

# UNIFEM AFGHANISTAN

## (Fact Sheet)

More than two decades of war, impoverishment, disintegration of the law and the systematic exclusion of women from social, economic and public life, have had a severe impact on Afghan women. Today, they face a complex web of imminent threats and opportunities as they seek to rebuild their role in society. UNIFEM established its presence in Afghanistan in early 2002 following the collapse of the Taliban. Since then UNIFEM has undergone a process of consultation with Afghan women to formulate its strategy for Afghanistan based on the needs identified by Afghan women and in the context of the country's history and culture.

UNIFEM's goal in Afghanistan is to increase options and opportunities for women through programme activities that transform the overall development of Afghanistan into a more equitable and sustainable process. We support the long term goal of Afghan women to realize their human rights as enshrined in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).



### **OUR MANDATE IS AS FOLLOWS:**

1. To support innovative and experimental activities benefiting women in line with national and regional priorities.
2. To serve as a catalyst, with the goal of ensuring the appropriate involvement of women in mainstream development activities, as often as possible at the pre-investment stage.
3. To play an innovative and catalytic role in relation to the United Nations system of development cooperation.

### **THE CORE STRATEGIES GUIDING OUR WORK INCLUDE THE FOLLOWING:**

1. Strengthening the capacity and leadership of women's organizations and networks.
2. Leveraging political and financial support for women from a wide range of stakeholders.
3. Forging new partnerships among women's organizations, governments, the UN system and the private sector.
4. Undertaking pilot projects to test innovative approaches to women's empowerment and gender mainstreaming.
5. Building a knowledge base on effective strategies for engendering mainstream development.

## Objectives

UNIFEM's multi-donor supported programme in Afghanistan seeks to advance Afghan women's human rights (as enshrined in CEDAW) and promote gender equality, building Afghan women's capacities and leadership to enable them to effectively participate in social, economic and political re-building of their country.

In partnership with UNIFEM's three main constituents – the government, women's groups/NGOs, and the UN system – UNIFEM's programme priorities in Afghanistan have been informed by the following strategies:

- i) Capacity building of government and NGOs to influence the priorities, policies and programmes: Expanding capacity to ensure the full realization of women's human rights and gender equality in the process of Afghanistan's rebuilding and strengthening the Ministry of Women's Affairs (MOWA) to mainstream gender equality.
- ii) Building sustainable knowledge and action networks: Supporting the establishment of Afghan women's civil society legal organisations (AWLPA, AWLC, AWN and AWJA) and media forum (AWJF) for advocacy for gender equality in the process of nation building and the bringing together of the gender and law working group (GLWG).
- iii) Experimentation on the 'how to' of achieving gender equality: Piloting Women's Development Centres to support women's leadership and mobilization of women at community and provincial levels.

## Activities

In Afghanistan, UNIFEM's mandate is furthered through collaborative efforts with government, United Nations, and nongovernmental partners to link women's and

gender issues. UNIFEM is committed to advancing Afghan women's human rights and promoting gender equality in the following areas:

### **Strengthening Women's Institutions**

To ensure progress on women's rights and gender relations, government institutions - such as the Ministry of Women's Affairs (MOWA) and the Office of the State Minister of Women - require support from the international community to enhance their capacity and exert due influence on national and local processes to implement effective gender mainstreaming.

UNIFEM supports the Ministry of Women's Affairs with organizational development, gender training, research and planning in order to build its capacity to lead, facilitate, monitor and support inter-ministerial work on gender mainstreaming. The Office of the State Minister of Women has been supported to influence the transitional process of legal and political reform in the country. UNIFEM is a member of the government's Gender Advisory Group which has been active on gender mainstreaming and budgeting within the National Development Framework.

UNIFEM is also assisting MOWA to design and implement an outreach strategy for its work in provinces. Five provincial Women's Development Centers (WDCs) are being established as fora for provincial and community level capacity building on gender issues. The centers are expected to play an important role in mainstreaming women's needs into government and NGO services, particularly in the fields of literacy, health, vocational training, income generation, peace building and conflict resolution, and legal and psycho-social support. The WDCs also provide outreach support to women in surrounding rural areas with a focus on displaced and returnee women. UNIFEM collaborates with UN agencies, USAID and other partners on our work in provinces.



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### **Engendering Governance & Peace Building**

UNIFEM supports women's government, non governmental organizations and networks to become strong advocates for women. The contribution of women at national and community levels is key to ensuring that the ongoing process of

reform in legal, judicial, constitutional and electoral systems is gender aware and eventually leads to gender equality in Afghanistan.

