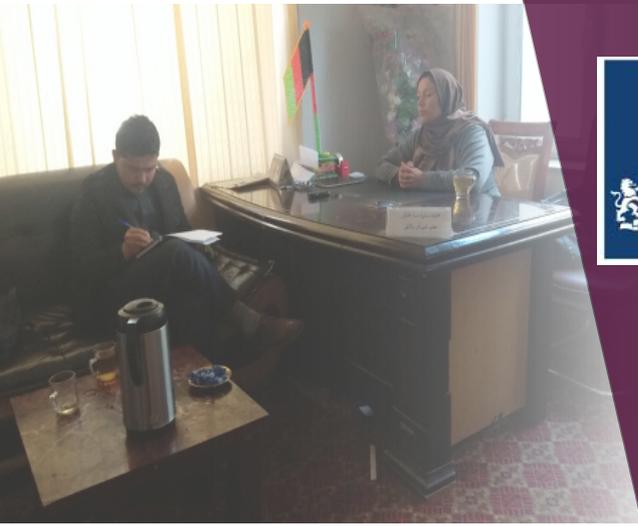


PWN Monitoring & Evaluation Report: Round V

August 2018



Kingdom of the Netherlands



Cordaid
BUILDING FLOURISHING COMMUNITIES

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EPD | EQUALITY
for Peace and
Democracy

Abbreviations & Terminology

Abbreviation

ANP	Afghan National Police
IARCSC	Independent Administrative Reform and Civil Service Commission
KII	Key Informant Interview
GIRoA	Government of Islamic Republic of Afghanistan
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
NAP	National Action Plan
PWN	Provincial Women Network
SCA	The Swedish Committee for Afghanistan

Terminology

ANP	Afghan National Police
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Vision

Afghanistan is a peaceful, prosperous and democratic state, where all Afghans enjoy equal rights without any form of discrimination.

EPD's mission is to empower and strengthen women and youth at the community and policy levels for building coalitions and networks and promoting human rights, peace and good governance. EPD focuses on the following three strategic areas:

Mission

Peace and Security: EPD works to empower and encourage the people of Afghanistan, particularly women and youth, to participate and engage in peace building, conflict prevention, conflict resolution, and mediation at both the national and grassroots levels.

Good Governance: In contributing towards improved governance, EPD aims to increase the transparency and accountability of public institutions for public resources and policies. EPD empowers communities by training and engaging them in the process of budget planning and execution and monitoring public service delivery and implementation of development projects to keep government institutions accountable for quality of their services.

Human Rights: Peace and good governance are critical to ensuring respect for human rights. EPD takes a rights-based approach to developing and implementing programs that empower all people of Afghanistan to know and exercise their rights as Afghan citizens regardless of age, ethnicity, gender, or other factors. EPD believes that women's rights are human rights, and empowering Afghan women is a key component of EPD's mission.

Approach

EPD employs an inclusive approach in its peace building, good governance, and human rights efforts. EPD mobilizes communities at the grassroots level, initiates advocacy initiatives, and build platforms where the public can come together and demand transparency and accountability, and better service delivery from the government. EPD proudly maintains itself not only as women and youth focused but also a women and youth led organization, requiring at least 50% of its staff to be women and 60% youth. EPD also maintains an all-women leadership structure. However, rather than focusing exclusively on women's issues, EPD is working in areas such as the peace process, elections, or anti-corruption issues with special attention to the needs and perspectives of women and youth.

Acknowledgment:

EPD would first and foremost like to thank the Kingdom of the Netherlands Embassy in Afghanistan for its generous support in funding the Monitoring Women's Peace and Security (MWPS) project. We also acknowledge our data collection team, whose interviews in the field enabled us to analyze the impact of the Provincial Women's Network (PWN) advocacies. The team members are (in alphabetical order): Kamaludin Wafa, Khan Zaman Modabbir and Maseehullah Farahmand. EPD would further like to express its sincere gratitude to all who offered their time and perspectives for this round of monitoring and evaluation, including the governmental and non-governmental stakeholders, elders, community members and project beneficiaries involved in this study.

