

LESSONS LEARNT AND BEST PRACTICES

PROJECT ON REINFORCEMENT OF COMMUNITY RESPONSE TO VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN



Members of the Reflect Circles in Yakawlang District of Bamyan Province

Commissioned by Action Aid Afghanistan

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Date: July, 2018

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The study on Lessons Learned and Good Practices of Action Aid Afghanistan is the product of numerous contributions from the staff and partners of Action Aid Afghanistan. The study was produced under the guidance of Mr. Masud Khan Programme Manager, and under the close supervision of Mrs. Maliha Malikpour Project Manager, who travelled and supervised the field mission with the consultant. She also played a key role in providing on time answers to questions and data request by the consultant.

I would also like to thank Action Aid staff and partners including in Kabul, Ms. Chaman Pincha the Social Inclusion Advisor, Ms. Zarifa Gender Officer, in Bamyan Mrs. Hakima Matin, the Office Manager of Action Aid, and Partaw Development and Cultural Organization and Accessibility Organization for Afghan Disabled (AOAD); and Action Aid Partners Voice of Women Organization and Women Activities and Social Services Association in Herat for facilitating the field visits, arranging the meetings and taking the safety and protection of the team into consideration.

ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

AAA	Action Aid Afghanistan
AIHRC	Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission
CDCs	Community Development Councils
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of Violence against Women
CF	Community Facilitator
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
CSO	Central Statistics Organization
EVAW	The Elimination of Violence against Women Law
GoRA	Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan
FDGs	Focus Group Discussions
Male-Ijtema	Male Association
MISFA	Micro Finance Support Facility for Afghanistan
MoJ	Ministry of Justice
MoSLMAD	Ministry of Social and Labour Affairs, Martyred and Disabled
MoWA	Ministry of Women Affairs
NAPWA	National Action Plan for Women of Afghanistan
NATEJA	Non-Formal Approach to Training, Education and Jobs in Afghanistan
RCV	Reinforcement of Community Response to Violence Against Women Project
PBUH	Peace Be Upon Him
UNAMA	United Nations Assistant Mission for Afghanistan
UNFPA	United Nations Fund for Population
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
VAW	Violence Against Women
VoW	Voice of Women
WASSA	Women Activities Social Services Association

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

After the fall of the Taliban in 2001, Afghanistan developed a number of laws and policies in support of women rights. The country is also a signatory to a number of international treaties and conventions, including the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Child Rights Convention (CRC). Furthermore, Article 22 of the Constitution of Afghanistan states that any kind of discrimination and distinction between citizens is prohibited and all citizens, regardless of their gender, have equal rights and duties before the law. Other policies of note include the National Action Plan for the Women of Afghanistan (NAPWA) 2007-2017.

Despite these legal guarantees, VAW is endemic throughout Afghanistan and discriminatory practices persist on multiple different levels of society. According to a Thomson Reuters Survey, 2018, Afghanistan is considered the second most dangerous country in the world for a woman.¹ Child and forced marriage; high maternal and infant mortality; high level of illiteracy rates (particularly among women and girls); and a lack of access to economic opportunities are part of the reality and daily life of Afghan women. According to a survey by the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) on VAW, the home is the most insecure place for women as the vast majority of VAW is carried out at home and by a close family member.²

The 'Reinforcement of Community Response to Violence Against Women Project' (RCV) was launched in this context to enable communities to tackle VAW. In January 2016, Action Aid Afghanistan (AAA) launched RCV with the idea to take a holistic approach by involving entire communities through a number of aspects, including by involving male stakeholders - such as members of Male Ijtema, Community Development Councils (CDCs), and Ulema - support to survivors of violence through paralegals, as well as vocational and literacy training for women.

The project, which is due to end in July 2019, was initiated as a response to tackle Violence Against Women (VAW) and gender-based violence in two provinces of Afghanistan, Herat and Bamiyan (See Annex 1, 4 and 5). The different components of the project were tied together in order to maximize this response. This report has been carried out in order to analyse the project as it is coming to a close, and to identify to what extent it has been successful, and draw valuable lessons that can inform future programming by development actors such as AAA throughout Afghanistan.

The consultant found that all components of the project complement each other well and worked positively to raise awareness among community members (male and female) about women's rights. The project was also largely successful in creating a network of paralegals from within the community to advise and support women survivors of violence, while it also enabled influential community-based entities (such as CDCs, Ulema Council and Male-Ijtema) to tackle VAW through training and capacity building. Furthermore, the project has provided an excellent ground for the socio-economic empowerment of women through Reflect Circles;³ Literacy Classes; Vocational Training; Financial Literacy; and M-Paisa and Community Saving Bank. As a consequence, the project enabled women to understand their own rights and the rights of their children among other issues.

¹ Reuters, *Factbox: Which are the world's 10 most dangerous countries for women?*, 26 June 2018, accessible via: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-women-dangerous-poll-factbox/factbox-which-are-the-worlds-10-most-dangerous-countries-for-women-idUSKBN1JM01Z> (Accessed 15 July 2018).

² AIHRC, *Summary of the Report on Violence Against Women. The causes, context, and situation of violence against women in Afghanistan*, Fiscal year 1396, accessible via: <http://www.aihrc.org.af/media/files/Research%20Reports/Summerry%20report-VAW-2017.pdf> (Accessed 24 July, 2018).

³ Reflect Circles have been established by AAA and consist of 30 to 35 women members from each community, promoting adult literacy and working on community development issues.

Violence against Women is understood as a violation of human rights and a form of discrimination against women and shall mean all acts of gender-based violence that result in, or are likely to result in, physical, sexual, psychological or economic harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life. See Article 3 of the Istanbul Convention.⁴

ROLE OF MEN AND RELIGIOUS ENTITIES

One notable achievement of the project has been the involvement of men in devising responses to VAW, and to use influential figures such as members of the Ulema Council, CDC members and Male-ljtema to achieve the project goals by raising awareness against VAW among the community and to deliver just decisions in community dispute resolution processes.

However, the response provided by male often dependent on the individuals' own belief, and varied greatly from community to community. For instance, Ulema in Guzara, Herat hold more discriminatory views about women compared to their peers in Bamyan and continue to place the blame for VAW on the survivors themselves. Ulema in Guzara also expressed beliefs that women are less intelligent than men, ostensibly attributing it to how menstruation affects their brain functions. Moreover, women in all three districts visited in Herat said that when they suffer from violence, male members of the Ulema and CDCs – and sometimes even paralegals - simply encourage women to be more “patient”, to accept their fates and to try to solve their problems within the family. Women in Guzra and Injil districts complained that during Friday prayers, when Mullahs are supposed to raise awareness among people about women rights, they instead often used their sermons to undermine women's rights and to reinforce harmful stereotypes.

On the contrary, the study reveals that Ulema and CDC members in Bamyan province displayed more liberal approach towards women. Ulema and CDC members, as well as members of the Male-ljtema, used their position of influence to pro-actively support women's rights, raise awareness among the community and campaigned against domestic violence including VAW and children. One of the reasons for the difference between the Ulemas could be that Herat province is very traditional and Guzara District one of the most insecure districts of the province. Armed Opposition Groups such as the Taliban have a greater level of influence over this district and in particular on mosques and madrassas.

ROLE OF PARALEGALS

Paralegals were much better functioning in Herat than in Bamyan, where the system had not taken root at all. Paralegals in Herat were found to pro-actively deal with cases of VAW, and in some instances refer the cases to a Legal Officer for further legal guidance and support. On average a paralegal in Herat deals with one or two cases of VAW within the district per month. The Paralegals in Bamyan were found to not function at all, which seems partly due to the lack of a Legal Officer present in the province. Two paralegals in Bamyan Centre did not even know who to report their work to.

There were several causes for the discrepancy in the performance of paralegals in Herat a few of which are mentioned below: Despite their obvious efforts to deal with cases of VAW within their districts, paralegals faced several challenges including a lack of any formal registration with a recognised institution, such as an NGO or the Ministry of Justice. Moreover, paralegals struggled to have access to cases – in particular in remote areas – as they were not provided with sufficient financial resources for transport and communication or technical tools. This had an adverse impact on the quality of their work. Paralegals, however, play a vital role within the community by providing legal guidance and support to survivors of VAW.

⁴ Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, accessible via: <https://www.coe.int/fr/web/conventions/full-list/-/conventions/rms/090000168008482e> (Accessed 26 August 2018).

SOCIO-ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN

The positive impact of the economic empowerment aspects of the project on women was visible in their daily lives, and it contributed to strengthening women's economic independence, even if only on a small scale in some communities. Women and men interviewed in both provinces acknowledged that domestic violence is often sparked by arguments over a family's financial situation, and that the economic empowerment of women had in some cases a direct impact on reducing domestic violence. Economic empowerment also had an impact in women's participation in decision-making within the family including on how and when to spend the families' financial resources, since they were now actively contributing to an income. During the interviews and the Focus Group Discussions (FDGs) most female respondents said that they are now involved in the day to day decisions about their own income such as where and how to invest it. However, their role in other decisions such as about purchasing or selling property, marriage etc. remains very limited.

Despite the positive impact, lessons can be drawn. Women beneficiaries of the Vocational Training highlighted a number of challenges. This included a lack of financial resources as well as a lack of training on marketing and how to effectively run a small business. Women with no or little financial resources found it difficult to make meaningful profits, as they lacked money to purchase facilities for production, storage and packaging, or to buy raw material in bulk. Women are well-aware of the challenges and obstacles in expanding beyond very small-scale production, and requested further training and support for turning their businesses into sustainable sources of income for their families, including training on production techniques and marketing.

Literacy classes were found to be another successful aspect of the project, as they have not only enabled women to learn how to read and write within a very short period of time, but also strengthened women's self-confidence, decision-making power, and participation in community and family affairs. Most women reported now being involved in the decisions relating to issues about their children education, doctor's visits and medical assistance, while in the past they would have left these decisions to their husbands. Literacy classes in both provinces are also a place where sisterhood networks have taken shape, where women felt supported and listened to by other women. The literacy classes also built up the self-confidence of many women, and the consultant found examples in both Herat and Bamyan of women enrolling in the formal education system as a direct result of attending literacy classes organised by AAA and its partners. One girl in Bamyan Centre said:⁵

"The literacy classes allowed me to dream for a better and brighter future. I can see myself studying further and going to university and becoming a teacher. I always thought that I would never be able to learn and do something important in my life, but since I started learning how to read and write, I started to believe in my abilities. I can see a brighter future for myself."

MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS:

Based on the research findings, the consultant proposes the following set of measures to be taken by AAA, its partners and donors. Included are also specific recommendations for the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (GloRA), which can be used in future advocacy:

AAA and its partners should:

- Continue to train members of the Male-Ijtema, CDCs, Ulema Council, paralegals and Community Facilitators (CFs) as a reminder and follow-up to past trainings. The trainings should not only focus on issues of women's rights but also on sensitizing men on how women can empower families and communities on the whole. Special consideration should be taken to relate women's rights to the Islamic tenets, which promote and protect them;
- Monitor sermons of the Mullahs within the communities covered under this project. This is to deal with the allegations from women, and observations made during field visits, that Ulema in Herat are propagating discrimination and hatred towards women and blaming women for triggering violent behaviour from men. Such monitoring could be done through members of the Male-Ijtema, CDCs, paralegals and Reflect Circles;
- Conduct advocacy with the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) and urge it to identify paralegals for formal engagement with the community to respond to VAW. Alternatively a dialogue can be initiated

⁵ Women FDGs, Bamyan Centre, 4 July 2018.

with the Ministry of Social and Labour Affairs, Martyred and Disabled (MoLSAMD) for recognition of paralegals as social workers with a mandate to intervene in cases of VAW; and

- Continue literacy classes for women, including for women who have already received basic training. This initiative has had an incredible impact on the confidence building and self-esteem of women, many of whom expressed a strong desire to further improve their literacy skills.

Donors may like to:

- Continue to support efforts, such as AAA's RCV project, to take both a long-term and "bottoms up" approach by actively involving communities. Such projects will have more sustainable impact and will impose responsibility on the members of the communities to respond to issues pertaining to the rights of women; and
- Show flexibility in allocation of funding for projects and organizations that are working on issues related to VAW. Implementers should have the freedom to adjust both budget lines and geographical coverage of the project to maximize the impact.

The GoIRA:

- The Ministry of Haj and Religious Affairs when providing the agenda for Friday prayers for all registered mosques should ensure that the issues related to VAW are covered by Mullahs. It should further establish a mechanism to monitor Friday prayer sermons in order to identify and hold to account any member of Ulema Council or other Mullahs who propagate violence and discrimination, in particular towards women and girls;
- The MoJ should create a mechanism to identify, train and support local and community based paralegals; strengthen the judicial system; and take new initiatives to make sure that the informal justice systems do not deal with criminal cases, including those related to VAW;
- The Ministry of Women Affairs (MoWA) should play a lead role to assist women survivors of domestic and gender-based violence and provide them not only with legal aid but also psychosocial assistance; and
- The Ministry of Finance, in collaboration with other entities such as the Micro Finance Support Facility for Afghanistan (MISFA) and Non-Formal Approach to Training, Education and Jobs in Afghanistan (NATEJA), should allocate resources to support women's economic empowerment through specific funding of programmes in line with the National Programme for Economic Empowerment of Women.

CHAPTER 1: BACKGROUND

1.1 STATUS OF WOMEN AND GIRLS IN AFGHANISTAN

Despite efforts by the Afghan government, civil society groups (including women rights groups) as well as the international donor community, combating VAW remains a challenge. Women's access to basic services and economic resources remain limited and access to justice is even a bigger challenge for most women in Afghanistan. As summarized by UN Women:

*"Afghan women continue to face complex mix of inequalities due to structural and cultural barriers. Although legislation exists for the protection of women's legal marital and economic rights, it is evident that most basic laws are not enforced or practised. The combination of lack of security, lack of awareness of rights, poverty and harmful cultural norms create immense challenges for Afghan women in their daily lives."*⁶

In March 2018, the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) reported that it had documented 4,340 cases of VAW throughout the country within one year, a rise of more than 50% compared to the year before. The AIHRC also reported that they have documented 277 cases of murder of women from which 136 were honour related killings.⁷ Yet, in December 2016 UN Women published a survey called Improving Women's Economic Rights in Theory and Practice, which found that:⁸

"Many Afghan men and women do not perceive gender based violence as one of the top issues facing women in Afghanistan today, despite the fact that 87% of women in Afghanistan experience some kind of violence during their lifetime. Both men and women agree that violence within marriage is unacceptable and not allowed under Islam, although more men than women believe that a woman should try to resolve problems with her husband even if he is abusive."

