously, her presence can upset traditional notions of territory and inscribe public spaces as non-male.
This research shows that agency and empowerment for women have the potential for expansion, especially through economic means, and that both agency and empowerment may be situated contextually and understood relatively, particularly through the lens of reasoned self-interest. If there is to be a commitment to women’s causes in Afghanistan, Afghan women’s views on gender relations should form the foundation of all efforts toward their well-being, especially in terms of increased opportunities and the recognition of the value of women’s productive and reproductive work. At the meeting point of gender, politics, the state and Islam in the specific context of poverty, power and security in Afghanistan, it would be beneficial to examine the complexities of Afghan gender roles and relations as they apply to individual women’s economic empowerment, particularly through the lens of culture and praxis.

3.1 Areas for review

Several points for review have emerged from the five case studies examined in this research. While acknowledging the limited number of case studies examined in this research and their geographical restriction to Kabul province—the socio-cultural parameters of which may or may not be reflected in other provinces and districts of the country—there are certain general issues and barriers that may find resonance among women across Afghanistan in terms of accessing economic opportunities, as indicated by the literature detailed in Section 1.1.

Three key issues that prevent the full participation of women are i) socio-cultural norms, ii) market barriers and, most importantly, iii) the lack of a coherent national policy for women’s economic participation. The discourse on women’s economic and social empowerment in Afghanistan therefore needs to be strengthened along these three axes. This lack is reflected in four of the case studies—one urban, two semi-urban and one rural—which are representative of the short-term skills-building projects that have had no follow-up activities to effectively transform them into income generation. On the other hand, the success of the other urban project, the HAM/IRC project, addresses the first two issues, but circumvents the third.

Identifying gaps

In reviewing the impact of the projects implemented by the FRDO, NABDP and SDO, the following points can be made. Firstly, effective baseline studies and needs analysis (including for the gendered social structure) of the selected sites should be consistently maintained. Projects should ideally have participatory programming with the intended women participants. In projects implemented for non-urban skills and livelihood opportunities, a focus on the gendered natural resource management of selected project locales should be part of programming. Project heads should ensure gender-responsive budgeting and strengthen the gendered impact analyses. There needs to be a focus on female economic development experts as lead agents. A business plan for selling the material products of the projects at retail and wholesale markets is also required. Further, access to capital must be programmed into a project to achieve the advantage from the initial training.

Secondly, on the input side, the better use of information technology to reach a greater number of women for simple skills training should be considered, as with basic literacy and numeracy. A sector-based micro-enterprise business development model as well as a women-friendly needs assessment that takes into account market demand, resource management and energy needs should be incorporated into project programming. Also, on the input side of programming, although government projects may inspire more
institutional credibility, providing female staff cannot be overlooked if women’s economic participation is to be expected. Most, if not all, staff working on the field in projects for women should be female; gender balance in the office staff of the implementing organisations also needs to be undertaken. Short-term projects have a highly limited effect unless markets can be identified, and the skills and training provided ideally need to be of portable value. Projects should consider infrastructure needs (e.g. cold storage facilities that also act as insurance against market or seasonal fluctuations), develop design skills (e.g. design courses in namada weaving), provide livestock feed during winters and undertake similar enhancements to the current project parameters.

Thirdly, while NGOs can provide capacity building and skills training, it is currently untenable to expect the organisations to conduct successful market-oriented projects. The NGO sector is not necessarily oriented toward trade and commercialisation; project developers are not skilled in the processes of manufacturing, marketing, procurement and supply. If this sector is to be utilised by the government and donor agencies to assist communities and women in income-generating activities, then capacity building for NGO staff is needed in these areas. In addition to the current gender units in the government, a dedicated and substantive women’s economic empowerment unit across ministries at a Grade 3 level and headed by female economic experts should be considered. Such units need to be adequately resourced in personnel, knowledge, skills and budget so that sector-based women-friendly training curriculums can be developed.