This report has been prepared by (in alphabetical order) Farzana Doosti, Madina Sahar Nazari and Michelle Tolson.



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I. Introduction

On October 31, 2000, the United Nation Security Council (UNSC) adopted resolution 1325 on women, peace and security. The resolution emphasizes women's inclusive participation in peace processes and the prevention of violence against them. In 2015 Afghanistan made a commitment towards the implementation of this resolution and the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (GiRoA) prepared the 2015 – 2022 National Action Plan (NAP 1325), of which key ministries and stakeholders committed to contribute to its implementation. Civil society is an implementation partner for this plan as well.

With the goal to provide support in achieving the objectives of the UNSC 1325 and the NAP, Cordaid, Afghanistan Public Policy Research Organization (APPRO) and Equality for Peace and Democracy (EPD) with the financial support of the Embassy of the Netherlands in Afghanistan, launched the project Monitoring Women's Peace and Security (MWPS). The project has worked to create an enabling environment to foster women's political participation in peace process, to reduce violence against women and to improve gender-sensitivity in the security sector. The partner organizations in this project have utilized three main interventions to meet the goals of a) understanding local women's realities, b) in-depth research on key-issues identified by women, and c) advocacy for policy changes based on evidence-based recommendations.

Following the intervention, with support of the Provincial Women Network (PWN) in 15 provinces in Afghanistan, APPRO and Cordaid conducted comprehensive research on the impact of the intervention. The project utilized a Barometer as a tool for women's security, designed using a participatory approach to engage vulnerable women in identifying and communicating their needs and to empower them to engage with relevant stakeholders to design and implement solutions. However, the Barometer was conceived as not only a tool, but also a secure online database with real-time indicators formulated by women that monitor and report their needs and track this progress.

Cordaid conducted three rounds of Barometer research, identifying women's concerns at the grass-root level. Simultaneously, APPRO conducted two research studies to document the project's impact for its annual reports and five case studies which aimed to analyze issues that threaten women's local peace and security. For its part, EPD developed its network of women, the PWN, who used advocacy strategies to address the problems identified in the research. In this way, the outcomes of the barometer were used to identify areas that were integrated into advocacy activities at local levels to generate policy change, improved representation and greater accountability for the security of women and their communities.

This study represents the fifth round of monitoring and evaluation (M&E) in the 15 provinces covered under the PWN's coverage area: Kabul, Parwan, Bamyán, Daikundi, Helmand, Kandahar, Uruzgan, Paktia, Nangarhar, Laghman, Kunduz, Badakhshan, Balkh, Faryab and Herat provinces. This report measures the impacts and changes that the PWN advocacies brought in communities in support of UNSCR 1325 resolution's four main pillars: 1) Prevention of violence and conflict against women and girls, including sexual and gender-based violence, 2) Participation and the inclusion of women and girls in decision-making in conflicts, 3) Protection of women and girls' safety, physical and mental health and economic security, and 4) Relief and recovery for women and girls' specific needs.

II. Methodology

For this round of M&E, EPD analyzed the project for the result of the PWNs implementation of the advocacy strategies designed in alignment with UNSCR 1325 resolution's objectives and the APPRO and Cordaid's research recommendations. These recommendations were designed to alleviate violence against women, the weak representation of women in public civil service, high rates of illiteracy among women, sexual harassment of women in the police sector and the financial problems of female Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs).

In line with the advocacy strategies, the research team aimed to meet and elicit information from the key stakeholders engaged in the process, including the beneficiaries supported by the network who sought to bring positive changes to their lives. The respondents for each province ranged from governmental and non-governmental authorities to vulnerable women, including the Departments of Haj and Religious Affairs, Women Affairs, Refugees and Repatriation, IDP and police women. For each advocacy, the research team prepared a unique set of questionnaires to measure outputs and outcomes.