Girls in Afghanistan are also vulnerable to child or forced marriage. According to the Central Statics Organization of Afghanistan, between 15-24 years old, 37.9 % of women are married against 16.4 % of men.⁹ Child and forced marriage brings with it risks of maternal morbidity and mortality. According to a UNFPA 2014 report, Afghanistan's pregnancy-related mortality ratio for girls aged 15-19 years is estimated at 531 compared to 257 for young women between the ages of 20 and 24 years (AMS 2010).¹⁰

Reports also show that harmful traditional practices of exchanging girls between families (badal) and offering a girl to a family to settle a dispute (baad) are common in Afghanistan. A 2013 national inquiry on causes and factors of rape and honour killings reported 406 cases of rape and/or honour killings with 8.4% involving victims 18 years old or younger.¹¹

⁶ UNWOMEN, *Knowledge, attitudes and practices survey on women's economic rights in Afghanistan*, Analytical report, August 2016, accessible via: http://www2.unwomen.org/-/media/field%20office%20eseasia/docs/publications/2016/12/04-aco_kap_report_7dec_email.pdf?la=en&vs=3301 (Accessed 14 July 2018).

⁷ Op.cit AICHR, *Summary of the Report on Violence Against Women The causes, context, and situation of violence against women in Afghanistan*.

⁸ UNWOMEN, *Improving women's economic rights in theory and practice*, accessible via: http://www2.unwomen.org/-/media/field%20office%20eseasia/docs/publications/2016/12/03-aco_wee_kap_brief_dec6_email.pdf?la=en&vs=2155 (Accessed 18 July 2018).

⁹ Islamic Republic of Afghanistan Central Statistics Organization, *Afghanistan living conditions survey, 2016-17*, accessible via: http://cso.gov.af/Content/files/ALCS/ALCS%20-%202016-17%20Analysis%20report%20-%20pre-print%20for%20web_rev.pdf (Accessed 14 July, 2018).

¹⁰ UNFPA, *Afghanistan state of youth, 2014*, accessible via: <https://afghanistan.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/AfghanistanStateofYouthReport2014.pdf> (Accessed 25 July, 2018).

¹¹ AIHRC, *National inquiry report on factors and causes of rape and honour killing in Afghanistan*, Spring 1392, accessible via: <https://www.baag.org.uk/sites/www.baag.org.uk/files/resources/attachments/AIHRC%20Rape%20and%20honour%20killing%20Spring%201392.pdf> (Accessed July 25, 2018).

The NAPWA 2007-2017 also highlighted the vulnerability of female-headed households in regards to social protection and income: *“Land, which is a highly valued economic capital, especially in an agricultural economy like Afghanistan, is generally owned by men. The loss of women’s inheritance entitlements to male relatives upon the death of a husband is another reason why very few women own land, a factor that reinforces the economic vulnerability and dependency of women, especially those who are heads of households.”*¹²

1.2 LEGAL FRAMEWORK PERTAINING TO WOMEN’S RIGHTS AND VAW

After the fall of the Taliban in 2001, Afghanistan has put in place a number of laws and legislations in support of women’s rights. For instance, Article 22 of the Constitution of Afghanistan states that any kind of discrimination and distinction between the citizens of Afghanistan on the basis of gender is prohibited and that the citizens of Afghanistan – whether men or women – have equal rights and duties before the law (See Annex 2).

1.2.1 AFGHANISTAN’S INTERNATIONAL LEGAL OBLIGATIONS:

Afghanistan is a signatory to a number of international treaties and conventions providing explicit protections for women’s rights, including CEDAW and the CRC. International treaties to which Afghanistan is a party compel the State to take action to ensure the equal right of men and women to the enjoyment of civil and political rights, and eliminate violence and other harmful practices against women. The Afghan Constitution acknowledges the obligation to adhere to international treaty obligations in Article 7 (1).¹³

1.2.2. THE ELIMINATION OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN LAW (EVAW):

The landmark EVAW was enacted in 2009 and remains the key law governing issues of VAW in Afghanistan. The law criminalizes 22 acts of VAW and lists among its objectives “fighting against customs, traditions and practices that cause VAW contrary to the religion of Islam,” and preventing and prosecuting VAW. Pursuant to Article 39 (1) (2) of the EVAW law, a woman complainant can withdraw her case at any stage of proceedings, with the exception of five acts of VAW which the State must act on, irrespective of whether a complaint is filed or subsequently withdrawn. These - commonly referred to as the ‘five serious VAW offences’ - are the crimes of rape, enforced prostitution, publicising the identity of a victim, burning or the use of chemical substances and forced self-immolation or suicide. The law, however, has been poorly enforced. An estimated 87% of women in Afghanistan experienced abuse in their lifetime in 2015, while a recent UNAMA evaluation of the law found that most cases of the five “serious” offences were not prosecuted or adjudicated by courts.¹⁴

1.2.3 OTHER DOMESTIC LEGAL PROTECTION:

Article 53 (2) of the Afghan Constitution contains provisions that explicitly recognize the right of women without caretakers and seeks to correct severe gender disadvantage in the areas of education, family, and decision-making, by guaranteeing necessary assistance.¹⁵ However, the specific definition of ‘necessary assistance’ is not clarified.

Article 70 of the Afghan Civil Code also states “the age of marriage for male is 18 and female 16. If a girl is younger than 15 years, she can get married by the permission of her legal guardian.”

Goal number III of NAPWA, which relates to legal protections and human rights of women, states: *“The goal of the Afghan Government is to revise its legislative framework and judicial system to guarantee equality and non-discrimination as enshrined in the Constitution as well as within*

¹² Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (GloRA), *National Action Policy for the Women of Afghanistan 2007-2017*, p. 9 (hereafter NAPWA), accessible via: <http://www.svri.org/Afghanistanpolicy.pdf>, (Accessed 14 July, 2018).

¹³ Article 7 (1) of the Constitution: *“The state shall abide by the UN Charter, international treaties, international conventions that Afghanistan has signed, and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.”*

¹⁴ Afghanistan Analysts Network, *Widespread Violence yet Perpetrators go Unpunished: A new UN report on violence against Afghan women*, 29 May 2018, accessible via: <https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/widespread-violence-yet-perpetrators-go-unpunished-a-new-un-report-on-violence-against-afghan-women/> (Accessed 15, July 2018).

¹⁵ Constitution of Afghanistan, Assasi Qanun Article 52 (1964) (2005), accessible via: <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/afghanenglish/3> (Accessed 12 July 2018).

international conventions and standards, thereby enabling women and girls to exercise their rights on equal terms with men and boys.”

Furthermore, the Afghan government under the Bonn Agreement 2001 established the MoWA, a key policy making ministry to promote and protect women rights. It also established the AIHRC in 2002 and Gender Units within all government ministries and institutions.

However, despite the breadth of legal protections that exist on paper, judicial institutions continue to fail women in providing them with legal guarantees and holding perpetrators to account. Some of the laws contradict international legal standards that Afghanistan is obligated to uphold. For example, under the Afghan constitution men and women are entitled to equal rights, but in law and practice women are discriminated against on issues related to their rights in child custody, divorce and marriage. The CRC defines anyone below the age of 18 as a child, but the Afghan Civil Code allows for the marriage of a girl not younger than 15. While the civil code stipulates age limits for marriages for both girls and boys, the law does not provide any legal recourse for holding to account those who violate the law by marrying younger children.

1.3 AAA’S RCV PROJECT

ActionAid is a global alliance of organizations, working towards achieving a world without poverty and injustice in which every person enjoys the right to life with dignity. Being one of the largest and most visible development organisations, ActionAid works in more than 40 countries in Africa, Asia, Europe and the Americas and its expertise lies in community-led development, working through partnerships with people living in poverty and their organisations.

In 2006, AAA committed itself to long-term work with poor and excluded sections of society through a human rights-based development approach. The new country strategy for Afghanistan titled ‘People’s Power for Inclusive Economic Empowerment and Social Justice’ for the period 2018-2022 focuses on ending VAW and girls; improving resilient food security; protecting children; promoting girls’ education; and advancing grassroots democratic governance.”

The RCV project was designed by ActionAid Italy and AAA and is being funded by the Italian Development Cooperation. The term ‘reinforcement’ has been used as this project constitutes the second phase of a larger intervention focused on enhancing community response to combat VAW. The project intervention is based on a thorough analysis of the root causes that contribute to discrimination and gender-based violence, as such contributing to the socioeconomic empowerment of women in Afghanistan is the general objective of the project. The specific objective of the project, however, is to provide 123 communities in Herat and Bamyan Provinces with the know-how, abilities and skills to promote women's rights and counteract gender-based violence. All activities of the project are organized into four modules, corresponding to the expected results: 1) community initiation process; 2) provision of social skills to prevent violence; 3) strengthening of community-based response mechanisms to gender-based violence; and 4) strengthening the financial/economic status of women.¹⁶

In line with AAA’s strategic priorities, AAA has implemented the RCV project since January 2016, which is due to be phased out in July 2019. At this point in time it is possible to draw substantive conclusions from the project’s implementation, and as such AAA has contracted a consultant to carry out a study on “Best Practices and Lessons learned by RCV.”

1.4 OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

1.4.1 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objective of this “Best Practices and Lessons Learned by RCV” study is to extract and document the lessons learned and best practices of the RCV experience and to assess and evaluate what

¹⁶ Action Aid Afghanistan (AAA), materials submitted to the consultant as a reference in the context of this project and study.

worked, what did not work, how it contributed locally, regionally and nationally and what are the specific usefulness, feasibility to scale up, results/impact of the best practices and lessons learnt. This study will inform donors and other relevant stakeholders – such as ActionAid Italia and concerned ministries under the GOIRA on best practices learned from the project to influence future project designs or replication as applicable.

1.4.2. METHODOLOGY

The research included a substantive and thorough desk study of AAA's project documents, a situational analysis to understand attitudes and practices of the target communities in addressing issues related to VAW, as well as the socio-economic situation of women and girls.

The field study was conducted in five districts (three in Herat and two in Bamyan) and the Bamyan provincial capital, and covered two communities in each district. The districts of Injil, Guzara and Ghoryan of Herat province and Panjab, Yakawlang and Bamyan centre were covered. The field visit to Zinda Jan district in Herat was cancelled due to security concerns and presence of Taliban in the district.

During this phase, the consultant in collaboration with AAA staff and partners conducted the field research and gathered the qualitative information from a semi-structured questionnaire developed by the consultant. The questions were focused on the role of community members such as Male-ljtema, Ulema Council (Religious scholars councils), paralegals and members of CDCs in tackling VAW, including through prevention, protection afforded to survivors of VAW, and the creation of an enabling environment for women to access economic opportunities.

During the research a total of 290 interviews (96 men and 194 women) were conducted, including 15 FGDs and 70 individual interviews. In Herat, a total of 130 people participated in interviews and FGDs consistent of 99 people (34 men and 65 women) and individual interview with 31 people (13 men and 18 women) from eight communities out of 68 beneficiary communities in four districts. This total represented 6% of the total number of beneficiaries (1,700 women and 1,700 men).

TABLE 1: INTERVIEWS AND FGDS CONDUCTED IN HERAT PROVINCE

Province	Focus Group Discussions		Individual Interview		Total
Herat	Male	Female	Male	Female	
Injil District	15	19	5	5	44
Guzara District	8	22	4	5	39
Ghorayn District	11	24	4	5	44
Zinda Jan District				3	3
Total	34	65	13	18	130

In Bamyan, a total number of 149 people (43 male and 106 women) participated in interviews and FGDs in six communities from two districts and the provincial capital. The interviews included six FGDs (110 participants male and female) and 39 individual interviews were conducted. This is representative of 5.5% of the total number of beneficiaries (1,375 male and 1,375 female).

TABLE 2: INTERVIEWS AND FGDS CONDUCTED IN BAMYAN PROVINCE

Province	Focus Group Discussions		Individual Interview		Total
Bamyan	Male	Female	Male	Female	
Panjab District	12	25	4	8	49
Yakawlang District	8	23	5	10	46
Bamyan Centre	10	32	4	8	54
Total	30	80	13	28	149

The consultant additionally interviewed beneficiaries (direct and indirect) - of each thematic area of the project separately, such as members of the Reflect Circles as well as male members of Ijtema, Ulema Councils and CDCs, beneficiaries of small grants, literacy programs and skills training, and others.

A semi-structured questionnaire with open-ended questions was used for all the interviews in order to allow the interviewees to provide detailed answers. Meanwhile, individual interviews in Herat were also conducted with the Director of Literacy Department; Director of Monitoring and NGOs of Department of Women Affairs; Head of Administration of Department of Justice; Director of Voice of Women (VoW); Legal Officer of VoW; Director of Women Activities Social Services Association (WASSA); and the Community Facilitator of WASSA.

As the interviews were conducted, the consultant relied on Microsoft Excel for the data-entry process in order to store and organise information. The information gathered from the field research through direct interviews with the respondents was organised along the following issues:

- Income and consumption patterns of families, in particular women;
- Current practices related to VAW and the communities' response;
- Access to services, including protection and support mechanisms for survivors of VAW;
- Access to economic resources, including opportunities and barriers for such resources.

Information was crosschecked with AAA staff, partners and other interviewees to ensure that all the information was reliable. The information was coded according to each theme and component of the project.

CHAPTER 2: ASSESSMENT OF THE ROLE OF MEN IN ADDRESSING VAW

AAA's RCV project's strategy involved a two-pronged approach: promoting human rights through women's socioeconomic empowerment, accompanied by a series of practical actions aimed to achieve a change of mentality in the communities. To that end, AAA employed an already tested approach in other contexts where the male counterparts of the families from the selected communities are also involved in promoting women's rights and tackling gender-based violence. As such, a key aspect of the project was the involvement of male stakeholders in the target communities, including religious leaders.

AAA, therefore, created 123 Male Ijtema. Male Ijtema (association) are the male member of the women Reflect Circle. Male Ijtema are made of mostly heads of households who have more influence in the family and community to respond to cases of violence.

The association' members, as well as Ulema (religious leaders), have taken part in a training program that focused on: gender-based violence; women rights; gender; children rights; laws and family legislation in terms of Islamic Sharia; Afghan constitutional; and civil laws. Trainings also focused on children's rights, including prevention of domestic violence against children, in particular girls, and harmful cultural practices that prevent girls from accessing basic rights such as education, health and social participation. Trainings additionally covered family law with a focus on women's influence on household affairs and the decision-making process.

2.1 THE ROLE OF MALE IJTEMA AND THE POSITIVE IMPACT OF AAA'S TRAINING

2.1.1. A SHIFT IN PERCEPTION

Members of the Male Ijtema in both provinces of Herat and Bamyan stressed that since they received the AAA training their perceptions of women and children had changed, and that they have since proactively attempted to raise awareness among the wider community about these issues.

A female member of the RC and a literacy student in Yakawlang District in Bamyan Province noticed:¹⁷

"The members of the Male-Ijtema talk to the men and tell them to not use violence against women and to be kind to their wife or daughter. When I was trying to come out of my home to participate in the Reflect Circles my husband used to get upset and ask me why I was going and he would stop me from leaving the house and going to the meeting. He was very suspicious about the meetings and what was thought to women there... Since he became a member of the Male-Ijtema and had the training he not only allows me to come to the literacy classes but encourages me not to miss the classes or meeting whenever I am tired or we have guests at home and I do not feel like going."

She further explained how his respect for her also has made her less angry and more appreciative:

"After the training he became a very good supporter of literacy classes and he realises that I am now able to read and write. He also says that now I am behaving better with him and my kids. In our Reflect Circle meetings we not only learned about how to read and write but we became aware of our own rights, the rights of our children and husband, and how to behave with them."