The forthcoming processes of establishing a new constitution, national elections, a national census, reviewing the laws of the country, addressing gender aspects of disarmament and demobilization, all present tremendous opportunities for involving women and integrating their views.

UNIFEM is determined to support women to use all opportunities that are available to them to influence these national processes. UNIFEM's programme is designed to complement the work of the government, the reform commissions, international donors, UNAMA and other UN agencies.

### **Supporting Women's Economic Security**

Women's economic participation is essential to the alleviation of poverty in Afghanistan. UNIFEM supports women's integration into the national and local economies. The key to this process is the existence of a strong constituency of businesswomen to influence economic laws, policies and practices. UNIFEM will also work to raise awareness and capacity of businesswomen, NGOs, government and other partners about women's economic security issues in Afghanistan and support the development of business services for Afghan women.

UNIFEM considers it important to increase understanding of the gender dimensions of livelihood systems in Afghanistan to help influence government policies and increase women's livelihood options. UNIFEM has conducted an assessment of women's socio-economic needs that is expected to lead to the development of special tools of analysis and recommendations on the integration of gender issues in livelihood policies.

### **Promoting Women's Rights and Protection against Violence**

The role of media in promoting women's rights is undeniable. UNIFEM is working towards increasing the presence of women in the Afghan media, developing a strong network of women journalists who can exert influence on public debates, and to increase the quantity and quality of gender focused media programmes. UNIFEM's media



programme works in collaboration with the Ministry of Women's Affairs, the Ministry of Information & Culture and UNESCO.

Afghanistan signed the UN Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1980 and ratified it in March 2003. UNIFEM works closely with a range of partners to disseminate information on CEDAW and other international standards on gender, and support their gradual and systematic application to national laws and policies in Afghanistan.

The elimination of violence against women is a dream for every Afghan woman. UNIFEM's works towards this goal in a culturally sensitive way with a wide range of partners. Initiatives supported include public awareness-raising through events and media, increased access for women to legal counseling, review of the family and other laws relevant to gender-based violence, and dissemination of information on protection against domestic violence.

## **Programs**

UNIFEM program priorities over the last two years have focused on five key areas listed below. These priorities are each carried forward by a program unit that is dedicated to furthering UNIFEM's mandate in that area.

1. Institutional capacity building of the Ministry Of Women's Affairs (MOWA)
2. Gender mainstreaming in Afghanistan's legal, justice and governance systems
3. Women's mobilization at provincial and community levels
4. Women's economic security and rights
5. Support for gender equality and gender campaigning in local media institutions

### **INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY BUILDING OF THE MINISTRY OF WOMEN'S AFFAIRS (MOWA)**

#### **MOWA INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY BUILDING SUPPORT TEAM**

Under a joint UNIFEM and UNDP project, support is being provided towards building MOWA's capacity to function as the national women's machinery leading policy development and advocacy within the government on gender issues. UNIFEM's interventions with MOWA have focused on developing institutional processes and skills of (a) the Policy and Public Relations Department, whose units play very strategic roles in executing MOWA's mandate; (b) Planning Unit; (c) Development Budgeting Unit; (d) Research and Statistics Unit; (d) Foreign Relations Unit; (f) NGO Relations Unit; and (g) Cultural Affairs Unit.

Formal protocols have been signed to forge partnerships with the ministries of education, health, commerce, planning and justice and ensure top level political

commitment to the mainstreaming gender into the work of these ministries. Gender has been incorporated as a priority in the Central Statistical Office (CSO) through the adoption of inter-ministerial plan on mainstreaming gender in statistics and the setting up of inter ministerial steering group to monitor this. Key gender related priorities have been included in the



two national budgets of Afghanistan for 1383 and 1384 through support and multi donor coordination facilitated by the Gender Advisory Group. Advocacy has been undertaken on key issues of nation building, reconstruction and reform such as the Constitutional Loya Jirga process, violence against women, CEDAW etc. through establishment of the Gender and Law Working Group, the task force on CEDAW implementation. Policy and procedures for linkages with NGOs have been developed and strengthened. Gender trainers' network has been established. And MOWA has been serving as the secretariat for the Advisory Group on Gender (AGG), a multi donor coordination mechanism; providing policy advice and donor support to key processes such as the National Budget, and the Constitutional Loya Jirga.