Fourthly, women’s shurā participation and their authority and power in the CDC seem dubious; women’s participation in the CDC is, in the words of the NSP Director, “trivial” across the NSP. The NSP should conduct an impact analysis, including a study of female heads of CDCs, and assess the gaps in their outreach in qualitative and quantitative terms. Information technology too should be involved. Televisions, radios and mobile phones could, for example, be used far more proactively by the ministries to spread information on the advantages and processes of female shurās and develop positive programming software on shurās from around the country that have autonomously implemented successful projects.

Government projects are better able to reach rural Afghanistan, so they should particularly ensure collaboration with and strengthening of female shurās across CDCs in income-generating projects for women. They should be able to make far better use of the instrument of the CDC in ways that incorporate women’s separate, but equal participation in the identification, selection, implementation and ownership of projects for their occupational training and skill enhancement. Even if women in traditional areas like Isārkhail are not aware of the non-traditional public participation of females, the communities in Mousākhil Pāein and Adam Khān show a more duniyā-dideh perspective among women, which needs capacity building by the NSP. This includes greater monitoring and training for women’s shurās in CDCs to make them more functional in spirit. Mainstreaming women’s perspectives and participation in development and governance also needs to be pursued and ensured.

Fifthly, a women-only community resource centre should be actively considered. Such a space is urgently required in all areas, whether rural or urban. While a group of men can meet anywhere - under a tree, at the chaurāhā (cross-roads, village square), at the local bazaar, at a chai-shop, or in each other’s houses- women simply cannot. Meeting in the homes of wealthier individuals, as they are large enough to accommodate greater numbers of people, brings hierarchy into play. Further, not all households and their men are seen as honourable or trustworthy by other families in the village or settlement; nang and gheirat will thus be activated. Consequently, women may not be allowed to go to certain houses or they may feel uncomfortable in others. Women-only community centres
address multiple needs: a meeting place, training centre, production area for women’s income-generation activities, storage space for the products of such activities, hub for women’s communal prayers, health check-up area for women, female *shura* centre and so forth. The current default use of the *malik* as the local implementer, with his house being used as a training location (including for equipment), could be seen as contributing to public resources becoming more or less private property. In line with this, prior needs assessment of a project should consider the social structure of the selected site, so that the local power dynamics within the village can be factored into its implementation. Safe spaces and women-only places need to be created by the implementers of such ventures, including for family- or community-based informal surveillance.

Lastly, and importantly, villages need to be identified where the authority of senior women can be better used to modify male access to resources, while keeping in mind that the patriarchy of the community is upheld by these senior women. Yet it is important to use and build on gendered agency within extant social structures; this can yield positive effects in constructing a model that is memorable (in the sense of community memory) as the authority is feminised. Single (unmarried and widowed) women are also an audience to address in economic engagement. Men appear to regard them as “with more time” or “with more need.” Either way, it may well be considered more acceptable for a single woman to earn an income than a *siāsar*, with a greater radius of mobility being accorded to her. The cultural spaces made available in this permitted radius of mobility need to be exploited in programming. In this sense, the economic changes affecting earning young women, like Morsāl, upon marriage need to be investigated. The ongoing effects of the tailoring training, for example, on girls from Adam Khān who have since married is a necessary part of monitoring that the NSP and SDO project implementers should routinely record.

It may also be useful to pilot an information dissemination initiative on the monetary aspects of the productive labour of women and its fiscal impact. Research and compilations of specific aspects of Qur’ānic injunction and idioms beneficial to women’s economic rights would also be useful.

**Within communities**, it is necessary to design and implement pre-course training for men. Examining men’s relationship and experience of power, privilege and subordination along different social axes and cultural domains is also needed to understand how Afghan women define transformation and to address socio-cultural structures so that gender equality can be seen as a win-win situation for the family and community rather than as a loss for men. Addressing community fears and male anxieties, especially around women’s safety, *nāmos* and *gheirat*, needs more focus.

118 Since men generally use the mosque premises for secular and religious gatherings, the use of the community mosque for women at certain times in the day for common purposes could be facilitated; such a move, however, may provoke a degree of resistance in many traditionally minded people.