For example, I would beat my kids if they were not going to school, I would beat them if they were not listening to me but now I don't. I learned that by beating I only make the matter worse and my children may become even more stubborn."

¹⁷ Women FGDs, Yakawlang District of Bamyan, 2 July 2018.

I am also trying to speak with my husband kindly and if I would want him to do anything for us I ask him with smile and in a nice way. This is not because I learned it from our literacy and Reflect Circle meetings but also because his own attitude changed towards me. He speaks with me kindly and calmly, which I believe is because of the training he received."

2.1.2. RAISING SOCIAL AWARENESS WITHIN COMMUNITIES

Members of the Male Ijtema have been playing an important role in community response to VAW. Most of the members of the Male-Ijtema are also members of the CDCs in all six locations visited in the context of this study, where they have been dealing with issues related to the community, including cases of VAW.



Male FGDs Panjab District, Bamyan Province, 1 July 2018

While the Male-Ijtema, unlike the Ulema Council, does not have the ability to use mosque gatherings to raise awareness on women's rights, they play an effective role within their own social circles, whether small or large. Male-Ijtema in both Herat and Bamyan Provinces are very active in disseminating messages and raising awareness among the other community members. They also take the initiative to speak with other men about women's rights and they often use platforms such as community gatherings, ceremonies or when there are specific cases of VAW that affect the community at large.

A member of the Male-Ijtema in Bamyan explained:¹⁸

"We members of the Male-Ijtema speak to people about the child and force marriage, violence against women and women's right to inheritance. We have heavier responsibilities compared to others in the community because our women are part of the Reflect Circles, Literacy Classes, Small Grants and Vocational Training and we should set a good example. When our women go to these places (Literacy and Vocational Training) people would look at them and how their husbands treat them. If we misbehave then we set a bad example for people. We have to have an exemplary relation and behaviour with our wives, sisters and daughters so the other people can learn from us."

However, Male-Ijtema are also individually driven members, those with more social influence and time are able to contribute more compared to the ones who do not have the same status. The study revealed that some Male-Ijtema are far more active than others.

¹⁸ Interview with Mr. Khadim Hussain a member of the Male Ijtema and CDC from Kamar-e-Rustam village, 2 July 2018.

2.2 LOW LEVELS OF WOMEN PARTICIPATION IN CDC'S

The CDCs - the local governance institution - play a bridging role between the people, the government and the development sector.¹⁹ Despite all the CDCs having to include female members as deputies, secretary and treasurer their participation and involvement in the decision-making process of CDCs remains challenging.

The study revealed that the degree of participation of women was affected not only by the status of women in their communities, but also by women's own interest in participating and their personalities and individual drive. This behaviour was not unique to women, there were also male members of the CDCs that were less active than others and would not play an active role in community related issues. Most women said that they would participate in the CDC meetings around elections (national, regional or local), they would also participate when issues around development projects by NGOs were discussed.

What emerged from the study is that the number of women who participate in CDC meetings to discuss cases of VAW were not high, and most interviewees said that when they do participate in such meetings the decisions are made by men, in particular Ulema or the head of the CDC. Women members also said that sometimes they were not informed about the meeting over the VAW issues.

Different studies conducted by other organizations including the Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit²⁰ and the World Bank in the past ten years also identified that women's role within CDCs are limited due to men in the community not involving women in the decision-making processes. A female deputy of the CDC in Bamyan's Panjab District said:²¹

"I have been to a very limited number of CDC meetings and most of the times we have no clue what the CDC is doing and what issues they are dealing with, we don't get any update and we are not invited to the CDC meetings."

She said she herself did not try to participate in the CDC meetings, and that they are solely run by men. Female members were only invited when there is an emphasis made by NGOs or other external visitors (government, donors, researchers etc.) to meet with the female members of the CDCs. She mentioned that the female members of the CDC are active members of the School Shura and they monitor the activities of the RCs and CFs in the context of this project.²² Women take great interest in any activity that are for women and children related and they often monitor such activities but they play minimal or no role in monitoring the community development projects related to construction or agriculture.

The lack of presence of women in community debates has a direct impact on any initiative or decision that involves women. For women to gain a real influence within CDCs, numbers are not enough, they must get involved and participate in debates and decisions which affects their community, themselves, and their families. Although such participation may mean challenging the traditional, social and traditional gender roles and beliefs.

The study also points to the need for capacity building and enhancement of the role of women and gender sensitisation for both men and women to address stereotyping of both men and women. Many male members of the CDCs in both Herat and Bamyan appeared to have the attitude that they

¹⁹ Most members of the CDCs are typically from the time when the NSP programmes started operating in Afghanistan in 2003, thus having more than a decade's experience in dealing with the communities NGOs, donors and local and central government at large. CDCs collaborate closely with Ulema Councils at the community level, on issues relating to conflict resolution, or water and irrigation systems or land allocations.

²⁰ Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, *Does Women's Participation in the National Solidarity Programme Make a Difference in their Lives? A Case Study in Parwan Province*, October 2010, accessible via: https://www.ecoi.net/en/file/local/1267161/1788_1287995044_gender-and-participation-nsp-cs-2010.pdf (Accessed 15 July 2018).

²¹ Interview with a female member of the CDC of Panjab District Bamyan Province, 1 July 2018.

²² FGDs with women in Panjab District Bamyan Province, 3 July 2018.

were doing women a “favour” by allowing them to participate in meetings, and did not seem to view participation as a right women are entitled to enjoy. Such views are problematic but at least represent an incremental step forward – the AAA training appears to have been instrumental in securing this space, although more work needs to be done.

BOX 1: DRIVERS OF GREATER PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN

In Bamyan Centre and Yakawlang the role of female CDC members was slightly different from Panjab in that some of the women reported that they had been participating in CDC meetings, and they would collaborate on issues with male members of the community. Individual women who would take proactive steps to attend CDC meetings and involve themselves in decision-making even if they had not received an invitation largely drove this.

The active participation was also more evident when both male and female members of the same families were part of the CDCs, which meant women were more aware of upcoming meetings and issues discussed within CDCs. This was in particular the case in Herat.

2.3. THE CRUCIAL ROLE OF ULEMA

Male Ijtema have been working in close collaboration with the Ulema Council and CDCs, and they all acknowledge that the Ulema’s role is more significant in the community and holds more influence over community members than any other body or group. Ulemas hold an influential role within the Afghan society at large, arguably more than any other actor, and their directive and opinions are extremely important and tend to be respected and followed by community members.

Most Ulema in both Herat and Bamyan Provinces said that while they did not feel they had learned anything new as such from the AAA training and workshops with regard to women’s rights, the trainings served as a useful reminder of their responsibility as religious leaders to raise awareness of women’s rights among the wider community. When asked if they were aware of how women’s rights are protected in the Afghan national legal framework and in international treaties to which Afghanistan is a state party, some Ulema said they had received trainings on such issues from other organisations in the past, while others acknowledged that they were largely unaware of these issues until the AAA training.

2.3.1 FINDINGS FROM HERAT PROVINCE – GUZARA DISTRICT

All six Ulema from Guzara district of Herat who were interviewed for the study said that they regularly discuss women’s rights and family issues during Friday prayer sermons, and urge men to treat their wives with kindness. The Ulema said they attempted to lead by example and to relate experiences from their own lives on how they treat their own family members with kindness. They also said that when they participate in wedding ceremonies or hold general sermons they often inform people of issues related to women’s rights.

Persistence of regressive views towards women

While Ulema in all three districts of Herat province took different approaches in tackling VAW, in Guzara district, in particular the more insecure villages seemed to have more radically regressive views towards women and women organizations.

Some interview subjects among Ulema continued to display a conservative and discriminatory attitude towards women, despite having undergone the training. One of the youngest Mullahs interviewed, Mawlawi Habibulah, 30, from Ghoshan village in Guzara District, stated that he believed that gender equality had no meaning in Islam and that there are certain pre-ordained roles for both men and women that cannot be changed. He stated that he believed that women are created “*to stay home and take care of the children and serve men,*” while men are created to work outside and provide for their family. He further claimed that Islam forbids women from participating in politics and other forms of work outside their homes, and women are naturally less intelligent than men.

Similar opinions were echoed by two older Mullahs from the same Guzara district - Mawlawi Abdul Lati, 65, from Kot village and Mawlawi Sayed Mohammad, 65, from Saiwashan village – who claimed that women are less capable than men. They attributed this to women’s supposedly smaller “brain size”, which they claimed is a result of menstruation and childbirth.

The persistence of such regressive beliefs about women could be because of the influence of Anti-Government Organizations such as the Taliban that are active and influencing the communities, or it could be because of the presence of more radical Mullahs in the district. From more in-depth interviews with different people (men and women), it was however evident across the areas visited in Herat that many Ulema and CDC members as well as paralegals, are encouraging women to be patient, to not demand their rights or material things (even food and clothing) to avoid conflicts with their family members, particularly spouses, conflating into violence against them.

Women said that they were aware of their rights to some extent in Sharia and in Afghan law which they had learn at AAA’s literacy classes and Reflect Circles or through the media and in particular TV. They know that they shouldn’t be subject to violence, have access to health, education, family visits but this is not what men understand or are ready to accept. Most women and men who were interviewed or participated in the FGDs in Herat said that because of high illiteracy rate men don’t know about women rights and violate it. The view of women as subordinates and obedient is embedded all over Afghan society and there is a need to change such perception and mentality among both educated and non-educated people.

However, Ulema from Mohhamdi village - which consists of five small townships in Guzara District, displayed more progressive approach compared to their counterparts in other parts of the district. Ulema in this village mentioned that they hold regular meetings in the mosques and schools to meet with families and members of the CDCs to discuss issues within the community, including family matters. They mentioned that issues around polygamy, elopement of girls to marry the person of their choice, and poverty could often result in VAW.

One of the positive differences that the Mohammadi village in Guzara District has in comparison with other much less tolerant villages is the fact that Hazara, most of who are returnees from Iran, largely populates its five townships. In this village access to education is encouraged by the community and traditionally Hazaras are more open minded in regards to respecting and adopting of human rights values compared to other communities who do not place the same value on education or live in more conflict-affected areas.



Meeting with Ulema in Guzara District, Herat Province.

Frustration with NGOs

The Ulema expressed frustration with some NGOs' programming and asked why international organisations disproportionately focus on women when both genders experience hardships in the District around issues such as family violence, inheritance disputes or other financial issues. One of the Ulema members of Guzara District questioned how programs could create just societies in the long run if they only focus on women, which creates an "imbalance in knowledge and power." He said:²³

"Don't you count men as human beings or a member of society or the family? Don't you see the need to help men? Men in our society carry a heavier burden of caring for their families and they have a lot of problems, but no one seems to care about this. If you want to have a successful programme it should run 50-50 for both men and women otherwise there will always be imbalance and backlash."

Ulema in Guzara District blamed international and national organizations for "provoking" women into filing for divorce and claimed that these organisations never blame a woman for violence. Some Mullahs specifically blamed the AIHRC or VoW for pushing for men to be punished in VAW cases, while they claimed that in 70% of cases it is women who are the ones who provoke a man into violence and that men are only at fault in 30% of the cases.

Most Mullahs and religious leaders in Afghanistan hold conservative views about women and such beliefs are based on some of the verses of Quran²⁴ and Hadiths,²⁵ which are interpreted as permitting VAW. It became even more evident when the EVAW was rejected by the Afghan parliament in 2013 after some claimed the law was non-Islamic. While many human rights including women rights organizations are trying hard to raise awareness among Afghans especially Mullahs on VAW, such trainings could be undermined when radicals are providing harsh interpretation of Quranic verses and Hadiths. There is a clear need for the Ministry of Haj and Religious Affairs to deal with such matters and provide religious expert views on such matters.

These beliefs are clearly extremely dangerous and undermine efforts of organisations such as AAA in promoting women's rights and eliminating gender-based violence. While the trainings provided in all districts were the same, the study revealed that Ulema in Guzara District appeared to have a more negative view of both international NGOs and women survivors of violence than Ulema in other districts. This situation requires a more thorough assessment to determine how to better change perceptions of men, and in particular Ulema, in Guzara.

BOX 2: POSITIVE IMPACT OF ULEMA'S SERMONS ON GIRLS ELOPING

Ulema's sermons in favour of women's rights appear to have lessened the risks faced by girls caught eloping. Mr. Mohammad Ali, a CDC member of Shahrak-e- Andisha in Guzara District, explained that when a girl is eloping and returns the Ulema and CDC come together to discuss solutions with both families. He says that they explain to the families that often girls' eloping is due to the family putting high dowry or their refusal to let them choose their husband:²⁶

"Then the Ulema will bring both the boy and girl and perform the Nekah so they are allowed to live in the community unless they want to move somewhere else. We tell families that this is the right of a girl or a boy according to Islam and Afghan laws to choose their own life partner. We explain that they haven't committed any crime. As a result people become more tolerant. Most of our traditions are not Islamic and we as elders of the community have a responsibility to spread the word about the true teachings of Islam."

²³ Interview with Mawlawi Bashir Ahmad i a member of the Ulema Council n Guzara District of Herat Province, 23 June 2018.

²⁴ For instance, Surah An-Nisa Ayeh 34 of Quran's interpretation is that hitting women is permissible in marital relationship.

²⁵ For instance, when a husband suspects Nashuz (disobedient, disloyalty, ill-behaved or rebellion) he is allowed to hit the wife (Sunan Abu Dawood, is one of six major collector of prophet (PBUH) Hadith collectors).

²⁶ Interview with Mr. Mohammad Ali, member of the CDC of Guzara District, Heart Province, 23 June 2018.

2.3.2 FINDINGS FROM HERAT PROVINCE – INJIL AND GHORYAN DISTRICTS

Ulema in Injil and Ghoryan Districts of Herat displayed more amenable attitudes towards women's rights than in Guzara District. This could be explained by the fact that the levels of education are generally higher in Ghoryan among both men and women, while Injil is in close proximity to the Herat provincial capital and has a significantly larger population than other districts in Herat.

Ulema themselves acknowledged that VAW is more common in rural areas compared to Herat City, and that this is as result of poverty, drug addiction, immigration and a lack of awareness among both men and women of human rights.

While both male and female respondents have identified the causes of VAW listed above, one cannot ignore the roles of larger structural systems that shape violence, including economic, legal, and political factors. Meanwhile, insecurity, insurgency, religious beliefs and practices play a significant role in women's access to economic, legal and political rights. Such beliefs are often spread within the society and lead to further inequality, discrimination and justification of violence.

Ulema in Injil and Ghoryan Districts said that they always focus on the rights of women and children during sermons at Friday prayers but also during other ceremonies such as weddings, Quran recitations and childbirths, and try to raise the awareness of people on these issues. They explained that the AAA training had had a positive impact in reminding them of their role in combating VAW and their responsibilities as religious leaders and that it had influenced them to use their authority in a more positive way.