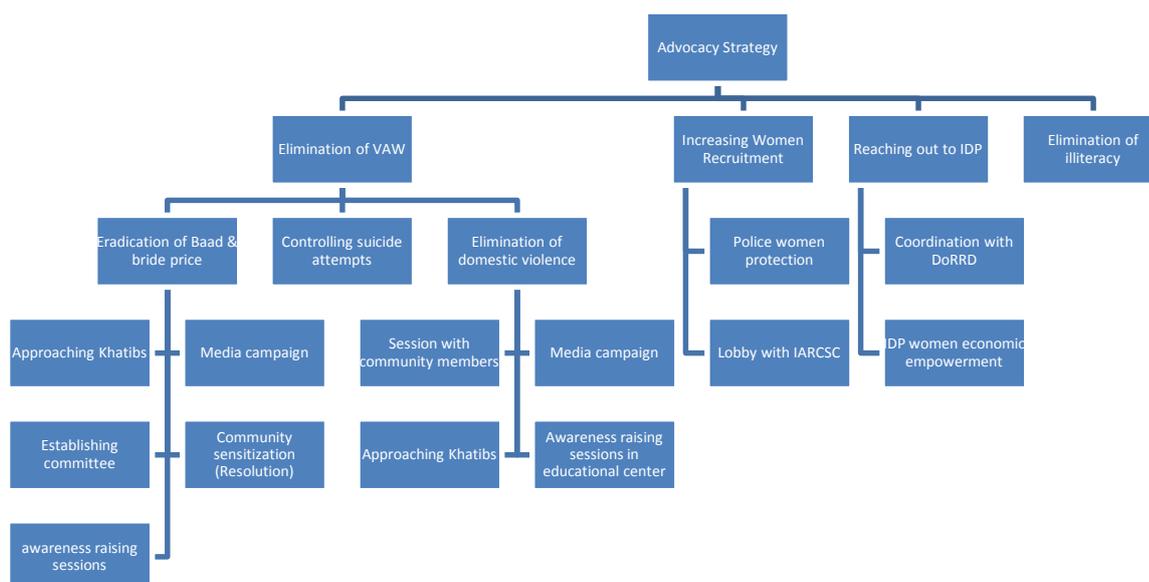
Due to the nature of the research design and concerns about the limited time, for this round of monitoring and evaluation, a purposive sampling was used for data collection. Overall, 212 interviews were conducted in the field, including 122 with key informant respondents and 75 PWN members in 15 provinces. The field visits were conducted in the 15 provinces from February to March, 2018.¹ Both qualitative and quantitative data was collected, and all the interviews were recorded, transcribed in local languages and analyzed and translated to English.

III. Advocacy strategy

Strengthening the influence of local people - especially women and women’s groups - in political processes in Afghanistan is a pre-condition for inclusive policies, social justice and democratic governance. Utilizing Cordaid’s and APPRO’s comprehensive research, EPD prepared 15 advocacy strategies to support vulnerable women in identifying and communicating their needs and empowering them to engage with relevant stakeholders to design and implement solutions.

The research identified different problems in each province followed by different recommendations. Considering the available budget and time, each PWN tried to address the recommendations and EPD supported them in developing advocacy strategies.

The following chart provides details of some of the identified problems and the approaches that the networks undertook to solve them.



1 Data collection was conducted in Kabul province from 18-03-18 to 20-03-18; Parwan from 18-03-18 to 20-03-18; Balkh 18-02-18 to 20-02-18; Nangarhar from 18-02-18 to 22-02-18; Daikundi from 02-03-18 to 06-03-18; Bamyán from 26-02-2018 to 01-03-18; Uruzgan 26-02-18 to 02-03-18; Helmand from 22-02-18 to 25-02-18; Badakhshan Kunduz from 04-03-18 to 10-03-18; Herat from 12-03-18 to 16-03-18; Paktia from 11-02-18 to 15-02-18; Faryab from 21-02-18 to 24-02-18; Laghman from 18-02-18 to 22-02-18; and Kandahar from 19-02-18 to 21-02-18.

