

AFGHANISTAN

SUPPORTING WOMEN'S ENGAGEMENT IN PEACE BUILDING AND PREVENTING SEXUAL VIOLENCE: COMMUNITY-LED APPROACHES



Women around the world face significant challenges to their participation in peace building processes; beyond this, national level legal frameworks around women's peace building or prevention of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) often do not filter down to the community level.

In Afghanistan, the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) is undertaking a global program entitled "Supporting Women's Engagement in Peacebuilding and Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict: Community-Led Approaches."

The two-year initiative in Afghanistan, which was launched in April 2007, is part of a global UNIFEM program funded through a US\$6.5 million grant from the United Kingdom's Department for International Development (DFID). The following six conflict-affected countries are involved in the program: Afghanistan, Haiti, Liberia, Rwanda, Timor-Leste and Uganda.



VAW Database training that we conducted for the Department of Women's Affairs, police and prosecutors in Herat.

OBJECTIVES

With a budget of US\$1,170,000 the objectives of the UNIFEM program in Afghanistan are:

- To support women's capacities to engage in peace building and prevent conflict at the community level;
- To support women at the community level in preventing SGBV and responding adequately to the needs of survivors.

ACTIVITIES

The program is being implemented in selected communities within the provinces of Parwan (Central Region) and Nangarhar (Eastern Region) in Afghanistan. At the same time activities are undertaken at the national level to further support the provincial-level work. Some of the key activities of this program include:

- Creating space for dialogue for women activists with local, national and international stakeholders to discuss women's participation and the inclusion of their priorities within all peace and security dialogues and processes.
- Providing support to Provincial Council members in fulfilling their role to eliminate customary practices contrary to Sharia and to ensure the respect of women's human rights.
- Establishing a Special Fund to provide small grants to innovative community-led SGBV protection and prevention initiatives.
- Establishing a paralegal program to provide assistance to women in remote areas, in order to enable them to have their rights upheld in communities and within the justice system.
- Establishing two referral centers to provide support to women victims of violence and coordinate other support services for women provided by relevant stakeholders in order to further empower women.
- Providing technical support to the ministry of Women's Affairs to operationalize a VAW database and produce an annual report from this data.
- Supporting the establishment of a transitional house for the protection of women released from prison who have no immediate possibility of returning to their communities.
- Amplifying Afghan women's voices by documenting the gender-specific dimensions of violence during conflict and in its aftermath.
- Providing technical support to the development of

gender sensitive legislation and policies at a national level needed for legitimizing and supporting activities in the communities.

SGBV IN AFGHANISTAN

While little information exists on the true extent and severity of SGBV, indicative studies suggest that:

- 82% of cases in a UNIFEM study on violence against women were perpetrated by family members, and
- Sexual violence accounted for 25% of VAW cases examined.¹

Some of the types of SGBV experienced during the conflict were:

- Women being abducted during Taliban time (and ongoing);
- Child and widow forced marriages;
- Abduction of boys.

PARTNERS

UNIFEM is working with the following partners to implement this program:

- Afghan Government and Justice Institutions and the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission
- UNAMA, UNHCR and UNFPA
- Five International governmental partners
- Five International NGOs
- Fourteen National NGOs

UNIFEM expects that these positive changes will contribute to supporting the women of Afghanistan in building peace and preventing SGBV at the community level.

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ANTICIPATED CHANGES

- Increased reporting of incidents of violence against women
- Increased access to justice
- Improved protection mechanisms for women in distress,
- Growing awareness and decrease in tolerance of violence and injustice
- Relevant laws and policies are in place
- Women leaders are empowered to promote peace and justice.

¹UNIFEM (2006) Uncounted and Discounted: A Secondary Data Research Project on Violence Against Women in Afghanistan, Kabul: UNIFEM.



Activities conducted for March 8th 2007