Awareness of the impact of early and forced marriage on VAW:

Ulema stressed that child and forced marriages often result in family violence, which disproportionately affects women. Ulema in both Ghoryan and Injil also said that they speak out against polygamy and encourage families to not force their daughters into marriage and warn them of the negative consequences of child and forced marriages. Ulema also warned against forced marriage of widows and raised awareness among the community that neither under the Islamic Sharia nor under the EAW law, anyone is allowed to inherit a woman or girl who is widowed or orphaned against their will. Ulema said they also urged communities to not go against women's right to an inheritance.

Issues relating to registration of Mosques and unregulated messages:

Ulema in all three districts of Herat further complained that the number of mosques and Mullahs has increased significantly, while the Afghan government does not register most of these mosques. They expressed concerns that this lack of government oversight has led to promotion of violence, undermining of women and their fundamental rights, and that they propagate teachings from Pakistani Mullahs and the Taliban which contradict the true teaching of Islam and Sharia. *"We do not have any control over them and the government doesn't have any control over them either,"* said a Mawlawi from Ghoryan district. He further added:²⁷

"Such Mullahs are also undermining our efforts while we are trying to fight certain harmful practices within our community; they create confusion among people on who is right and who is telling the truth, and this is an unfortunate situation."

²⁷ Interview with one member of the Ulema Council in Ghoryan District. His name is not mentioned for security concern and upon the request of the person, 21 June 2018.

BOX 3: ROLE OF ULEMA IN REDUCING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

A member of Ulema Council in Injil District who was also among the youngest Ulema interviewed, shared one of his experiences in dealing with a case of domestic violence:²⁸

"In our village we have a family with five daughters, they are poor and the husband is earning very little from selling vegetables and fruits. One day the wife came to me and complained that in the past few months and after she gave birth to the fifth baby daughter the husband started to misbehave and from time to time he would argue over nothing and if she objects, he beats her and even her daughters. She also complained that the husband keeps saying that he would re-marry another woman who can give him a son and he feels ashamed for not having a son who would keep his name alive after his death.

I was very angry and I couldn't believe that someone who is not even able to feed his own family properly could dream of having another wife because he wants a son. The man is a frequent visitor to the mosque and when he came next for evening prayers, I asked him to not leave the mosque after prayers, as I needed to speak with him. I didn't tell that his wife came to me. I asked how was his life and how are his daughters and congratulated him for the fifth daughter. He became very angry and wondered if the daughter's birth was worth congratulating. I said of course it was, and explained to him how from Islamic Sharia point of view, daughters are bringing blessing to the family and this is why our Holy Prophet (PBUH) had a daughter who he loved a lot. I also told him that if you provide good education and care for your daughters they would be even better than a son. I also told him that if your wife is not happy, if you want to marry by using violence you make Allah upset because you are challenging Allah's creation, he gives us sons and daughter and sometimes nothing.

I asked him how could he be confident that the second wife would bear a son for him. I also explained from a medical point of view that women play no role in the gender of the child but it is mainly the man himself that makes a daughter or a son. I know this from studying scientific and medical books. I also told him that in Islam a man should be wealthy enough to afford a second wife because you have to be just with both women and provide for them and their children equally and love them equally - will you be capable of doing this?

I spoke with him for almost two hours or more. At the end he told me that now he realises his folly and he would do everything to keep his wife and daughters happy. He would not listen to the people who are taunting him for not having a son and he promised to be a good husband and a good father. It is now several months since it happened, and whenever I see his wife and his children I find them all very happy. His wife says "I wish I could have come to you earlier because he has changed dramatically in a very good way."

2.3.3 FINDINGS FROM BAMYAN PROVINCE

High level of awareness:

Ulema in Bamyan said that they did not learn anything new during the AAA training, and that it was rather a reminder of their responsibilities and obligations to raise awareness among communities about Islam, Sharia and laws. Mullahs in Bamyan also mentioned that the majority of the Mullahs are already relatively well educated and have access to textbooks and other sources to deepen their knowledge about both the Islamic and Afghan legal frameworks.

However, Ulema in Bamyan said that after they received the training from AAA they made sure that during Friday prayers and other religious ceremonies they raised awareness about women's rights. They said they speak against different forms of VAW, and relate them to the violation of women's rights to health, education, inheritance and political participation. They added that this had a significant influence in the life of people who are now more likely to allow their daughters to go to school or "allowing" women in their family to seek medical assistance if they need to.

²⁸ Interview with Mawlawi Habibullah Goshan member of the Ulema Council of Guzara District, 23 June 2018.

Ulema in Bamyan Province all acknowledged that the level of VAW had decreased a great deal and issues such as forced and child marriage have reduced significantly. There was a consensus among them that this was due to high level of awareness among the people, not only thanks to NGOs and human rights organizations but also to the media.

Persistence in blaming women's economic demands as a cause for violence:

Ulema in Bamyan, like their peers in Herat, believe that poverty and a poor economic situation play an important role in triggering domestic violence. Some Ulema continued to put the burden of violence on the women's "excessive economic demands".

Haji Jawad Akhlaqi one of the members of Ulema Council in Panjab District of Bamyan said:²⁹

"When a woman asks her husband to provide for her and her children, or she demands clothes, money and other things which the husband cannot provide, an argument often follows that can lead to a man beating the woman. You know that men's pride often means they cannot simply say that I am not able to provide, they make excuses or they get angry. When women stand by their demands and she doesn't want to understand the economic situation of her husband, this is when the fight erupts.

Some men are patient and they don't beat their wives but some are impatient and resort to violence. In such a situation we speak with both men and women and we make sure to tell the women to understand her husband's situation. If he is poor he cannot go and steal for her and what she is getting is only possible with Halal and legitimate income. We also criticize the man for using violence and as a result we make peace among them."

Another member of the Ulema Council³⁰ in Bamyan also expressed frustration with the negative impact of TV and "soap opera" programs, which cause women to make unreasonable demands on their husband for material goods.

Most men in a traditional society like Afghanistan often justify VAW through religious teachings or general belief and perception of women. Many religious scholars argue that the punishment of women is permissible under Quran and Hadith. Despite NGOs and human rights organizations' efforts to change such narratives and perception in regard to VAW, it is extremely difficult to argue against verses of the Quran or Hadiths that allow husbands to use different forms of violence against their wives.

Importance of involving men:

All men in the context of this study who were interviewed in Bamyan Province stressed the importance of involving men in future projects to avoid resentment and to ensure an equal share of knowledge and skills. It is very important for future activities to consider involving men not just in awareness raising, but also in literacy and skill building classes. Nazir Hussain, 53, a farmer and Head of CDC of Raqool village of Yakawlang District said:³¹

"Most men have plenty of time during autumn and winter and they spend most of it at home; their being idle creates a lot of tension between wife and husband. Since most men in rural areas are farmers and they have to be near their land during spring and summer it would be very good if the programmes are designed for autumn and winter seasons to bring men together and teach them something positive. By being at home the only thing that can happen next is argument and fighting."

²⁹ Interview with members of the Ulema Council, Panjab District, Bamyan Province, 1 July 2018.

³⁰ Interview with members of the Ulema Council in Panjab District, Bamyan Province, 1 July 2018.

³¹ Interview with a CDC member of Yakawland District Bamyan Province, 2 July 2018.

BOX 4: ISSUE OF DOWRIES

One of the other issues highlighted by Ulema was the high amount of dowries paid in Herat and its impact on forced marriage and VAW. The normal dowry in Herat, in particular in rural areas, is between 300,000- 500,000 Afghani (USD 4000 - 7000) and the prices increase if the girl is educated, belongs to a wealthy or influential family, has special skills such as carpet weaving or other skills that can generate income to her family. Ulema said that they do not have any control over this phenomenon but they always encourage families to not engage in dowries, or urge families to reinvest the dowry money for the welfare of the girl herself. An Ulema in one of the villages of Ghoryan District said he had ordered a cap on the amount of dowry money and if any family violates this cap, the Ulema would not perform the 'nekah' (marriage) ceremony.

Ulema in Bamyan on their part said they often tried to eliminate or decrease this practice, but that they had been largely unsuccessful. Haji Ali Bakhsh, a member of the Ulema Council in Panjab Bamyan Province, said:³²

"My daughter is educated, she has been to school and she is a teacher. When we married her, we did take all the dowry money but we used it to buy our daughter gold and we told people that the dowry money is for the girl. After few months within her marriage her relationship with her mother-in-law became sour and then she sold her gold and purchased herself a house where she is living now with her husband. If the dowry money is used for the girl's future as an investment it is very good, but if the family takes the money for themselves then it is equal to selling their daughters. Although we do everything, bringing about transformation in attitudes is a slow process, it requires a great deal of patience and persistence."

2.4 NARRATIVES AND PERCEPTION OF WOMEN

"Unfortunately we do not hear a lot about elimination of violence against women from Mullahs, all we hear during the Friday prayers is how women should keep their Hijab, how women should obey their husbands and how the Indian and Turkish dramas are destroying women's morals. To be honest this all you hear on and on and it will be very odd to hear anything positive about women from the mosque. I am not sure if other women told you the same thing, but this is what I hear every Friday and I don't know why there is no control on what Mullahs are saying against women," one of the female members of the CDCs in Injil District.³³

The same view was expressed by other women in the province, others tended to disagree and stressed they believed that women should be more careful and dress more modestly so as not to provoke men. Many women, however, felt that they wanted Mullahs to focus more on important issues around high dowries, rapes, and other forms of VAW.

Women in all three districts of Herat reported that during the Friday prayers if a Mullah finds a chance to speak about women he would prefer to choose issues around the Hijab, how women should behave and how women should learn from the behaviour of the Prophet's (PBUH) daughter Fatema Zahra as an example. Women also stressed that some Mullahs are speaking about the issues of VAW, child and forced marriage but they are in a minority and they never go into details after only briefly touching upon these issues they quickly change subject.

It must be remembered that there are hundreds of mosques in each district of Afghanistan and the government does not register most of these mosques and no one has any control over the Mullahs and their preaching. Two Mullahs in Injil District during the interview acknowledged that some Mullahs are preaching irresponsibly and they are spreading hate and discrimination within the society but no one has any power to stop them except the government. Meanwhile, it is also important to remember that not every Mullah/ Ulema were trained by AAA or its partners. As such it would not be relevant to blame the shortcomings or challenges of preaching to AAA trainings. The successes

³² Male FGDs, Panjab District Bamyan Province, 1 July 2018.

³³ Interview with Amina, a female member of the CDC and paralegal in Injil District of Herat Province, 23 June 2018.

highlighted in this section of the report are a combination of many factors and AAA training of Mullahs is one of them.

Women in Bamyan stressed the positive impact of the minority of Mullahs who took issues around women's rights seriously. They said that in the communities where Mullahs use Quranic verses and Hadiths to promote a tolerant society and encourage people to not use violence and not to marry their daughters at younger age or by force, this has had a significant and positive impact. Attitudes in these communities were markedly more positive towards women's rights and women felt that instances of VAW were lower.

It is very important that mosques, which are run by the members of the Ulema Council, supported by AAA and its partners are monitored regularly, in particular during Friday prayers, to see if Ulema or Mullahs are misusing their power to spread more hatred and discrimination against women. If they are found to promote oppression there is clearly a need for more training and awareness raising, possibly with the help of other more progressive and human rights-friendly Mullahs.

CHAPTER 3: ASSESSMENT OF MEDIATION PRACTICES IN CASES OF VAW

According to a report by the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) in 2018, despite Afghan laws such as the EVAW, the issue of VAW remains widespread throughout the country.³⁴ The same report also mentions “murder of women represents the second most prevalent form of VAW in Afghanistan.”³⁵ UNAMA documented 280 cases of murder and “honour killings” of women from January 2016 to December 2017. Of these, only 50 cases ended in a conviction of the perpetrator and subsequent prison sentences, representing a mere 18% of documented cases.

The AIHRC report released in March 2018 also states: “Of the 2,286 cases involving 4,340 incidences of VAW, 361 cases were resolved through mediation. In 94 cases, the complainant withdrew, 194 cases were referred to the police, 168 cases were referred to the Attorney Office, 545 cases were referred to the courts, 611 cases were submitted to legal aid centers; 54 cases were presented to health centers; 106 were referred to the elderly people.”

During this study, it also became evident from interviews with women, paralegals, members of the CDCs, Ulema Council and Male Ijtema that most cases of VAW are solved within the community through mediation and only very few cases make their way to the formal justice system. This practice was even more evident in Panjab and Yakawlang Districts of Bamyan Province, and Injil and Guzara Districts of Herat Province.

3.1 PREVALENCE OF COMMUNITY MEDIATION

In Herat both male and female respondents in all three districts said, that in a very rare situation a woman or a man would go to the formal justice system to pursue a case of family violence, or inheritance issue, without first going to the institutions in the community or family for mediation. In Ghoryan District, even though women are more likely to seek justice from the formal legal system,³⁶ the CDCs and Ulema Council continue to engage to solve most cases of VAW through mediation. In this district both male and female respondents said all minor cases of domestic abuse, inheritance and other civil matters of the family are solved through mediation process in which relatives and members of the CDCs and Ulema Council get engaged. These cases range from husbands’ refusal or reluctance to provide basic necessities to the family (food, clothes and other needs), to his wilful dictate to prevent other family members from seeing their relatives, to seek education opportunities, medical care, or domestic abuse against women and children.

Some of the reasons for such prevalence of community mediation practices are listed below.

3.1.1 PERCEPTION OF VAW AS A CIVIL V. CRIMINAL ISSUE

Ulema in Bamyan emphasised that they only deal with civil cases and not criminal cases, but this rather reflects a worrying attitude – also evident in Herat – that cases of VAW are often viewed as a family matter and not a criminal offence. When the Ulema in Bamyan were challenged on their definition of criminal and civil cases, they emphasized that domestic violence is a family and a civil

³⁴ UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan and UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, *Injustice and Impunity Mediation of Criminal Offences of Violence against Women*, page 1, May 2018, accessible via: https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/unama_ohchr_evaw_report_2018_injustice_and_impunity_29_may_2018.pdf (Accessed 12 July 2018).

³⁵ According to data collected by the MoWA in 2014, 371 cases of murder of women out of a total of 4,541 registered cases were documented. According to the Ministry’s report, the most prevalent form of VAW in Afghanistan is battery and laceration. *Afghanistan’s Third Report on the Elimination of Violence against Women*, November 2015, (Accessed 13 July, 2018).

³⁶ Despite Ghoryan being a remote district compared to Injil and Guzara of Herat Province, the number of people who are educated is higher and most people are having a close or extended family member working in one of the government departments in Herat city or with an NGOs. Furthermore, its geographical location (near Iran) facilitated immigration. Ghoryan District also has its own private TV channels and radios. Media have already been identified as one of the effective tools to raise awareness on fighting VAW.

matter and that such cases could be solved within the community without going through the formal judiciary.

One of the members of the Ulema in Bamyan Panjab District, in response to a question about how the cases of VAW are referred to them and what actions they take in such situation, said that:³⁷

"We do not intervene in cases of family issue unless we are approached. We don't know what happens behind closed doors unless someone speaks out. Once we are approached we speak with both, wife and husband, to find out why this has happened and then we speak with them separately and we try to mediate and make peace among them. In most cases both of them accept our decision because we ask the perpetrator, who is mostly a man, to promise that he will not use violence again and if he for any reason breaks the promise then the community could call for a harsher punishment against him or we ask the woman to go and seek justice from the government. [He was not able to explain what harsh decision would be, but said it includes advising him or will ask the family of the woman to take their daughter until the man realizes his mistake]."