119 The engagement with men and families is crucial if projects for women and their implementing organisations are not to be labelled as “un-Islamic,” “foreign,” “un-Afghan” or “Western.” Their engagement would also aim to prevent social tensions that block women’s participation. Coburn, in his ethnographic study of an Istālif village, describes the establishment of a women-only, state-of-the-art electric kiln in Istālif, where women had never traditionally participated in the firing process of the village’s famed pottery; since the villagers considered it shameful for their women to go to the women’s centre, the kiln was of no use to the community and lay unused; see Noah Coburn, *Bazaar Politics: Power and Pottery in an Afghan Market* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011), 48-9. As Azerbaijani-Moghaddam, “A Study in Gender Equity,” 33, writes in this respect, “The failure of program and project implementers either to seek or find effective ways of engaging men and boys in transforming attitudes and behaviours, in itself creates resentment and perpetuates resistance and lip-service, leading to discussions of positive gender discrimination in terms of cultural and moral corruption being forced on them by foreigners.”

120 See, for example, Sylvia Chant and Matthew Guttman, *Mainstreaming Men into Gender and Development: Debates, Reflections and Experiences* (London: Oxfam GB, 2000).
Female entrepreneurs and organisations leading community-based, participatory economic ventures for women need greater support from national-level trade organisations in order to find profitable wholesalers or retail outlets for their products both nationally and internationally. Small market infrastructure also needs strengthening. Importantly, the breadth and depth of the microfinance sector should be massively strengthened.

The low enrolment of girls in primary and secondary school is of great concern. There should be an urgent emphasis on policy and planning to target the retention of girls in the 8-18 age group. The non-provision of girls-only schools with female teachers has been detrimental to girls’ enrolment and retention. The importance of female teachers for girls’ education cannot be emphasised enough. The socio-cultural trend that accepts girls’ withdrawal from education in third or fourth grade as normal should be opposed on a priority basis. Early school withdrawal, besides rendering girls uninformed and restricted, definitely contributes to child marriages, with the accompanying early and frequent pregnancies. In areas where physical mobility remains a problem for girls, whether due to geographical or cultural reasons, alternative educational means should be sourced. Community-based education needs to be strengthened and mobile communication used to greater effect to ensure the wider reach of female education. Incentives to increase the enrolment and continued participation of young girls through interactive mobile education could include, for example, providing a free mobile phone for all secondary school girls.

Access to healthcare was sorely lacking in the three non-urban areas of this research, and the greatest barrier, along with transportation costs, was the lack of female health professionals. Women’s health should be a high priority in policy strategies that focus on women’s economic empowerment. In tandem, reproductive health education for the 10-19 age group is needed. This need not be through the school-based curriculum if deemed too sensitive, but alternative routes like community-based groups, religious education groups or programming within women-oriented government projects should be considered. Mobile clinics are necessary to reach women in communities that are not well connected to peri-urban and urban health centres.

While rural investments need a strong focus on connecting women to health and education facilities, gender-sensitive policies and investments in transport are necessary, including women-only group travel; in parallel, intermediary means of transport need be seriously explored. Focus is needed on harnessing the sources of renewable energy (wind, solar and biogas) and educating women in the use and maintenance of energy equipment. Projects that invest in community-based renewable energy should incorporate a gender perspective in their strategies as well as gender equality in terms of access, rights and ownership in harnessing the sources of renewable energy.

Lastly, sexual harassment needs to be taken very seriously; non-militia-related violence in the public sphere and sexual harassment must be tackled. The effects of daily indignity and humiliation, viewed as assaults on their ezzat, can be traumatic; internally, the rage and fear suffered by girls and women can vary. It would not be unusual for any human to prefer the relative safety of the home and abandon education, for example, rather than face daily harassment. The extent of the nature of sexual harassment and its qualitative and quantitative impact on the economic empowerment of women, including through education, mental health and public participation, should be examined further. On the other hand, as long as men think that their nang and gheirat are at risk through sexual harassment, they will hesitate
in according women the mobility that they need for education, health and income generation. Projects aimed at women’s economic participation, safety and public participation should take into account strategies and ways in which women can and do deal with sexual harassment. A legal instrument to criminalise this serious offence has to be carefully studied. Campaigns should be initiated to encourage community-based action against sexual harassment; young men also need to be involved in the prevention of sexual harassment.
## Appendices