IV. Key Findings

A. Violence against women

The impact assessment research revealed that violence against women, despite targeted efforts, remains still a major issue for women in Afghanistan, with the severity and nature of the problem varying from province to province. After reviewing the barometer report, APPRO's annual reports and consulting with EPDs provincial coordinators, analysis showed violence against women takes different shapes based on various cultural norms and situations that victims encounter, including but not limited to, the harassment of women at the workplace,² a *lack of female representation in governmental entities (particularly subnational branches)*, *harassment of policewoman at the workplace*, *domestic violence against women and the challenges internally displaced person (IDP) females experience*. Regarding domestic violence against women (VAW) in Paktia province, a lack of awareness was identified as the main barrier to its reduction and elimination. The barometer analysis of Kabul province reported both street and workplace harassment as the main concerns.

Bride price

In the Afghan culture, providing gifts for the bride's family is an important part of marriage ceremonies. One of the most controversial aspects of that is the tradition of making a payment to the girl's family as a bride price. Most families practice this tradition through their own will and consent; however, problems arise when the amount is excessive to what is considered the norm. In provinces like Paktia, Kandahar and Helmand, where traditional customs are strictly observed, it would be very difficult to disregard the bride price. Consequently, grooms without such payment cannot marry their intended brides.

The concept of bride price has been misinterpreted and usually is perceived as equal to *Mahr*. On the contrary, in Islamic *Fiqh*,³ the concept of bride price has no place but rather Islam stresses the importance of *Mahr* which is intended to be paid to only the bride herself, and not to her family.⁴ Moreover, article 14 of Afghan law on marriage has banned paying a bride price to the bride's family or her relatives.⁵ In spite of its prohibition, people still practice it, which has been linked to severe cases of domestic violence. Many girls flee their homes, family disputes arise and at times engagements dissolve.⁶ The misuse of *Mahr* has hurt families financially, and in a roundabout way, has increased the level of crime as grooms face difficulties earning sufficient money to pay the high bride price amount, causing them to either go abroad for work to make money or to succumb to crime.⁷

According to annual reports published by APPRO in 2016 and 2017, *Baad*, the taking of a young girl from one family to live as a slave for another family in order to settle disputes, is a common type of violence which can threaten girls' lives in southern provinces, particularly Helmand, Paktia and Uruzgan. A high dowry was also linked to a severe type of violence in Paktia (APPRO, 2016) (APPRO, 2017).⁸ However, during the interviews with the research stakeholders

2 In Kabul province, street harassment of women to and from work (which police denied) was reported as a major concern, while in Daikundi province physical and domestic violence were a concern. In Bamyan, this violence was linked to suicide, through a suicide awareness campaign (in that women seek suicide as recourse after experiencing violence).

3 Islamic law.

4 Atekyereza, Peter. (2001). "Bride Wealth in Uganda: A Reality of Contradictions." The Uganda Society. Volume 47(. 49-66. 10.4314/uj.v47i1.23052).

5 Ministry of Justice. (1971). "Law on Marriage." - 1971 - Official Gazette No. 190 Retrieved from <http://www.asianlii.org/af/legis/laws/lom1971ogn190p1971080813500517a383/>

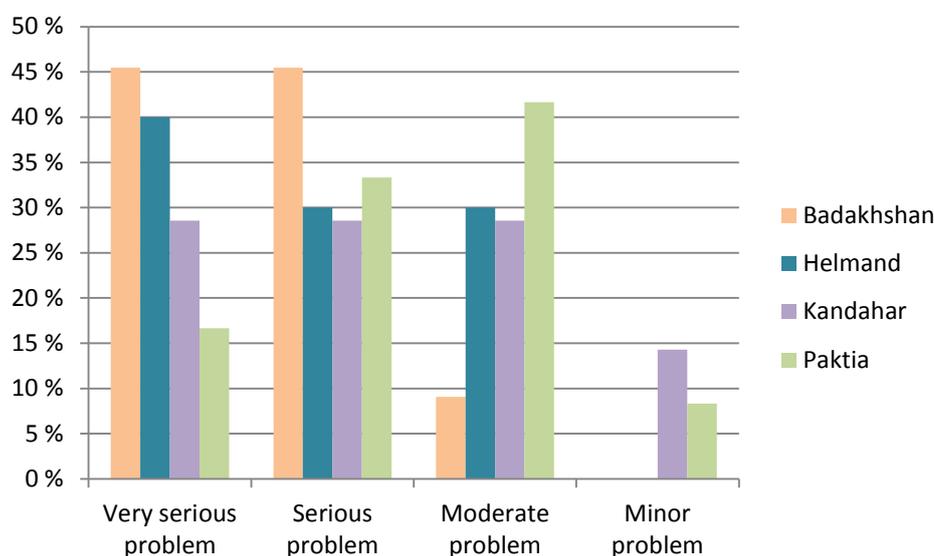
6 Interview with the coordinators of Paktia and Kandahar