But we don't like women going to the government and seek justice through the formal system, it is very bad. If a woman does so she will face a lot of problems with her husband and it will only make the matter worse. People don't mind much if their case is solved within the community and by the Ulema or CDCs members."

3.1.2 A LENGTHY, CORRUPTED JUDICIAL SYSTEM

Ulema in Bamyan, like their peers in Herat, emphasize that family cases must be solved within the community and if such cases go to the court system (formal judiciary) they will simply be delayed for years and the outcome will not be different than if it was decided on the community level.

In Guzara District a mullah and a member of Ulema Council explained:³⁸

"We also decide on cases of domestic violence and abuse, if a woman or man does not agree with our decision and do not want the community or Ulema to get involve they go the formal justice system. The only reason that most people would prefer to seek mediation rather justice in formal court proceedings is that the formal justice system is lengthy, corrupt and will take the side of the one who pay more bribes or have a link with someone powerful, but this is not the case with community mediation."

3.1.3 PRESSURE FROM THE TALIBAN AND THE COMMUNITY

When asked why they handle criminal cases and if they have the authority to do so, members of the Ulema Council of Guzara district said that they face pressure from the Taliban to solve all cases according to Sharia law. The Taliban also threaten to impose fine if the cases are referred to the formal justice system. One member of the Ulema Council in Guzara District of Herat said that they have received a letter from the Taliban who warned them to not refer any cases to the formal justice system, or face a fine to the tune of 50,000 Afghani. The issue was confirmed by all six members of the Ulema Council of the District present in the meeting.

Both primary and secondary research shows that mediation is widely used not only by the communities across Afghanistan but also by the judiciary, human rights and women rights organizations as an accepted form of dealing with cases of VAW and family disputes.

Mediation is used partly because it is seen as one of the easiest, quickest and most accessible methods. Different studies on mediation through Jirgas, Shura or decision by the clans and families show that such methods do not bear any justice for battered women. Most cases of mediation are happening in male-dominated jirgas/ shuras where women - including the victim – are not present. Mediators in Afghanistan are often not skilled and lack the professional understanding and methods of mediating cases of violence. In addition, when mediation occurs there is no support and protection mechanism for victims.

³⁷ Interview with Karimdad Nusrat, a member of the Ulema Council of Dahan-e- Deg Dorakhshan village of Panjabd District of Bamyan Province, 10 July 2018.

³⁸ Interview with Mawlawi Haji Bashir Ahmad of Shogofani village of Guzara District of Herat Province, 23 June 2018.

Mediations often do not guarantee an end to violence or protect women and children. In most cases of mediation women are pressured by the family and community to accept the decision of the mediators even if it requires them to return to the family despite possible serious fear for safety for herself or her children.

In the same vein, UNAMA reported: *“UNAMA received consistent accounts from survivors of being pressured or coerced by family members, perpetrators, communities and even ERAW Law institutions to accept mediation or the intervention of a traditional dispute resolution mechanism. Survivors also noted that they decided to withdraw their cases and seek mediation because they lacked other alternatives, given their dependent financial and family situation.”*³⁹

3.2 ASSESSMENT OF THE ROLE OF PARALEGALS IN HANDLING CASES OF VAW

In this context where mediation predominates, the role of paralegals has become crucial to handle cases of VAW. Paralegals form another important component of the CRV Project. These are voluntary positions with no financial benefits in return for the work they do. Paralegals were selected as volunteers from all communities where Reflect Circles were established to support women's empowerment. Each of the target communities of this study has 10 paralegals (eight female and two male in Herat; 10 female in Bamyan). In total there are 70 paralegals in the two provinces (40 in Herat and 30 in Bamyan). Each of the paralegals received 20 days of training on the topics of women's rights; national and international laws; court procedures; psychological support; and other skills involved in discharging their functions.

Paralegals offer support to victims and survivors of violence, providing them with consultation on their rights, practical advice on how to tackle violence, and inform them of actors they can reach out to in order to receive assistance and access to justice. Moreover, paralegals are responsible for the referral of cases of violence, supporting those facing violence through rehabilitation; they also support the district resource centres. In addition, each province has one or two Legal Officers who are responsible for coordinating with paralegals and providing consultation for more complex cases; they make sure that the cases of VAW are registered in a database maintained by partner organizations.

Aziza Saljuqi a paralegal from Herat Province Injil District explains:⁴⁰

“We are trying to deal with different levels and types of violence against women in our district. As paralegals we deal with the cases of physical violence to family issues, child and forced marriage, polygamy, drug addiction of husbands, inheritance, exchange marriage and Baad. We are trying to provide advice and guidance to the extent possible and we also refer the cases for legal aid to our Legal Officer. We believe in confidentiality, safeguarding the privacy of the victim and trying to solve disputes through community responses. If this doesn't work we will have to refer the case to the formal justice system.”

3.2.1. DISCREPANCIES IN LEVELS OF RESPONSE TO VAW

Discrepancies between Herat and Bamyan

During the field visits it was found that paralegals in Herat play a more proactive role in providing support and guidance to victims of violence and have a more systematic way of record keeping compared to their peers in Bamyan. Between October 2017 to June 2018, paralegals in Herat documented and supported tens of cases of VAW, while not a single case had been documented or supported in Bamyan. The study revealed that in Bamyan the paralegals were essentially inactive and had not held a single meeting since they received the training.

Paralegals in Bamyan said that after the training, they were not provided with any guidance or instructions on how to proceed further and there was no one to report or refer the cases of VAW to in AAA office in Bamyan or with the partner organizations. Furthermore, paralegals in Bamyan were too

³⁹ Op.cit, AIHRC, *National Inquiry report on Factors and causes of Rape and Honor Killing in Afghanistan*, page 9.

⁴⁰ Interview, Injil District Herat Province, 24 June 2018.

reluctant to intervene in VAW cases without having any form of formal recognition from an authorized government or non-government institution.

Discrepancies based on one individual's negative belief:

As pointed out above, paralegals in all four districts of Herat are very active in identifying cases of VAW and providing survivors and their families with advice and legal guidance. However, the approach towards the cases of VAW by paralegals varies hugely from one individual to another. A small number of paralegals are more in favour of referring cases to the formal justice system when advising on cases of VAW, but the majority continue to resort to cultural norms and traditional practices and prejudices when solving VAW-related issues.

While raising awareness on women's rights and VAW is very important, the commitment and belief of individuals who are dealing with such cases are even more crucial. If a paralegal holds a view that VAW is a crime and it should not happen under any circumstances he/ she will deal with the cases of VAW as a criminal matter and would advise the victim accordingly. But, if they believe in the more traditional role of women or that a woman should show more "patience" in family matters then the same view will be reflected in the way he/ she deals with a case of VAW.

For instance, in Ghoryan District one of the paralegals explained that a woman came to him explaining her husband threatened of beating her after she asked money for her and the children to attend one of her relative's wedding. The paralegal then explained:⁴¹

"I asked the woman what her husband's job is. She said he is jobless, and then I told her where do you think that he will bring the money to pay for new clothes? She said she did not know, he must work or he could borrow, but she and her children need decent clothes for the wedding and they did not have any new clothes for a very long time. I told the woman that if your husband was jobless and he did not earn how would he bring the money for you. Should he do something illegal to find money or perhaps use magic? After a long discussion, the woman was convinced to not press upon her husband for the cloths and agreed to live with what she has."

This was not the only case found during the course of this study of a paralegal or a member of CDC or a Ulema Council that shift the blame for violence on a woman and consequently that put pressure on the woman to keep quiet, and "be happy with what she gets". Although, it is understandable that under circumstances when economic resources are limited it is difficult for men to provide for their families and meet their demands, it is worrying that some actors apparently seek to justify VAW due to economic conditions.

This is an issue to focus on in future trainings. Justifying violence only encourages the perpetrators of violence to continue with impunity and without being held to account, whether by the community or a court of law. This also shows the pervasiveness of stereotyped views of women and the pressure they face to keep the family together, to be more patient and not to speak about any so called "family/ private" matter outside the family. This example also brings out the structural causes of violence when society defines women and men's role rigidly.

Discrepancies based on the paralegal's community status:

The approach of paralegals also depends on the level of influence that they hold within their community. For example, a paralegal who is the wife or daughter of an Arbab (tribal leader) of the community holds considerably more influence compared to someone who does not have such a background, meaning that community members are more likely to listen to them and take their advice seriously.

Such issues can also raise the question of power balance in dealing with the cases of VAW and AAA and its partners should make sure that paralegals are working under strict guidance for the interest of justice. Meanwhile, a regular monitoring and oversight over the cases that were undertaken by the paralegals and follow up with the parties involved could minimize the risk of power imbalance which could compromise justice.

⁴¹ Interview with Arezo a female paralegal and a member of CDC of Ghoryan District, 21 June 2018.

A female paralegal from Guzara District explained:⁴²

“Within the CDC I hold the role of the Deputy, my father is Arbab (clan) and for this reason many people listen to me and take my decisions seriously... I always participate in the CDC meetings and I always make sure that the concerns of our women are highlighted at the district level.”

On the whole paralegals in Herat proactively deal with cases of VAW. In some situations the paralegals will advise and let the victim or the family make the decision whether or not they would like to take the case further. In a situation when a victim or the family would want to further the case, the paralegals put them in touch with the relevant Legal Officer who then deals with the case and support them in furthering their action. There are also situations when AAA partners in Herat provided survivors with shelter, legal aid, and support for processing their cases through courts.

3.2.2 OBSTACLES TO CONSISTENT RECORD KEEPING

A lack of Legal Officer in Bamyan:

In terms of record keeping, the experience of paralegals in the two provinces varied widely. Paralegals in Bamyan do not work on any cases of VAW as yet, the only exception being two paralegals in the Bamyan Provincial Centre. However, when they receive a case of VAW they just provide advice and guidance to the person in question; they do not have tools to track progress or refer cases like their peers in Herat province do. This is because of the absence of a Legal Officer in Bamyan who can provide guidance and technical assistance to the paralegals and ensure bookkeeping of the cases of VAW. Paralegals in Herat systematically keep records of cases, but because of the sensitivity of the issue the record keeping does not include the name and other details of the victim, that could reveal their identities.

Paralegals in Herat meet on a monthly or bi-monthly basis to discuss the cases they received, and next steps, and report to the Legal Officers. When asked how the paralegals avoid duplication of cases of action, they replied that each paralegal represents a number of specific villages and they have a clear geographical division and coverage, which helps avoid duplication. It was also stressed that in a situation when victim or the family do not trust the paralegal responsible for the village where they live, they can always refer them to another paralegal that is not from the same village. This is an important form of protection, since in many cases women are afraid that the community may know about their case. It is also important in cases where the paralegal is related to the victim or the perpetrator.

Inadequate supply of record books and different formats among partners:

Some paralegals in Herat raised concerns about the lack of resources and that since they ran out of their record book between February and March 2018, they had not received any replacement. Instead, they used their own private notebooks and shared the information with the Legal Officer only and then destroyed the pages. Furthermore, the paralegals do not have a unified form or logbook to register cases of VAW and every organization has developed their own format of record keeping.

3.2.3 LACK OF FINANCIAL SUPPORT FOR TRANSPORT AND COMMUNICATION

The paralegals in all three districts of Herat Province visited for this study have raised concern over a lack of financial support for the expenses of transportation or mobile top-up credit cards, which are key in dealing with the cases. One of the paralegals in Herat Injil District explained:⁴³

“I am a teacher and I only earn 10,000 Afghani per month from which I pay my tax as well as support my family. Working as a paralegal is not an easy task. When I receive a case of VAW, I need to find out who the person is and how I can contact her/ him. Once I find the contact details I may need to call several people, we sometimes have to spend hours to speak to a

⁴² Interview with Jamila a paralegal and Deputy of the CDC in Guzara District of Herat Province, 23 June 2018.

⁴³ Interview with Aziza Saljuqi, a female paralegal of Injil District, 23 June 2018.

victim to listen to her and other relevant persons in order to understand the issue and how we can help them. In some cases we have to travel to remote villages, if the security allows... Most paralegals have another full-time job and for them leaving their work and travelling to a location means that they also lose one day of salary from their employer. All this means there are big financial constraints for paralegals."

In summary, appointment of legal officers, regular meetings and follow ups, meticulous record keeping, multiple strategies to tackle the cases, and proactive attitudes of paralegals are the factors the presence or absence of which determines effectiveness or poor performance of the paralegals.

CHAPTER 4: ASSESSMENT OF THE IMPACT OF THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN ON VAW

One of the key components of AAA's RCV project focuses on the socio-economic empowerment of women in Bamyan and Herat provinces. According to the Sexual Violence Research Initiative, poverty is a risk factor associated with gender-based violence, which also often intersects with and reinforces gender inequality. Various microfinance and other economic empowerment approaches have been implemented by NGOs to try to address this intersection by a range of actors across Afghanistan. These approaches typically aim to empower women by increasing their economic resources and reducing gender inequalities in their intimate relationships.⁴⁴

Increasing economic empowerment of women can mitigate factors of violence, which is often driven by limited economic resources, poverty and gender inequality. Strengthening the socio-economic status of women will also increase their role in decision-making within the household and community. The field research in Herat and Bamyan corroborated these assumptions as many respondent (both male and female) identified poverty and lack of economic and financial resources within the family as some of the drivers of VAW.

4.1 VOCATIONAL TRAININGS LEAD TO GREATER DECISION MAKING, FINANCIAL INDEPENDENCE, AND A SENSE OF PRIDE

AAA's economic empowerment project targeted 552 women in Bamyan Province (in two districts, Panjab and Yakawlang Districts, and in Bamyan centre) and 600 women in Herat's four Districts (Injil, Guzara, Ghoryan and Zinda Jan). In interviews conducted during the study, men and women in both provinces said that the economic empowerment of women had a significant impact on reducing violence, which had previously often been triggered by lack of economic or financial resources in the family.



Women interviewed for this study in Bamyan Province.

⁴⁴ The Sexual Violence Research Initiative, *Economic empowerment interventions to reduce gender based violence*, accessible via: http://www.svri.org/sites/default/files/attachments/2017-07-20/SVRI_SB_Microfinance_LR.pdf (Accessed 19 July, 2018).

4.1.1 PARTICIPATION IN DECISION-MAKING

Most women reported that since they are contributing an income in the family they are involved in decision-making on how they want to spend their income. They also now pay themselves for some of the expenses, while in the past they had to ask their husbands for money. One woman in Ghoryan District said:⁴⁵

“Since I learned the skills from the WASSA (AAA’s partner organisation) I am using my skills to produce jam and pickles and I sell them with the help of my husband... I borrowed some money from my father and now I make 20-30 kilo of pickles every week and my husband takes this to the district centre and sells it. Sometimes I make bigger batches and I make more money. My husband does the marketing for me to find new customers and we both work hard. He would buy stuff and bring it home, and I prepare and sell it and it feels very good to do teamwork. We fight less and work more. Since I am contributing to the family economy I have become more involved in family decision making as well.”