### Appendix 1: Issues framing the Topic Guides for the project participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Level 1</th>
<th>Level 2</th>
<th>Level 3</th>
<th>Level 4</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Self</td>
<td>Family and household</td>
<td>Village or neighbourhood</td>
<td>Wider community</td>
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<td><strong>Material changes</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Economic opportunity or access</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Desire for economic opportunity</td>
<td></td>
<td>Access to income generation</td>
<td>Access to banking or credit</td>
<td>Individuals seeking</td>
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<td>Increased income and income</td>
<td>Second or third loans taken</td>
<td>participation in more</td>
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<td>Control over pie-wāsi (the livestock</td>
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<td>security</td>
<td>participation in micro-credit</td>
<td>economic opportunities</td>
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<td>given to a woman by her natal family</td>
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<td>Control over loans, savings'</td>
<td>networks</td>
<td>with or in the community</td>
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<td>at the time of her marriage) or other</td>
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<td>use and income</td>
<td>Reduced reliance on temporary</td>
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<td>Full or partial</td>
<td>or informal borrowing</td>
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<td>Skills building</td>
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<td>contribution to income-</td>
<td>Increased participation of</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>generating tools (looms,</td>
<td>women in paid labour</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>sewing machines, etc.)</td>
<td>Increased number of women</td>
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<td>Investments (livestock,</td>
<td>with a greater say over</td>
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<td>jewellery, land, home,</td>
<td>income</td>
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<td>home, home renovation, etc.)</td>
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<td><strong>Resource access</strong></td>
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<td>Access to productive assets</td>
<td>Access to resources in the</td>
<td>Individual or collective</td>
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<td>and household property</td>
<td>community</td>
<td>action to challenge unequal</td>
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<td>Control over productive</td>
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<td>assets and household property</td>
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<td>Control over household</td>
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<td>Control over income from</td>
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<td>Reduction in unpaid</td>
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<td>domestic work, including</td>
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<td>Contribution to knowledge</td>
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<td>and skills of other women</td>
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<td>in the village and</td>
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<td>community toward greater</td>
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<td>income generation</td>
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<td>Greater participation in</td>
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<td>networks and training for</td>
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<td>income-generation skills and</td>
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<td>capacity building with other</td>
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<td>village women</td>
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<td>independently make</td>
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<td>economic decisions for the</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>household</td>
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</table>
### Access to economic networks
- Collective or dependent access to markets
- Reduced dependence on intermediation by others to access resources, markets and public institutions
- Greater ability to act independently
- Greater individual mobility and access to markets, retailers, suppliers and vendors
- Greater networking among project-related activities
- Individual or collective action to challenge discrimination in access to resources and markets
- Greater access to income-generating opportunities through projects and/or NGOs

### Perceptual changes

#### Self
- Increased confidence and happiness
- Desire for equal well-being
- Increased skills, including literacy, occupational procedures, etc.
- Increased ability to think ahead and plan for the future
- Increased recognition and respect for women’s value and contribution

#### Self and others
- Awareness about taking decisions concerning oneself and others
- Assertiveness and sense of autonomy
- Betterment of health and nutrition status
- Greater control over household consumption and other valued areas of household decision making
- Greater participation in village group activities, including around hāshar) and siyālī wa sharīkī
- Better perception of women’s economic contribution
- Better perception of women’s economic autonomy
- Participation in capacity building activities in wider networks
- More meetings with other women and female groups
- Lesser seclusion within the home
- Better perception of women’s economic contribution

#### Self and gender
- Awareness of discrimination between daughters and sons
- Contribution to the higher value of and increased expenditure on girls and other female family members
- Questioning gender-based practices among community women
- Awareness of discrimination between daughters and sons
- Contribution to the higher value of and increased expenditure on girls and other female family members
- Questioning gender-based practices among community women