## **MAINSTREAMING GENDER IN AFGHANISTAN'S LEGAL JUSTICE, GOVERNANCE AND ELECTORAL SYSTEMS**

### **GENDER AND JUSTICE UNIT**

The Afghan Constitution promulgated by President Karzai on January 25, 2004 ensures that the citizens of Afghanistan, whether man or woman, have equal rights and duties before the law and that any kind of discrimination amongst citizens is prohibited. The constitution also guarantees a minimum of 2 seats per province in the National Assembly.

In the run up to the process of constitution and legal reform, UNIFEM has sought to bring together major actors in the sphere of justice and legal reform such as the MOWA's Legal Department, the Ministry of Justice, Supreme Court judges, lawyers, legal experts, the Judicial Reform Committee, the Constitutional Commission and others in order to advance the cause of women's legal rights and gender equality. Specifically, UNIFEM has supported a number of initiatives:

*Supporting Afghan Women's Civil Society Legal Organizations:* UNIFEM has provided funding and support to Afghan women's NGOs established by women including women lawyers, professionals and judges to address governance and justice and strengthen networking such as: (a) The Afghan Women Lawyer and Professional Association



(AWLPA) was established to create awareness on the constitution for women lawyers to work as trainers in Kabul and various provinces. The AWLPA has also published and disseminated a book on women rights in the constitution; (b) The Afghan Women Lawyer Council (AWLC) established their office in Kabul in late 2002 with a mandate of creating awareness about women's legal rights

and governance and providing training to female Emergency Loya Jirga delegates. In collaboration with the Joint Election Management Body (JEMB), the AWLC has also provided training to women on the electoral registration process; and (c) The Afghan Women's Judges Association (AWJA) has provided training sessions on Afghan laws and international conventions to women judges and attorneys who were unable to practice during the Taliban regime and has provided free legal counselling to women in Kabul and surrounding provinces (d) Afghan Women's Network (AWN) to strengthen mobilization and networking of women's groups on gender and women's rights .

*Supporting the Gender and Law Working Group (GLWG):* Formed in December 2002 with the support of UNIFEM, the GLWG comprises of key members of the government including the State Minister for Women Affairs (OSMOW) and MOWA, Supreme Court judges, legal experts, human rights activists and women's civil society organizations. The mandate of the Working Group is to monitor the constitutional and legal reform processes to ensure that the constitution and legislation that emerge promote and protect gender equality and women's rights.

*Supporting the Constitution Process:* In order to ensure the effective participation of female members of the Constitutional Loya Jirga (CLJ), UNIFEM provided support in a number of ways: (a) In collaboration with UNDP, UNAMA and women's NGOs, UNIFEM supported and contributed to the development of curricula for and training of the women members of the CLJ. The female CLJ delegates received training to equip them with the confidence and the arguments they needed to advocate for women's rights in the Jirga; (b) UNIFEM provided staff to officially monitor the provincial-level women's elections to the Constitutional Loya Jirga in 3 provinces; and (c) A senior UNIFEM staff member was seconded to the Constitutional Commission to support the special elections for women delegates in the Kabul region.

*Supporting MOWA's Legal Department:* To ensure legal and judicial reforms and institutions respond to women's needs and priorities and incorporate international standards such as CEDAW, UNIFEM has been working with MOWA since June 2003 to strengthen its Legal Department and is supporting an intensive 12-month capacity development programme. The Legal Department hosted two conferences regarding women's legal rights. The first, entitled 'Women's Rights in Islam' held in September 2004, brought together women and men including religious scholars and ministers delivered speeches on women's social, political, cultural and education rights, which resulted in a recommendation for the establishment of family courts. In commemoration of International Women's Day in March 2004, the Department held a 3-day workshop entitled, 'Constitution and Election – Implementation of Women's Rights' which brought together 100 female CLJ delegates with the purpose of giving voice to women in the constitutional, legal and electoral sectors, and to foster dialogue at policy and decision making levels in order identify both short and longer term concerns affecting women, as well as solutions to address concerns.

*Supporting the Judicial Reform Commission, Ministry of Justice and Consultative Group on Justice:* In November 2003 UNIFEM supported the JRC and Ministry of Justice (MOJ) with a full time adviser specializing in Islamic and Gender Law who (along with other senior UNIFEM staff members) has since provided technical assistance to the MOJ's Legislative Department in



drafting the Juvenile Criminal Code (in cooperation with UNICEF and the Italian Justice Project). In July 2004, UNIFEM collaborated with the Legislative Department on a review of the current family law to ensure that the law adheres to both Islamic and gender principles, without compromising legal international standards. Also in coordination with UNICEF, UNIFEM worked with the International Development Law Organization (IDLO), the International Institution of Higher Studies in Criminal Sciences (ISISC), and the JRC to support the inclusion of gender specific topics and perspective in the 16-month 'Interim Training for the Afghan Judiciary'.