She further explained that for instance she was able to prevent her husband from marrying their daughter by insisting that she should instead continue her education.

4.1.2. FINANCIAL INDEPENDENCE

Women who received Vocational Training stated that gaining vocational skills reduced their economic dependency. They are now able to use their new skills to generate income and contribute to the family economy, even if it is on a small scale. Women were also expressing a sense of pride in being able to at least pay for their own small expenses, while in the past they were dependent on male members of the family, especially their husbands, for the same.

A woman in Ghoryan District of Heart said:⁴⁶

“My husband, a skilled mason, has been jobless since he returned from Iran few years ago, whatever money he had we spent and he was not able to set up a business here. Slowly our economic condition became worse, and the poorer we became the more my husband became agitated at the slightest trigger, which resulted in violent behaviour from him... Whenever I asked for money to buy stationary for kids he would fight, if I asked to buy clothes or school uniforms he would fight, if I wanted to go to my parents and ask for transport fare he would fight and if I resisted or continued asking he would beat me and he would even beat my children.

Since I learned how to make jam and pickles I use my skills to generate some money for my family. We don’t have a lot of money to buy raw materials in bulk, therefore I buy the raw materials from local shops – for maybe 100 Afs or 200 Afs - and then I make pickles or jam and I would take it to the neighbours and I sell my products within the village. I can sell most of my products if the timing is good, such as during the month of Ramadan when people will often buy jam, and if it’s winter people would buy pickles. I use my earnings to pay for my children’s small expenses or for my own needs, the expenses, which would have caused issues and fighting and violence at home. Now I buy my children’s stationary and I even bought a dress for myself without the need to ask my husband.”

4.1.3. A SENSE OF PRIDE

From all the interviews and FGDs it was evident that women were taking a lot of pride in being able to contribute to the economy of the family and felt it was important that they had skills, which can bring cash to the family. This is partly related to long-held traditional notions that what is considered “women’s work” - such as household chores, looking after livestock – is not seen as important or valuable contributions. The women, however, were only counting the money spent on raw material and not the time dedicated to production when discussing their profits.

⁴⁵ Women FGDs, Ghoryan District of Herat Province, 21 June 2018.

⁴⁶ Interview with the beneficiary of the Vocational Training in Ghoryan District of Herat Province, 21 June 2018.

One of the women in Injil District said:⁴⁷

"My husband is in Iran (he is serving jail), I am here with my two kids living with my parents and the life is so difficult... Since I learned the skill I am trying to make some contribution and at least be able to pay for my own children's small things such as their school bags, stationary, pocket money and to buy myself at least sanitary products. I couldn't ask my father for all of this. Since I am using my skills to have some income my children are looking much happier and I feel proud, I don't feel like I am a useless and a consuming person as I did before. If God wills I may be able to find more customers and sell more and become totally independent."

The unique initiative that AAA took in order to promote women's socio-economic empowerment in Afghanistan was a localized approach, which means that the Vocational Training was rolled out not on a provincial level, but tailored to each district depending on what local resources are available there and how those resources could best be used. For instance, in Ghoryan District in Herat the initiative started with saffron collection and trading which due to some loss was changed to pickles and jam making. In the other three districts the women learned baking and production of confectionaries, jam and pickles. In Bamyan, women learned weaving and dairy processing skills (paneer, Qorut, yogurt drink and pudding). Such an approach showed an understanding of local issues, capacities and barriers.

4.2. ASSESSMENT OF THE VOCATIONAL TRAININGS IN HERAT



Pickles and jam made by women in Herat Province

Women in Herat who received training in how to make jams and pickles expressed their satisfaction with the quality of the training, and how much they were able to learn and benefit practically. Some of the women, who participated in the FGDs, explained how the new skills have improved their lives, even though they encountered several challenges in producing and marketing their products.

4.2.1 LACK OF RESOURCES TO INCREASE PRODUCTION AND INCOME GENERATION

The project actively sought to identify the most vulnerable women such as the ones who suffered from economic initiated violence, women household heads, poor and economically disadvantaged such as the ones with no land or livestock, to provide skills training to. While all the four districts of Herat are marred by poverty, immigration, drug abuse and limited economic and income generating resources for both men and women, the research indicated that AAA had successfully identified the poorest beneficiaries in the villages and districts.

An unfortunate side effect of this, however, was that most beneficiaries were struggling to access the financial resources necessary to increase production and income generation after they had received the training. From interviews and FGDs with the women in all four districts of Herat, it was evident that more financial resources led to increased production, resulting in more incomes and profit. A woman with an investment of 150 Afghani was typically generating a profit between 40-50 Afghani and this including material costs and not taking into account the time spent on production.

⁴⁷ Interview with Hasiba in Injil District of Herat Province, 23 June 2018.

4.2.2. PRODUCTION RELATED CHALLENGES: RAW MATERIALS, STORAGE, TRANSPORTATION, AND MARKETING

Women in Herat who were part of the jam and pickle production training highlighted several challenges such as access to financial resources, production, storage, transportation and marketing.

A woman in Guzara explained:⁴⁸

“As you may know all the fruits and vegetables are cheap during the summer because of high production and the prices go up during winter because there are few local products and most vegetables and fruits are imported from other countries. This has a negative effect on our production because jam and pickles are mostly used during the winter or in times of cold weather in Herat, while the demand for this during the summer is limited.

For this reason, even if we produce a lot during summer it means that first there will be a small market for our products, and secondly, because we don't use food preservatives and we don't have cold storage, our products go bad within a week. This is because of very hot summers in Herat, and there are tonnes of Iranian products in the market which are cheaper and last longer. The shopkeepers can keep these on shop shelves for months and they have better and attractive packaging, with production and expiry date on it. Even though our products are more healthy, it is difficult to compete with Iranian products since they last much longer.”

Another woman in Injil District said:⁴⁹ *“The reason that I make a very small profit is because I buy my raw materials from the local shop. If I had enough money to buy vegetables and fruit in bulk from the vegetable market (Maidan-e- Tara Bar) I could make good margins on my products.”*

The profit and marketing techniques were different from individual to individual. A small number of women were able to target the local market in the district centre and find themselves regular customers, which helped them to grow and even buy the products from other women in their village. Because the level of products and sells were high, the income and margins were high as well. While other women in all four districts who were having smaller amount of production and their selling was limited mostly within their own village or sometimes in the neighbouring villages, while still able to generate a small income that was helpful in one or another way to the household economy, it was not good enough to change their lives.

Women in Injil and Guzara learning production of jams and pickles depending on their own interest or potential for profit. Women who learned baking were able to bake different kinds of cookies, cakes and other sweets and confectionaries, and to sell them in local market or within their villages. Most women who were part of the baking initiative reported that they had very busy days before Eid and they produced a lot of cookies, cakes, doughnuts and other Afghan traditional sweets and managed to make a good profit.



cookies baked by women survivors of violence, supported through Small Grants in Herat Province

Since women working on baking used the resources provided by AAA and their partner VoW such as baking oven, big frying pans and stoves and shelves, it was more convenient to work as a group. The benefit of working as a group was that everyone would contribute a small amount of money and together they would buy bulk of raw materials, which is cheaper compared to buying in small portions from local shops.

⁴⁸ Interview with Najiba a beneficiary of the Vocational Training of Guzara District of Herat Province, 23 June 2018.

⁴⁹ Women FGDs, Injil District of Herat Province, 23 June 2018.

Furthermore, women survivors of domestic violence 20 in each district were provided with Small Grant to support their economic empowerment and independence. Women from Injil and Guzara districts who benefited from Small Grant scheme, used the grant to collectively produce confectionaries through learning sweet baking. The AAA partners provided all the equipment for production of confectionary in three districts of Herat. Women in Injil and Guzara Districts used this method during Eid when women were able to jointly buy material to produce and sell product. Each woman reportedly made a profit of 250-500 Afghani per week.

4.2.3 SUCCESS OF SUSTAINABILITY AND LOCAL OWNERSHIP

One of the good initiatives by VoW in regard to the Small Grant was that they worked towards local ownership of the initiative, and helped women survivors of violence to register their own small businesses with the GoIRA. This will help women towards sustainability, and in the longer term they will be able to receive loans if they meet the requirements.

VoW also created brand names, logos and labels, which are used for their products. Each district and each production had their own brand name. Women in these districts were feeling proud to be part of a production initiative with a brand and identification. They saw it as more of their own collective products and took pride of ownership over that. Such examples could be used in the other contexts as well to promote local ownership and assist with sustainability of the products in the longer term.

4.3. ASSESSMENT OF THE VOCATIONAL TRAINING IN BAMYAN

Women in Bamyan had the option to receive Vocational Training in either dairy processing or crochet, with different villages preferring different options depending on the demand for specific products in their areas and the personal interests of the beneficiaries. At the time of the consultant's visit to Bamyan province, in some villages women had just finished their Vocational Training on dairy processing, while others were due to receive it from a skilled trainer hired by the AAA and its partners. All trainings were provided ended by 24 June 2018.

In Panjab district, crochet women learned how to produce different crochet products including tablecloths, tray cloths, sweet pots, trays and other decorative products, which had recently seen a spike in popularity in the district. According to a local woman in Panjab:⁵⁰

"Nowadays women are using a lot of crochet products and they are so popular that people will even give them as wedding gifts. A full set of crochet made decorations, which is about a dozen pieces, would cost 5000 Afghani in the local market. If we learn how to do it, we can make a good profit from this."

At the time of the visit, women were showing how they were learning to make different patterns, sizes and shapes, and there was almost a sense of competition among the beneficiaries over who can make the neatest and nicest product.



4.3.1. INCREASED HYGIENE AND VALUE OF DAIRY PRODUCTS

The dairy processing training was completed by 24th June 2018, in Bamyan, but there was a strong sense that women were taking such trainings very seriously and trying to make the most out of it. Women who received training on dairy processing and were interviewed or participated in FDGs were clearly excited about the new skills they had learned. Women said that in the past they did not know the value of their products and they would never sell it but were giving it away. But since they have learned the new skills they know the value of their products and they would no longer give them away for free.

One of the women in Yakawlang District said:⁵¹

“Before whoever wanted would send their child and ask for a bottle of Dogh (Yogurt drink) and I was giving it for free because I was not seeing it as something valuable. But since I received the training if anyone asks for a bottle of Dogh I would ask for 20 Afghani, no free Dogh anymore!”

Furthermore, women also reported that they not only learned how to make the products but they also learned how to do them in a shorter time and in a more hygienic way, which they did not know in the past. Women relayed their knowledge on how they would look after the hygiene of animals and the stable, as well as their own personal hygiene and that of their products.

Women in Yakawlang District during the FDGs also explained that they had acquired new skills, such as how to make paneer, as well as new metal tools for processing their products, which simplified the production process considerably compared to their traditional methods. In traditional methods, they would use a container made of sheep skin to process the dairy, but, the sheep skin was unhygienic and a breeding ground for bacteria, while the new metal tools are easy to clean and wash.

4.3.2 PRODUCTION, STORAGE, AND MARKETING CHALLENGES

Despite the women in Bamyan having just finished their training they were making plans on how to move forward and make the most of it. Furthermore, the beneficiaries of the Vocational Training who were interviewed or participated in the FDGs, while being grateful for the opportunity they were given, also expressed concerns about the challenges ahead of them. Women said that the first challenge would be that dairy production will be limited to summer season as the animals barely milk during the autumn, while they are pregnant in winter and have to feed their new-born calves in spring.

The other challenge is the marketing of their products, as women expressed concern over how to find a regular market. Since most of the districts and villages are far away from the provincial centre and travel costs can be substantive, it will be important to identify alternative methods of marketing moving forward.

Since dairy products are sensitive and can spoil quickly most women also expressed concerns about storage of the milk or their products. Because of the environment and geographical location of Bamyan, families do not have much livestock and this has an impact on collecting and storage of milk before they are able to process it and make other products from it. Another challenge is that because most of the dairy products will be produced during the summer heat, lack of refrigeration and storage for the milk and the products can pose a serious challenge to the producers. It would be useful for AAA to explore options of refrigeration within the communities, or to provide solar powered refrigeration or storage, which could be shared between several villages.

Another method to explore is collective production and selling of products, which would mitigate the challenges of limited availability of livestock and the seasonal production of milk. Women should also be encouraged to approach shops and markets before production to get a sense of the interest in

⁵¹ Women FDGs, Yakawlang District of Bamyan Province, 02 June 2018.

purchasing their products and the amount they may be able to sell on a weekly or monthly basis. Such an arrangement will assist women to understand how much they need to produce of which product, and how much profit they would make.

4.4 ASSESSMENT OF THE MOBILE PHONE BANKING AND COMMUNITY SAVINGS BANK INITIATIVES

At the time the field visit was conducted, the M-Paisa (Mobile phone banking) and Community Savings Bank initiatives were being executed in both Herat and Bamyan Provinces, and it was difficult to assess the effectiveness and challenges associated with them.

One of the challenges which surfaced, however, in Band-e-Bala Sadat village of Bamyan was that the M-Paisa programme is only accessible through Roshan Telecom, and there are many villages where Roshan does not have any coverage, meaning that many women were not able to install the app. The Programme Manager (Maliha Malikpour) raised this issue in the past and AAA decided to replace M-Paisa with a Community Savings Bank in some, but not all, affected villages. Bamyan was more vulnerable to this issue compared to Herat.

Staff of partner organizations and AAA staff members in Bamyan also expressed concerns that the M-Paisa app had been copied from Herat to Bamyan under the RCV project without a proper analysis of its suitability to Bamyan Province. This was apparently due to limited flexibility by the donor to change the M-Paisa to another alternative component. In order to maximize the effectiveness of such projects it is very important that - like other components of the project, such as the vocational trainings – it is bespoke and based on local needs and accessibility.

4.5. ASSESSMENT OF THE LITERACY INTERVENTIONS

According to the findings of the Afghan People Survey 2017 conducted by the Asia Foundation to identify the two biggest problems facing women in Afghanistan, over a third of all respondents (36.4%) identified that education/illiteracy was a major problem for women across gender, age, ethnicity, and the rural/urban divide. It is also the most frequently reported issue facing women in all regions except for the South West, where a higher proportion of respondents cite domestic violence (27.6%) over education/illiteracy.⁵²

4.5.1 AN EFFECTIVE EMPOWERMENT TOOL

Since October 2017, all the members of the Reflect Circles became part of literacy classes where they were taught through literacy textbooks and learned reading and writing for a period of nine months. The beneficiaries of the literacy classes upon the completion of the course obtained a qualification equivalent to grade three of primary school. Each literacy class enrolled between 20 and 25 students, aged between 15 and 45, on average.

Almost every woman in all five districts of Herat and Bamyan who were interviewed or participated in FGDs, said they were able to fluently read the textbooks provided to them, they could also write with confidence. Women were very grateful for the opportunity to learn how to read and write as well as to learn basic maths, reciting of Quran, and about human rights including, women and children rights. The impact of the literacy classes was significant in building the confidence of women and helping them to believe in themselves.