#### Self and mobility
- Awareness of the wider world outside
- Courage to interact more with non-family
- Discussion on the ways to travel alone
- Solidarity on mobility with key household members
- Negotiating with family for a greater radius of mobility
- Able to travel to neighbouring village without mahram but with permission
- Negotiating socio-cultural barriers within the community
- Discussions with other women on ways to be more mobile
- Planning and travelling with other women to new locales
- Not needing permission or mahram to travel to the neighbouring village
- Courage to travel alone
- Being able to travel alone
- Being able to travel with women, but not needing permission
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relational changes</th>
<th>Health and fertility</th>
<th>Violence</th>
<th>Socio-cultural contextual practices</th>
<th>Public sphere or participation</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Health and fertility</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Desire to take control of own fertility</td>
<td>• Awareness of and access to reproductive health services</td>
<td>• Action to defend oneself against violence in the household</td>
<td>• Knowledge of and access to reproductive health services</td>
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<tr>
<td>Violence</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Desire to stop domestic violence</td>
<td>• Awareness of other forms of violence against women (rape, incest, child marriage, abduction, <em>ba`ad</em>)</td>
<td>• Action of the ways in the community and negotiating tactics and coping strategies around violence against women</td>
<td>• Awareness of and access to reproductive health services</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Violence awareness and access to reproductive health services</td>
<td>• Control over fertility decisions</td>
<td>• Advice given to tackle domestic violence in other households</td>
<td>• Knowledge of and access to reproductive health services</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Joint action for increased public welfare provision for women and village</td>
<td>• Awareness of and control of own fertility</td>
<td>• Action from other households to tackle domestic violence</td>
<td>• Collective or covert action against other forms of violence against women (rape, incest, child marriage, abduction, <em>ba`ad</em>)</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Action to increase public welfare provision for women and village</td>
<td>• Action to increase public welfare provision for women and village</td>
<td>• Collective or covert action against other forms of violence against women (rape, incest, child marriage, abduction, <em>ba`ad</em>)</td>
<td>• Participation in meetings or workshops on women’s rights, laws, prevention of violence against women</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Public sphere or participation</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Awareness of local politics</td>
<td>• Contribution of family to issues of violence, inheritance, education, health</td>
<td>• Greater solidarity against violations of women’s rights</td>
<td>• Participation in local politics</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Awareness of legal rights (violence, inheritance, education, health)</td>
<td>• Contribution of family to issues of violence, inheritance, education and health</td>
<td>• Village or community contribution on issues of violence, inheritance, education and health</td>
<td>• Organising the enforcement or amendment of laws to protect women’s rights</td>
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<td>• Contribution of family to issues of violence, inheritance, education, health</td>
<td>• Greater solidarity against violations of women’s rights</td>
<td>• Village or community contribution on issues of violence, inheritance, education and health</td>
<td>• Participation in local politics</td>
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<td>• Greater solidarity against violations of women’s rights</td>
<td>• Participation in local politics</td>
<td>• Organising the enforcement or amendment of laws to protect women’s rights</td>
<td>• Socially or culturally contextual practices</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Awareness of gender-based discrimination in cultural, legal and political processes</td>
<td>• Action to increase public welfare provision for women and village</td>
<td>• Action to increase public welfare provision for women and village</td>
<td>• Participation in local politics</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Desire to engage in cultural, legal and political processes</td>
<td>• Knowledge of cultural, legal and political processes to circumvent women’s socio-cultural subordination</td>
<td>• Action for the removal of formal barriers to access to cultural, legal and political processes at community levels</td>
<td>• Organising the enforcement or amendment of laws to protect women’s rights</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Increased solidarity among women and mutual support over gender issues</td>
<td>• Participation in local politics</td>
<td>• Increased solidarity among women and mutual support over gender issues</td>
<td>• Socially or culturally contextual practices</td>
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<td>• Organising the enforcement or amendment of laws to protect women’s rights</td>
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<td>• Village or community contribution on issues of violence, inheritance, education and health</td>
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<td>• Participation in local politics</td>
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<td>• Greater solidarity against violations of women’s rights</td>
<td>• Socially or culturally contextual practices</td>
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</tbody>
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Appendix 2: Focus group participants

*Hh: household members; Girls: daughters or sisters; Boys: sons or brothers. All names changed