## **WOMEN'S MOBILIZATION AT PROVINCIAL AND COMMUNITY LEVELS**

### **COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT UNIT**

In accordance with UNIFEM's overall goal in Afghanistan to strengthen and support women's leadership in the process of nation-building and reconstruction at national,

provincial and community levels, UNIFEM is supporting the emergence of women's development centres (WDCs) at provincial and community levels as institutions of community development and mobilization, utilizing a strategy that will ensure that the centres are autonomous and self-sustaining.

Since 2003, four WDCs have been established in the provinces of Parwan, Ghazni, Kandahar and Herat, and three IDP sub-centres in the Shamali Plains and in Mazar-e-Sharif. An additional two centres are planned, with their locations to be determined in consultation with the Government and various donors. Services provided by local NGOs in the WDCs include literacy and health education, income generation workshops, computer skills and English language training. The strategy and approach for outreach to the provinces is detailed in a Memorandum of Understanding signed with the Ministry of Women's Affairs.

The WDCs have developed an independent management structure with Executive Committees overseeing management of WDCs while NGOs provide services, formalized



through a MOU with the MOWA, to support outreach and participation of women in national development. To date, over 30 Afghan NGOs are implementing training programmes and other services to women through the WDCs. The centres have also started to facilitate women's access to critical services such as education and literacy, computer skills, health and income generation. The WDCs have expanded livelihood options for women through business skills development training, training in production for the market and market linkages facilitated by the Afghan Women's business Council. Thus far

around 42% of women who have accessed the WDCs have participated in generating income programmes such as in fruit drying, food preservation, handicraft production, shoe making and computer courses. These centres have also been important sites in the roll-out of pre-election programmes on voter education and women's political participation. Broad-based forums on women in politics were held with UNIFEM support in these and other locations to encourage dialogue around women participating as activists, members of political parties, candidates and elected holders of office. These forums were important in creating links between policy-level and community-based organisations and institutions from diverse backgrounds.

## STRENGTHENING WOMEN'S ECONOMIC SECURITY AND RIGHTS

### ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT UNIT

UNIFEM has worked to establish and strengthen national and local organizations to advocate for women's economic security and to expand business and trading opportunities for women. UNIFEM has mobilized support from the government of Afghanistan, the National Bank, the Italian Government and other donors to lay the foundations of institutional support for women entrepreneurs and producers and to commit to improving women's economic security and rights. The resulting Afghan Women's Business Council (AWBC) was established in the summer of 2003 through a partnership between women entrepreneurs and leading Afghan NGOs in the field of enterprise development. It has since become a registered (with the Ministry of Justice) body with a governing board and full-time coordinator and has become a member of the Afghan International Chamber of Commerce (AICC). The AWBC is mandated to advocate on behalf of women entrepreneurs in the country, in order to facilitate women's entry into the private sector.

In addition to the establishment of the AWBC, UNIFEM is also collaborating with various other ministries vis-à-vis women's economic security: (a) The Ministry of Women's Affairs has set up an Economic Empowerment Department in line with



the priority that it gives to the issue of women's economic security; (b) The Ministry of Commerce has appointed a Gender Adviser to the Minister, and established a forum focusing on Afghan women's

entrepreneurship development; and (c) The Ministry of Rehabilitation and Rural Development has started work on micro-credit and enterprise development for women.

## MEDIA CAPACITY FOR GENDER EQUALITY

### MEDIA UNIT

Paramount to achieving UNIFEM's overall goal of strengthened leadership is heightened awareness of Afghan women's contributions to society, their rights and specific needs. Since media plays a crucial role in reaching the general public and shaping values, UNIFEM, in collaboration with MOWA and the Ministry of Information and Culture (MOIC) is implementing a media advocacy strategy to raise awareness and knowledge of gender issues locally and nationally through institutional capacity building within local media organizations and groups, and capacity building of national institutions (for improved coverage of gender issues and more gender sensitive reporting).



The main accomplishments over the last year include: (a) the establishment of the Afghan Women's Journalist Forum (AWJF); (b) Improved partnerships with and between Afghan women in the media community, through strengthening the Afghan Women Journalists' Forum (AWJF); (c) Wide circulation of a weekly clipping service of news articles about women carried by the media in Afghanistan; (d) the increase in the availability of gender resources and tools for media professionals; and (e) increased communications capacity of the Ministry of Women's Affairs (MoWA). In addition to capacity building, UNIFEM has also provided strategic support to emerging institutions and organizations for women.