A woman in Ghoryan District of Herat Province said:⁵³

“When I was going to the Reflect Circles my husband was not happy about it and he always grumbled and asked me why I am going and what am I doing there... When the literacy classes started last year, he told me that I would not learn because I am old now and I have

⁵² Asia Foundation, *A survey of the Afghan people, Afghanistan in 2017*, accessible via: https://asiafoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/2017_AfghanSurvey_report.pdf, (Accessed, 22 July 2018).

⁵³ FGDs, Ghoryan District in Herat Province, 21 June 2018.

kids, so my brain may not function properly. I told him that I will go and I will prove that I can learn, my marital status and my age will not stop me from learning.

As days went by, I started to learn and even proved to be a fast learner. My husband was very surprised and then he gradually became one of the biggest supporters of these literacy classes.

Just six months into literacy classes I was reading and writing fluently, no one in my family could believe it. Now I am able to read and write, calculate and even help my younger children with their school lessons and homework. I am very proud that I was able to learn to read and write in such a short time, and I am very thankful to Action Aid and WASSA. Since I started literacy classes, I have also learned how to behave with my children, I do not beat them but instead speak with them. I am surprised to see that my children are now behaving much better than before when I used to beat them."

The literacy classes were not only seen as a place where women and girls learned how to read and write, but also as a place of association and gathering among women where they build their own networks of sisterhood and support within the community. Most cases of VAW within the community are also reported through the literacy classes to the teacher or paralegals, who then offer to help the affected person.

Literacy classes are also playing a significant role as a complementary component to the Vocational Training, through financial literacy, accounting and saving skills. Most women reported that the literacy classes became a test point for their abilities and it has boosted their confidence and self-esteem. Apart from reading and writing, they are also able to calculate and handle basic accounting to keep track of incomes and expenditures.

BOX 5: CONCERNS OVER SOME EXTRA CURRICULUM DISCUSSIONS DURING CLASSES

The literacy classes also encouraged open discussions on the rights of women and children, other family related issues (proper behaviour of a husband and wife towards each other within a family), and Quran recitation. The nature of these extra-curricular teachings depended on the interests of individual teachers. On occasions, extra-curricular lessons or debates seem to have put extra burden on women to conform to the concept of "good woman", to not argue with her husband, to "behave", or to be more understanding. This approach was also encouraging many women to simply put up with destructive family situations and to be more "patient". This approach was evident in Herat Province, especially in Ghoryan District, while in Bamyan much of the focus of extra curriculum lessons were on children rights, women rights and religious studies, but much less on promoting the concept of a "good woman". It is worrying that some literacy classes appear to have emphasised traditional and harmful stereotypes of a woman's role in society.

4.5.2. A BOON FOR EARLY SCHOOL DROPOUTS

The literacy classes also offered a very good opportunity for girls who dropped out of school at an earlier age to refresh their reading and writing skills. In both Herat and Bamyan Provinces there were young girls who started their schools after or even during the duration of the literacy classes. During the field visits to Herat and Bamyan, at least one young girl in Injil District reported that she had re-enrolled in year nine of high school as a result of the literacy classes. The teacher explained that the girl had to leave her school at a young age when the family had to leave Badghis Province due to insecurity and settled in Injil District as an internally displaced family.

The teacher said:⁵⁴ *"From the beginning she started to shine, she had the brain of a computer and was learning very fast even though she was only in school up to year four. I realised that she would have a very bright future. I encouraged her and worked with her parents to enrol her in school and finally last month (May 2018) she received the approval that she could continue her education through the formal schooling system in year nine."*

⁵⁴ Interview with Jamila the literacy teacher in Injil District, 23 June 2018.

Of all communities/villages visited, the largest number of beneficiaries from literacy classes who were planning to continue their education through the formal schooling system was in Bamyan. In Panjab District's Taghak village, at least four girls between aged 16-20 were either already enrolled in school or in the process of enrolment. All four girls said that they would like to pursue their education up to the university level. The situation was similar in Bamyan Centre and Yakawlang District, where some beneficiaries of the literacy classes were in the process of enrolling into the formal education system to continue their education.

4.5.3. EFFECTIVE ENTRY POINT FOR MALE SUPPORT

"My wife is almost 60 years old, I told her that she was too old and that she would not learn a thing in literacy classes. But she refused to give up, now after nine months she proved me wrong! She is able to read and write beautifully and I am proud of her," said one of the members of the Male-Ijtema in Yakawlang District during a focus group discussion.⁵⁵

Many men have been supporting literacy classes for women and girls in both Herat and Bamyan. They said that they have witnessed changes in their lives and in the lives of their wives or daughters, and that they have seen how women are now better able to articulate their needs and relate them to their rights. They also said that the literate women tended to use significantly less violence against children.

Many men also asked whether AAA could organise similar classes for men as well, because women now know how to read and write, but as men remain illiterate this can create imbalances and tensions within the family. Men in Bamyan suggested autumn and winter as ideal time for classes for men as most men spend time at home with limited employment opportunities due to the harsh winter season.

Women in both provinces requested AAA to continue with the literacy classes because they want to improve their learning skills through a refresher course of nine months. This will also help receive a qualification equivalent to a year-six school student. Literacy classes can become a very strong tool for promoting women's rights and elimination of gender-based violence, in particular if awareness raising about such issues is embedded in the literacy books for both men and women.

BOX 6: COLLABORATION WITH STAKEHOLDERS

The consultant met with the Director of Literacy Programme of the Department of Education of Herat, the Head of the NGOs Liaison Department of Women Affairs of Herat, and the Head of Case Management of the Department of Justice of Herat. These government institutions were all aware of the activities of AAA partners in the four districts of Herat Province, and expressed appreciation for this work with the target communities. The consultant also met with the Department of Women Affairs and Department of Literacy in Bamyan.

However, none of the government departments that were visited and interviewed were able to provide any solid evidence whether the project had any impact on either reducing or increasing VAW in the targeted districts. The government departments, however, all praised the quality of the services provided for women in the four districts, and saw it as a very useful way of tackling VAW and promoting the rights of women and children.

The relevant government institutions dealing with adult literacy and education have been conducting monitoring missions to the project sites periodically, and were reporting back and liaising with NGOs on their findings.

Due to some guideline restrictions within the MoLSAMD it did not engage with the project in any capacity. This is because the Ministry only assists with Vocational Training programmes that are of three months duration and above. The initiative was not supported by MoLSAMD.

⁵⁵ Male FGDs in Yakawlang District of Bamyan Province, 02 July 2018.

While, the Vocational Training include financial training and M-Paisa, neither of the partners of AAA nor AAA itself in Bamyan had had any interaction with the MISFA, and NATEJA.

CHAPTER 5: RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

5.1 RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1.1 RECOMMENDATIONS TO AAA AND ITS PARTNERS:

Although many recommendations are cross-cutting in nature, below are given specific recommendations based on the analysis of the research findings for each of the project components:

For CDCs:

- Raise awareness and build the capacity of both men and women on equal participation in community related matters, and the importance of including women in all CDC meetings.

For religious entities:

- Monitor sermons of the Mullahs within the communities covered under this project. This is to deal with the allegations from women, and observations made during field visits, that Ulema in Herat Province are propagating discrimination and hatred towards women and blaming women for initiating violence. Such monitoring could be done through members of the Male-Ijtema, CDCs, paralegals and Reflect Circles.

For paralegals and mediation of cases of VAW:

- Identify means to support the paralegals financially, including payment for transportation and communication costs. Such assistance will enable them to expand their outreach and provide assistance and advise to the survivors of violence;
- Address in future trainings that economic deprivation cannot be used as a justification for VAW, as some among paralegals expressed such conceptions;
- Design a logbook to be used by all partners and AAA itself to register cases of VAW and to clearly indicate what actions were taken towards assisting the victim. The development of a common format to use in all project sites will make data entry and processing easier with measurable results;
- Organise an exposure visit of paralegals from Bamyan to Herat Province in order to observe and replicate good practices in place there;
- Ensure follow-up of complaints and cases over a period of three months to reinforce the safety and security of women facing violence;
- Put in place avenues for women facing violence to leave their household in emergency cases; and
- Appoint a Legal Officer in Bamyan as a matter of priority in order to provide guidance and technical assistance to the paralegals and ensure bookkeeping of the cases of VAW.

For women socio-economic empowerment:

- Expand assistance to beneficiaries of the Vocational Training programming through help with the packaging, storing, marketing and sales of their products. Such support could be provided as a follow-up to the project and in different phases until the beneficiaries are able to run their business independently and effectively;
- Expand assistance to beneficiaries of the Vocational Training in calculating their production costs and in identifying additional financial resources to increase their production and income generation; and
- Explore possibilities for beneficiaries of the Vocational Training to organise collective production and selling of products, in order to mitigate the challenges of limited availability of livestock and the seasonal production of milk.

For phone banking:

- Ensure that the delivery of phone banking services is based on local needs and accessibility, including network coverage and service providers' availability.

For literacy interventions:

- Continue literacy classes for women, including for women who have already received basic training. This initiative has had an incredible impact on the confidence building and self-esteem of women, many of whom expressed a strong desire to further improve their literacy skills; and
- Reinforce work with communities and provide literacy classes and skills building training for men in target areas as well. This is to avoid future resentment and tension within families, as well as to enable men to better contribute to family income. Such training should include strong components focusing on the rights of women and children.

For collaboration with Government entities:

- Work closely with the Ministry of Haj and Religious Affairs to monitor mosques and Mullahs to avoid the spreading of hatred and discrimination, and to promote women rights and gender equality; and
- Conduct advocacy with the MoJ and urge it to identify paralegals as having a formal role in the community response against VAW; or alternatively to engage the MoLSAMD to recognize paralegals as social workers who are able to intervene in cases of VAW and other family issues.

For effective monitoring and evaluation:

- Continue to monitor the impact of the project in the lives of women in all 123 communities in Herat and Bamyan. Such assessments could be done through regular monitoring, data gathering on cases of VAW, and the response of the community. In the absence of a rigorous monitoring, it is very difficult to assess the success of the project in tackling and mitigating VAW;
- Study further approaches used by male members of the communities in Bamyan in regard to women rights and VAW, in particular from influential bodies such as Ulema Council and CDCs, and draw lessons from why the project was more successful there compared to in Bamyan;
- Continue the training of members of the Male-Ijtema, CDCs, Ulema Council, paralegals and CFs as a reminder and follow-up to past trainings. The trainings should not only focus on women rights issues but also on gender sensitization;
- Monitor sermons of the Mullahs within the communities covered under this project. This is to deal with the allegations from women, and observations made during field visits, that Ulema in Herat are propagating discrimination and hatred towards women and blaming women for initiating violence.

5.1.2 RECOMMENDATIONS TO DONORS

- Continue to support efforts such as AAA's RCV project which takes both a long-term and "bottoms up" approach by actively involving communities. Such projects will have more sustainable impact and will impose responsibility on the members of the communities to tackle women's rights issues;
- Show flexibility in allocation of funding for projects and organizations that are working on issues related to VAW. Implementers should have the freedom to adjust both budget lines and geographical coverage of the project if it needed to maximize impact;
- Support initiatives by NGOs such as AAA who are trying to unite the legal and community response in order to fight VAW in a holistic way, which is vital to fighting VAW at the community-level; and
- As the security situation is deteriorating across Afghanistan, more women face violence due to lack of access to legal aid, the judiciary and other protective mechanisms. Donors should support initiatives such as training of paralegals that are living in the communities and are more accessible and less controversial for survivors of VAW to use.

5.1.3 RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE GOIRA:

- Do more to support local communities, in particular men, to enhance their ability through training to tackle VAW. This should be done through working with the local Shuras, Ulema Councils and other means;
- The Ministry of Haj and Religious Affairs should while providing agendas for Friday prayers for all registered mosques ensure sure that Mullahs appropriately cover the issue of VAW. It should further establish a mechanism to monitor Friday prayer sermons in mosques in order to identify and hold to account any member of Ulema Council or other Mullahs who propagate violence and discrimination, in particular towards women and girls;
- The MoJ should create a mechanism in which they can identify, train and support local and community based paralegals. The role of paralegals should be to advise and support the survivors of VAW and other issues related to women and girls within the community;
- The MoJ should also ensure that informal justice systems are not used to deal with criminal cases, including cases of VAW. This could be monitored through the creation of a monitoring mechanism over the activities of the informal justice systems in Afghanistan;
- Ensure that all laws and policies related to women are implemented throughout the country. This could be done through imposing restrictions on all government institutions that do not implement those laws and policies. Such restriction could be allied with regular monitoring by the Independent Commission for Oversight the Implementation of Constitution.
- Take further steps to remove all barriers to the economic empowerment of women in line with the NAPWA and the National Programme for Economic Empowerment of Women.
- The MoWA should further assist women survivors of domestic and gender-based violence and provide them not only with legal aid but also psychosocial assistance. This could be done through collaborating with the NGOs who are providing psychosocial services to survivors of violence;
- The MoWA, in collaboration with the Ministry of Haj and Religious Affairs, should work to improve the quality of information and awareness of Mullahs and religious scholars in relation to women's rights and VAW; and
- The Ministry of Finance, in collaboration with other entities such as MISFA and NATEJA, should increase its support for women's economic empowerment through specific funding of programmes in line with the National Programme for Economic Empowerment of Women.

5.2 CONCLUSION

The project of RCV to fight VAW and gender-based violence by AAA is a successful initiative. It is possible to draw several valuable lessons on best practices. The findings of the study show that different components of the project are interlinked and play a key role in fighting VAW at the community level. The project has contributed to strengthening the communities' own response mechanisms. The components of the project complement each other well, and together ensure an effective response mechanism.

THE CRUCIAL INVOLVEMENT OF MEN:

One notable achievement of the project has been the involvement of men in devising responses to VAW, and to use influential figures such as members of the Ulema Council, CDC members and Male-ljtema to achieve the project goals. In fact these influential entities formed part of the backbone of the success of the project. The involvement of men could, however, become even more effective through continuous training and awareness raising, coupled with rigorous monitoring mechanisms over the involvement of the above-mentioned bodies and their response to VAW. Such training and monitoring is necessary in order to prevent the re-victimization of women who are survivors of VAW, to make sure that they have been given the right advise, and that their cases were solved with the best interest of the women at heart.

The evidence in this report shows that male members of the community, in particular the ones with already influential positions within the community, can play a very useful role in fighting VAW, raising awareness and to deliver just decisions in community dispute resolution processes.

The support of the male members of the community, like all other aspects of this project, is individually driven and it is very important that the men who are part of this project are well informed and gender sensitised. The findings of the report show that Mullahs, particularly in Herat, continue to hold more conservative views towards women's issues, compared to Mullahs in Bamyan.

Members of the CDCs and Male-ljtema in both provinces were helpful not only in tackling the cases of VAW, but also in promoting women's rights within the cultural context of their community or village. Their involvement in the project has been crucial, a fact that was highlighted many times by women interviewed for this study.