7 Ibid and also Afghan Analysts Network. (25 October 2016). "The Bride Price: The Afghan tradition of paying for wives." Retrieved from: <https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/the-bride-price-the-afghan-tradition-of-paying-for-wives/>

8 Afghan Public Policy Research Organization. (2016). "Localization of Nap 1325: A 15 province-Status report.", p61.

in Paktia (mid-February 2018), respondents emphasized that Baad has almost been eliminated in the province. Respondents noted that fortunately, after extensive public awareness campaigns conducted with support of religious leaders and civil society, including Paktia’s Provincial Women’s Network (PWN), this harmful custom is not practiced anymore.⁹ Now the local Jirgas’ verdicts determine an amount of property to be paid to the affected family instead of using the lives of young girls to settle disputes. On the other side of the situation, the respondents also stated that the rates of the bride price have been reduced significantly. However, they confirmed that the custom is still being practiced with demands for high amounts in rare instances in villages and rural areas in this province.¹⁰

The following bar chart rates the severity of the impact of extravagant wedding party expenses including the costs of the bride price from the perspectives of the key informant interviewees (KII) who participated in this study in Badakhshan, Helmand, Kandahar and Paktia provinces. The majority of the interviewees indicated that such high expenses can be very serious or are serious obstacles, which can increase domestic violence in families. In contrast, the interviewees in Badakhshan were more concerned that the issue significantly threatens women’s local peace and security. In the case of Paktia, as it was mentioned before, respondents believed that it has been a critical problem in the past few years, but now due to awareness raising and advocacies, people especially in the center of the province have been tending to decrease the costs of wedding parties. This shows that to some extent the advocacy strategy supported by religious and influential elders could indeed successfully contribute in bringing changes and support to women’s social well-being in this province.



B. Elimination of violence against women

a) Eradication of harmful customs (Baad and bride price)

The PWN in Paktia, Badakhshan, Helmand and Kandahar all reported that a lack of awareness was the main reasoning behind the continued practices of baad and extravagant bride prices, which are considered harmful customs and especially threatening to women’s local peace and security.¹¹ During the network’s advocacy in Badakhshan, a university lecturer said:

Afghan Public Policy Research Organization. (2017). “Localization of Nap 1325: A 15 province-Status report.”, p48

9 Pak 01, 06, 07, 08, 09, and 12

10 Pak 01, 02, 03, 04, 06, 08, 10, 11, 12

11 Coordination meeting with the Provincial Women Network coordinators and members-August 2017

“Lack of public awareness on Islamic laws and women rights has increased domestic violence. I am from Dareem district, where normal rate of the bride price is around AFN 150,000. Such expenses are truly significant hinderances for youth’s marriage.”¹²

Based on the situations in the different provinces, the network incorporated a variety of approaches to raise awareness, such as communicating with Khatibs (religious leaders) and Ulema Councils to introduce religious sermons on the topics and sessions with community members, sessions in schools and universities, and radio discussions and public campaigns. During the meeting with the PWNs to prepare the advocacy strategies, there was a general consensus among the networks that communities were highly influenced by religious and tribal elders. Because of this factor, the networks agreed that approaching them for awareness raising would be an effective way to change entrenched mindsets.¹³

Following section details the PWN’s initiatives to eradicate Baad and bride price, considered among the main triggers of violence against women.

i. Approaching Khatibs to eliminate Baad and bride price

The women’s networks in Paktia, Badakhshan, Helmand and Kandahar provinces have worked to raise awareness on the harm these practices cause through traditional channels, such as Khatibs (religious elders, also known as Imams) and community elders who have significant influence over the community’s beliefs and norms. The PWNs in the four targeted provinces approached the Department of Hajj and Religious Affairs to lobby for awareness raising on the “consequences of extravagant wedding parties and its prohibition in Islam” in the Friday sermons. The Department in all the targeted provinces were receptive and welcomed the initiative, instructing Khatibs in charge to include the initiative in the sermons.