### A. Nahr-e-darsan, Guzargah,

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Mahram</th>
<th>Hh</th>
<th>Girls</th>
<th>Boys</th>
<th>Ethnic group</th>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Marziyā</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Housewife</td>
<td>Husband</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Pashtoon</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
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<td>Father</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
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### Situation Analysis: Women’s Economic Empowerment in Afghanistan, 2002 - 2012

- **Income Generation and Performance:**
  - **Agriculture:**
    - Increase in crop yields and improved agricultural practices.
    - Women participating in small-scale farming activities.
  - **Non-agricultural activities:**
    - Women involved in weaving, tailoring, and small-scale manufacturing.
    - Enhanced opportunities for women in service sectors.

- **Gender Equality and Social Change:**
  - **Education:**
    - Increased enrollment of girls in primary and secondary schools.
    - Impacts on literacy rates and future economic opportunities.
  - **Healthcare:**
    - Improved access to healthcare facilities.
    - Women’s active role in health awareness campaigns.
  - **Political Rights:**
    - Women’s legislative representation and participation.
    - Women’s involvement in community decision-making processes.

- **Social Advancement:**
  - **Employment:**
    - Increased employment opportunities for women in formal and informal sectors.
    - Higher wages and benefits for female workers.
  - **Entrepreneurship:**
    - Women setting up and managing small businesses.
    - Support from government and non-governmental organizations.

- **Challenges and Barriers:**
  - **Cultural and Social Norms:**
    - Resistance to women’s participation in economic activities.
    - Gender-based discrimination in access to resources.
  - **Policy and Legal Framework:**
    - Inadequate policies supporting women’s economic empowerment.
    - Limited legal protections for female property rights.
  - **Access to Credit:**
    - Difficulty in accessing loans and investments.
    - Interest rates and collateral requirements.

- **Future Prospects:**
  - Continued support and advocacy for women’s economic rights.
  - Integration of gender perspectives in development programs.
  - Strengthening of women’s organizations for collective advocacy.

---

**Appendices:**

No Name Age Occupation Marital Status Girls Boys Ethnic group
---
7 Häji Mahfooz 55 Retired police officer Married 4 2 Pashtoon
8 Saidā Jān 40 Former police officer, shopkeeper, shurā member Married 2 3 Tājik

---

**C. Isārkhail, Istālíf**

No Name Age Occupation Marital Status Girls Boys Ethnic group
---
1 Hawas Gull 30 Housewife Husband 5 1 2 Tājik
2 Saforā 25 Housewife Husband 13 Tājik
3 Arifā 37 Housewife Husband 12 3 1 Tājik
4 Hajirrā 38 Housewife Husband 5 2 1 Tājik
5 DādāShirin 42 Housewife Husband 5 4 Tājik
6 Shirin 45 Housewife/widow Father-in-law 13 1 2 Tājik
7 Nāzi Gull 25 Housewife Father-in-law 13 3 2 Tājik
8 Wahidā 16 Housewife Father-in-law 12 1 0 Tājik

---

**D. Mousakhil Pāein, Qarabagh**

No Name Age Occupation Marital Status Girls Boys Ethnic group
---
1 Zibā Gull 53 Housewife Husband 10 3 4 Tājik
2 Malalāi 45 Housewife Husband 14 5 6 Tājik
3 Fribā 30 Housewife Husband 12 2 3 Tājik
4 Zubaidā 40 Housewife Husband 25 5 2 Tājik
5 Roshan Gull 65 Housewife/widow Son 5 Tājik
6 Khori jān 60 Housewife Husband 9 2 1 Tājik
7 Maidā Gull 50 Housewife/widow Son-in-law 11 2 Tājik
8 Mujāhidā 38 Housewife Husband 13 4 2 Tājik

---

No Name Age Occupation Marital Status Girls Boys Ethnic group
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1 Shayeq Khōn 28 National Area-Based Development Programme staff Engaged 0 0 Pashtoon
2 Nematullah 48 Farmer Married 2 2 Tājik
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Appendix 3: Research Participants

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<td>Executive Director, NSP</td>
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