THE IMPORTANT ROLE OF PARALEGALS:

Paralegals are another strong components in dealing with cases of VAW in Herat. In Bamyan, however, the paralegal system was not functioning properly, partly due to problems within both the AAA office and its partners, and partly because of a lack of initiative among the Bamyan paralegals themselves.

Since the project started in Bamyan in January 2017, the AAA and its partners have not hired a Legal Officer, which appear to be essential in ensuring the well functioning of the paralegals. Two paralegals in Bamyan said that even when they tried to identify cases of VAW and needed some guidance and support on legal advice and referral, no one in AAA knew what to do and how to guide them because none of the staff working in AAA office in the province are legal expert.

Legal Officers in Herat are providing constant mentoring, monitoring, guidance and supervision over the activities of the paralegals and this has led to better results in serving the women survivors of violence. In the absence of an assigned individual who can initiate, support and guide paralegals in Bamyan it seems unrealistic to expect them to operate by themselves without knowing who to report, who will follow up the cases or provide legal advice to the victim. Furthermore, paralegals in both Bamyan and Herat were asking for a form of official Identification Card to show who they are, where they work and how they are allowed to intervene in VAW cases. Without such an official identification they are no different from any other ordinary citizen and people would contest their authority and legitimacy in intervening in VAW or family matters.

Paralegals in Herat play a vital role in providing guidance and advise to survivors of VAW, collaborating with the CDCs and Ulema Council, and in severe cases in referring survivors to the formal justice system. While some of the paralegals continued to espouse a more traditional way of dealing with cases of VAW by encouraging women to "be patient" (an approach that puts a lot of burden on the survivor), this could be mitigated with further trainings on VAW, and awareness raisings on gender equities.

Paralegals must also have a way of operating officially within Herat and Bamyan to legitimize their activities within the community. This could be done either through negotiations and lobbying with the MoJ, or they could be identified as social workers under the MoLSAMD. They also need financial support for transportation and communication costs in order to enable them to both identify and follow-up on cases of VAW.

THE POSITIVE IMPACT OF THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN:

The economic empowerment of women has been one of the central components, which has strengthened women's economic independence while also improving their role in decision making within families. Beneficiaries of the project, however, highlight some key challenges. These included a lack of financial resources to purchase raw material or to strengthen their businesses, as well as a need for further skills development in negotiation, bargaining and marketing. There was, however, clear evidence that women are using their new skills to the extent possible, to gain financial independence and contribute to the family economy.

In both provinces a lack of financial resources and economic means meant a potential increase in violence within the family, in particular when the male heads of household are not able to provide for their families. Access to financial resources and economic empowerment of women were identified as two of the ways to mitigate or reduce violence within the families, in particular violence as a result of disputes about the family's financial situation.

Reflect Circles and literacy classes were a success in both provinces, as they not only enabled women to become literate but also helped create a network of support and a circle of sisterhood. The literacy classes enabled women to deal with problems in their daily lives, which they had not been able to handle before as illiterates. Women said that they are now able to read their children's vaccination cards, invitation cards, inserting the telephone credit cards, writing names and reading caller names on their mobile phones, finding their ways around within government departments or in the hospitals. In Herat, literacy classes also became a forum where cases of VAW could be identified and reported to the paralegals, who then assist women survivors in making informed decisions on how they want to deal with their situation.

The literacy classes also became an important complement to the Vocational Training of the beneficiaries. Women are now able to count, understand basic accounting, including tracking their expenses and incomes, and calculating profits. Literacy classes also made it easier for women to learn quicker how to use the M-Paisa application and Community Saving Bank approaches. It was suggested by women that AAA should continue the literacy classes on a higher level so they can further improve their reading and writing skills; this will also enable those who want to enrol in the formal education system.

Literacy classes have built women's self-confidence and self-esteem to some extent. Many women said the classes had made them believe in their own abilities in a way they were never aware of before. Literacy classes have also been a tool for them to become aware of and understand their own rights and the rights of their children. This has had an impact on the behaviour of parents in not using violence against their own children. Furthermore, the literacy classes also helped women to understand and read training material provided through Vocational Training classes, which helped improve production of their produce.

However, AAA chose to provide Vocational Training to only 15 out of 20-25 women in each Reflect Circles. This situation has created some tensions within the communities, as women who were not selected for such training did not know why they were not chosen and felt a sense of resentment. These women expressed hope that they would be able to benefit from future programs to learn new skills.

ANNEXES

ANNEX 1: MAP OF AFGHANISTAN



ANNEX 2: OVERVIEW OF LAWS AND POLICIES PROVIDING SPECIFIC PROTECTION FOR WOMEN AND GIRLS

Treaty/Law/Policy	Year
Convention of the Child Rights	1994
Conventions on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)	2003
Optional Protocol to CEDAW	2003
The Constitution of Afghanistan	2004
National Action Plan for the Women of Afghanistan (NAPWA)	2007
National Justice Sector Strategy	2008
Afghan National Development Strategy (ANDS)	2008
Shia Personal Family Law	2009
National Law for the Rights and Privileges of persons with Disability	2009
Elimination of Violence Against Women (EVAW)	2010
Afghanistan Action Plan on UNSCR 1325 women, Peace, Security	2015
Anti-Harassment Act against Women and Children	2016

ANNEX 3: ESTIMATED POPULATION OF BAMYAN PROVINCE BY CIVIL DIVISION, URBAN, RURAL AND GENDER 2017-2018⁵⁶

No	Civil Division	Rural			Urban			Total
		Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	
Total		220134	228486	448620	6860	6664	13524	462144
1	Bamyan Centre	37270	37480	448620	6860	6664	13524	88274
2	Shiber	14928	16187	31115	—	—	—	31115
3	Shaighan	12339	12949	25288	—	—	—	25288
4	Kahmard	18631	19673	38304	—	—	—	38304
5	Yakawlang	31589	32623	64212	—	—	—	64212
6	Panjabd	35415	36483	71898	—	—	—	71898
7	Waras	56390	58647	115037	—	—	—	115037
8	Yakawland No 2	13572	14444	28016	—	—	—	28016

ANNEX 4: ESTIMATED POPULATION OF HERAT PROVINCE BY CIVIL DIVISION, URBAN, RURAL AND GENDER RATIO 2017-2018.⁵⁷

No	Civil Division	Rural			Urban			Total
		Female	Male	Total	Female	Male	Total	
1	Province Center (Herat)	-	-		253052	253844	506896	506896
2	Enjil	126229	131737	257966	—	—	—	257966
3	Guzera (Nizam-i-Shahid)	76011	78818	154829	—	—	—	154829
4	Karrukh	29739	30507	60246	3567	3736	7303	67549
5	Zendahjan	29864	30382	60246	—	—	—	60246
6	Pashtun Zarghun	51575	54165	105740	—	—	—	105740
7	Kushk (Rubat-i-Sangi)	55898	57776	113674	9192	8930	18122	131796
8	Gulran	49363	49931	99294	—	—	—	99294
9	Adraskan	28013	28638	56651	—	—	—	56651
10	Kushk-i-Kuhna	23692	24530	48222	—	—	—	48222
11	Ghoryan	28381	29261	57642	18248	18539	36787	94429
12	Obe	37264	38973	76237	1920	1867	3787	80024
13	Kohsan	28508	28887	57395	—	—	—	57395
14	Shindand	19492	19926	39418	2607	—	5410	44828
15	Fersi	15544	16810	32354	253052	—	—	32354
16	Chishti Sharif	12215	12825	25040	—	—	—	25040
17	erko	24799	25323	50122	—	—	—	50122
18	Poshtko	16527	16877	33404	—	—	—	33404
19	Kozeor	6098	6227	12325	—	—	—	12325
20	Zawol	23783	24287	48070	—	—	—	48070

⁵⁶ Central Statistics Organization of Afghanistan, accessible via: <http://cso.gov.af/en/page/demography-and-socile-statistics/demograph-statistics/3897111> (Accessed 12 July, 2018). The table has been modified to fit in the page of this report.

⁵⁷ Op.cit.

ANNEX 5: EVALUATION QUESTIONNAIRE

Questionnaire to the beneficiaries

Focus group discussions questions from beneficiaries

- 1- What are the jobs and responsibilities of Community Development (CDC) members?
- 2- What are the jobs and responsibilities of Ulema Council within the community?
- 3- What are the jobs and responsibilities of Para-legal advisors?
- 4- What is the role of Male Ijtema members within the community?
- 5- What sorts of cases are the members of the CDCs, Ulema Council and Male Ijtema, para-legals are dealing within the communities?
- 6- How do you all collaborate with each other? How often do you meet and who participates in your meetings? Is participation by invitation or it is open for everyone?
- 7- What role women play within the CDCs ? Are the women participating in the community meetings?
- 8- Did you receive any training from AAA or its partner (name of the partner applicable to the district) if yes on what topic and theme and how do you assess the benefit of the training?
- 9- Did the training have any impact on the way you are dealing with the cases of VAW or in your behaviour within the family or community?
- 10- Are you aware of the programmes (vocational Training and literacy) for women in your community? How do you see them?
- 11- Do you see any changes within the community specially in regard to violence against women after you and other members of the community (Reflect Circles) have received? Are they good or bad changes and why?
- 12- What do you do in a case of domestic violence or child and forced marriage and what are the process you go through in order to resolve it?
- 13- How the cases are referred to you and who is calling upon you for help? Is this the victim, the family of the victim/ affected or the members of the community?
- 14- What forms of violence occurs in your community?
- 15- How do you categorise the VAW, a civil or criminal case and why?
- 16- What are the main reason/s behind violence among the families, including child and forced marriages?
- 17- What is the situation of women household head widows and separated women, economically and socially?
- 18- How many cases of violence do you deal on monthly bases?
- 19- What are the more common form of violence here?
- 20- Who are more at risk of violence in your community? Women, children, disabled, IDPs, widows, orphans or anyone else and why?
- 21- What do you do in a situation when a case of VAW is not able to solve through community mediation?
- 22- Have there been any programme within your district to help people with their economic empowerment issues?
- 23- Is drug an issue in your district? If yes how big is it and who is affected most?
- 24- Is immigration an issue within your district? This will include the people who leave the district, people who come from other districts/ provinces to live here or people who repatriate from other counties?
- 25- Did you benefit from the programmes of XXXX within your district and which programmes you benefit the most?
- 26- What is your recommendations for betterment and improvement of AAA/ Partner programmes in this district?

Individual interviews

Name, age, gender, district or village, marital status, occupation, association with this project

- 1- How long have you been associated with AAA project and in what capacity/ category? (RC, Literacy, VT, SG, M-Paisa, Paralegal, CDC, Male-Ijtama, Ulema Council, CF)
- 2- How do you assess the implementation of this project in your area, has the project had any impact on deduction of VAW? If yes how and if not why?
- 3- What component of this project is more successful from your view point and why? (RC, Literacy, VT, SG, M-Paisa, Paralegals, Male Ijtama, CDC, Ulema Council, CF).
- 4- Which component of this project from your view point is more effective in tackling VAW and how?
- 5- Which component of this project is more successful and satisfactory compare to others in your view point?
- 6- How often do you meet and discuss your issues with other members of the community in context of this project? (Issues related to Literacy, VT, SG, M-Paisa, VAW and other issues?)
- 7- Has there been any changes in economic condition of women as a result of this project? Good or bad?
- 8- How is the participation of women in family/ community decision making? Do you see any change, progress or staggering or the same?
- 9- Who participate in such meetings and discussions within your community and who is taking charge of resolving the issues? Do you participate and how?
- 10- What forms of violence against women is more common in your community and who are the perpetrators?
- 11- How a case of VAW is referred for a community and who (CDC, Male-Ijtama, Ulema, Paralegals or someone else)? Who participates gender of the participants, is everyone including the affected person involved in the discussion and decision making?
- 12- Who are the main decision makers in your community? Are women involved in community decision making and at what level?
- 13- What happens if the community doesn't want to help a woman victim of VAW? Who does she turn to and why?
- 14- What happens if one of the parties to a VAW case is not satisfied from the decision of the community? Who he/ she turns to?
- 15- Are there any specific category of women and girls who are most vulnerable to VAW? Widows, separated, orphans, disabled, IDPs etc?
- 16- Are there any specific category of men who are more violent towards women and girls compare to others in your community? (Poor, rich, educated, health/ disability, immigration/ displacement, drugs, social and economic condition, age)
- 17- How often cases of VAW occurs in your community and how do you know it?
- 18- Are the women and girls victims of VAW are able to report it? If yes to whom?
- 19- Is there any reduction or increase in cases of VAW since the project started?
- 20- Do you have any mechanism of book-keeping or registration or record of cases VAW? If yes who keeps it.
- 21- Who is the most influential person in your community who have the power to stand against VAW and if he/ she is part of this initiative?

- 22- What was about this project that you like the most and why?
- 23- What was about this project that you don't like or do not approve and why?
- 24- What could be done differently and how?

Annex 6: Questionnaire to Action Aid Afghanistan and its partners

Project designing:

1. Were the project outcomes and activities in this project are relevant to the needs and context as they evolved?
2. To what extent did the project achieve to tackle VAW in this context?
3. How participatory were the various aspects of the project? (e.g. – to what extent were beneficiaries and communities involved in design, implementation, and monitoring of activities and outcomes?)
4. To what extent did the key contextual changes, threats and opportunities that arose during implementation influence and inform project implementation changes from one year to the next?
5. How appropriate or necessary were the changes proposed during the project implementation?
6. Have there been any internal evaluation of the project by AAA or its partners? If yes, how often and what methodologies used and what were the outcome of those evaluations?

Efficiency:

7. Was the project implementation using resources in an efficient way?
8. Were networks with relevant stakeholders (government, CSOs, CDCs and communities) established and were synergies with other actors functioning?
9. Were lessons learned and built upon by AAA and its partners from year to year in order to improve efficiency as the project progressed?
10. What could future projects do to increasingly develop and invest in existing resources?
11. How was working with local partners? Have the staff of the partners who are at the heart of the implementation of the project were involved in design of the project? If not, who was involved?

Effectiveness:

12. Were results achieved as set in the planning?
13. Were the activities carried out in line with the original plans? If not, were the changes adequately discussed, documented, and implemented? Which adaptations might have increased the effectiveness of the implemented activities?
14. Were activities conducted along professional quality standards?
15. How effective were the project activities in reaching the women who are at risk of VAW (Target areas and beneficiary selection / outreach by project activities)
16. How inclusive and culturally sensitive were the activities carried out in terms of approach, quality of participation, and information sharing?
17. How the pull and push factors were identified within the communities in this project and how it was tackled?

Impact:

18. Is the do no harm principle being applied and plausibly put into practice (or are there signs of harm being done by the intervention)?
19. To what extent has the project contributed to the resilience and protection of the targeted and affected population and contributed to a reduction of VAW?

20. Did the project have any indirect or unintended effects with regard to protection, for example for the protection of Women and girls IDPs/ returnees or community members who are not direct beneficiaries of the project?
21. What may be said about the sustainability of the project or its activities (in particular the capacity building of local actors)?
22. What could be done differently if the project is extended?
23. How do you rate the success of this project and why?