The Badakhshan PWN had targeted five mosques in their advocacy strategy, however with support of the Department they were able to cover a higher number of mosques, including Fazelbigi, Gheyasi, Devanbegi, Sar Kheyaban, Sar Bazar, Itefaq and Batash central mosques. During the PWN’s advocacy campaign, the Khatibs introduced the topic an average four times per mosque.¹⁴

Similarly, the Department of Haj and Religious Affairs in Kandahar and Helmand instructed Khatibs to raise awareness on negative impact of extravagant expenses of the marriage ceremonies and other indecent customs like Baad, forced marriage and the marriage of underage girls.¹⁵ During the interview in Kandahar, the Department of Haj representative said:

“We have raised awareness on the prohibition of extravagant wedding ceremonies. The awareness raising was conducted in many mosques, for example Haj Qutbudin, Sarwar-e-Kaenat and Imam Zaman. I myself preached in Shuhada Mosque.”¹⁶

In Helmand, the Ulema Council and Haj and Religious Affairs Department joined their support of the awareness campaigns. The network had lobbied with both organizations and successfully convinced them that the issue constituted a major threat and obstacle for the community, which increased violence against women. The Department of Haj and Religious Affairs in Helmand confirmed that the network communicated and coordinated with them several times. Additionally, they pointed out that the network facilitated a coordination advocacy meeting with the Department’s participation along with the Ulema Council, the Governor’s Office, Provincial Council, Department of Women Affairs and media, highlighting this cooperation and resulting in a joint action plan targeting extensive awareness raising through the Khatibs. The Department instructed the Khatibs to conduct sermons in 20 mosques in the center of the Helmand province.¹⁷

12 Khudad, University lecturer at Education Faculty, Badakhshan University.

13 Quarterly coordination meeting with the Provincial Women Network coordinators and members-August 2017

14 Interview with the Department of Haj and Religious Affairs in Badakhshan – Bdkhsh 01

15 Helm 06, 01, 02, 03, 09 and Kan 06, 04, 07, 08,

16 Kan 06

17 Helm 06

ii. Media campaigns

The Network in Helmand coordinated with the Department of Haj and Religious Affairs to facilitate a live radio discussion to answer people's questions regarding Mahr and bride price and to raise awareness on the issue.¹⁸ Radio Zhwandon, which has extensive coverage in the Helmand area and broadcasts its program almost in all of the districts, was selected for this program.¹⁹

Badakhshan's PWN also utilized media in their campaign to ban extravagant expenses for wedding parties. Fortunately, some PWN members in this province were journalists and had experience in working with media and could easily access media agencies. The network prepared key messages on the potential harms caused by this indecent custom and encouraged the public to put an end to its practice. The messages were broadcasted through Pamir, Mehr and Mili television stations in Badakhshan. Additionally, the PWN assistant and members conducted several radio interviews and round table discussions on the harmful practice of extremely lavish wedding parties via local radio stations, such as Salam Watandar, Banowan, and Badakhshan.²⁰ Moreover, Ms. Alina Gheyasi, the PWN assistant prepared articles on this topic and with the support of the Lajward and Seda-e-Haq presses, these were published.²¹ In this regard, a PWN member said:

"Most of the PWN members are journalists and usually broadcast messages to solve community problems and raise awareness on related issues. Similarly, for the case of banning extravagant expenses of wedding parties, we conducted radio and TV discussions via various media companies like Pamir TV."²²

iii. Conducting awareness raising sessions

In close coordination with the Department of Women Affairs (DoWA) and the Ulema council (a council of religious elders, such as Khatibs and Imams), the network encouraged community elders to raise the public's awareness on the dire impact of extravagant bride prices in Helmand province. The network believes community elders usually direct customs and traditions within the community, therefore their role is very important in the eradication of indecent and improper customs, such as bride price. The Ulema council usually holds meetings with community elders, which in turn could be a major opportunity to raise awareness. Within this advocacy, the elders in different communities raised awareness through sessions with locals. According to the respondents in Helmand, such sessions with community members were held in Kart-e-Lagan, Chehel Metra, Mukhtar, and the City Center. The respondents believe that these series of awareness raising sessions have helped prepare community members' minds to changing the traditions.²³

In Badakhshan, PWN targeted youth and academia for awareness raising in private and public educational centers, whose mindsets tend to already be more open to accept changes. For this aim, the network coordinated with the Department of Education to conduct awareness raising sessions in institutes and schools. As a result of this work, the network was able to gather around 300 of students and teachers within nine sessions conducted in various educational centers such as Makhfi, Halima Sadia, Almehad 1 & 2, Arman, Pamir, Burna, Tayeb and Lincoln.²⁴ A university lecturer who expressed support for these sessions said:

"The awareness raising sessions could encourage the public to decrease the expenses particularly in 4th district of Faiz Abad (center of Badakhshan province). It is very important to follow up the advocacy and undertake the next steps to spread awareness in the other areas of the province."²⁵

18 Helm 01, 03, 09 and Department of Haj and Religious Affairs in Helmand

19 Helm 03

20 Interview with the Badakhshan Provincial Coordinator and members

21 Interview with the Badakhshan PWN Assistant

22 Bdkhsh-PWN Member-01

23 Helm 05 and 09

24 Interview with the PWN coordinator, assistant and the members also Bdkhsh 03, 04

25 Bdkhsh 08

iv. Community sensitization to eliminate extravagant bride prices

The women's network in Paktia was concerned that awareness raising alone would not be sufficient to put an end to harmful practices.²⁶ Therefore, the PWN decided to use a more effective and powerful approach by mobilizing the community elders, whose voices can have a profound impact and influence over provincial society, thus, altering mindsets and stopping this practice that goes against Islamic law.

Following the advocacy strategy, the Paktia PWN approached the Ulema council²⁷ to call upon influential representatives of different tribes from different districts, including Chamkanai, Ahmadaba, Sayed Karam and Zazai Aryub, to eliminate improper customs. These advocacy efforts were conducted in close coordination with the Department of Women Affairs (DoWA), Paktia Police Headquarters, Provincial Council, Justice Sector and religious and community influential figures. Accordingly, the tribal representatives were counseled, and an initial draft resolution was prepared to ban Baad, exaggerated bride price and the practice of underage marriage of girls – and other harmful customs with which abuse women rights and harm communities' social wellbeing. Subsequently, they shared the resolution with their tribes and within several rounds of meetings, the communities' opinions were incorporated into the resolution. The PWN submitted the final draft to both the Haj and Religious Affairs Department and the Prosecution Office on Elimination of Violence against Women for awareness raising and its enforcement.

These efforts have the potential to successfully reduce bride prices rates from a high level of AFN 800,000²⁸ (\$11,172.41 USD) to an average level of AFN 300,000 (\$4,189.65 USD), and even in some cases as low as AFN 80,000 (\$1,117.24 USD).²⁹

“Previously in Khuja Hassan area of Paktia, the rate of the bride price was very high, but nowadays it has been reduced to AFN 80,000. Of course, the bride's family does not have the right to take the money for themselves, but the amount is determined only to buy gifts for the bride.”³⁰

“The resolution and awareness raising through the religious leaders had very good impact. Before this, normal rate of bride price was AFN 500,000 to 700,000 but now it has been significantly reduced. I know a person in Barka village who has not received any bride price and submitted the total amount of Mehr to her daughter. Another person in Bagh-e-Per in Gardiz has received AFN 200,000 only to buy wedding gifts for her daughter. Similarly, there are many examples of households who are stopping this practice.”³¹

Some of the religious elders who have participated in this study stated that receiving bride price is considered Haram (forbidden) in Islam and should be removed completely.

“As per the Haj and Religious Affairs Department's instruction, we have preached sermons on prohibition of bride price in Islam via many Paktia Mosques such as Umar-e-Faroq, Mohammadi, Quba and Maaz Ibn Jamal Mosques where thousands of people come for offering prayers ... In my view, the network should have totally banned the bride price. It is Haram and should be removed, hence the bride price's deduction amount is not enough.”³²

Cutting down of this amount was not an easy task for the network as within a very short period, they encountered public pressure by changing a notion that had been practiced over past generations. The network believed that more lobbying and advocacy are needed to enforce the resolution and finally eradicate bride price. Currently, the resolution is being implemented by support of the Ulema Shura (also known as council) and tribal elders. Certainly, for providing a stronger legitimacy particularly, for enforcing the fine determined for perpetrators of the resolution violation, the network needs to lobby with a more authoritative entity, such as the Governor Office.

26 Quarterly coordination meeting with the Provincial Women Network coordinators and members-August 2017

27 Scholars

28 At the writing this report the dollar exchange rate for Afghani was \$1=AFN 70.1

29 Pak 03, 04, 07, 08, 12,

30 Pak 03

31 Pak 07

32 Pak 06

The network has already communicated with the Governor Office and fortunately, the office has expressed its support toward the resolution. Nevertheless, it requires time and efforts to share the resolution with this office and its sub-branches (District Governor Offices). Considering limited time and budget, the network could not involve this entity fully for the enforcement of the resolution within this reporting period but they will continue their advocacies to fulfill this objective as well. The network plans to hold a wider conference platform inviting the main stakeholders and involve the Paktia Governor Office to sensitize the public and ensure the implementation of the resolution more strongly throughout Paktia.

v. Establishing a committee to ban extravagant wedding expenses

As illustrated in figure 1, costly wedding parties have been a critical challenge for communities in Badakhshan. In this province, wedding ceremonies traditionally includes more than seven days of celebrating and exchanging expensive gifts between the immediate families and other relatives.³³ Due to this the groom's family often experience considerable challenges in order to afford the prohibitive costs, which can lead to conflict and domestic violence.

However, the PWN believes that besides awareness raising, a more formal intervention is needed to reduce the extravagant custom connected to weddings. To address the issue, the Badakhshan PWN attempted to meet authorities with both the power and influence on society to create a committee to raise awareness and set restrictions on the rates and create punishment for the perpetrators. With Badakhshan's PWN lobby and coordination, finally this committee was established with representatives from the Governor Office, Department of Women's Affairs, Department of Haj and Religious Affairs, Department of Justice, Provincial Council and CSOs on board. The committee members to date have held several meetings and as a result, prepared a resolution to impose limitations on the practice of the bride price payment and the other expensive and unnecessary ceremonies.³⁴ Fortunately, the network attracted not only religious elders' support, but also the Governor Office who declared its support during the advocacy meetings.³⁵ The representative of this office during the interview said:

*"The Provincial Women Network in Badakhshan has conducted extensive programs particularly regarding advocacy for women... They have contacted the Governor Office for creating a committee to restrict over the top expenses of the wedding parties... as representatives of the local government, for implementation of the Governor Office will not hesitate to cooperate."*³⁶

At the time of the data collection in Badakhshan,³⁷ as per the advocacy strategy, the network had successfully coordinated the preparation of the draft resolution with the agreement of the committee members but was waiting for implementation and enforcement of the resolution. The network plans to arrange a big conference to facilitate the interaction between the community members and the authorities. The PWN will also launch the resolution from the Governor Office whose voice can provide more formality and political power. Once the resolution gets finalized in this conference, the network will lobby with the Haj and Religious Affairs to publicize the resolution and raise awareness on the details of its articles.³⁸

b) Elimination of domestic/physical violence and harassment

Women in Afghanistan have always been subjected to violence. Conflict due to three decades of war and the Taliban era only increased their vulnerability and further contributed to acts of violence against women. This issue only becomes more severe for women in areas with an entrenched traditional and patriarchal culture. While it can be said that a great

33 Interview with the Badakhshan PWN coordinator and assistant and also the quarterly coordination meeting with the Provincial Women Network coordinators and members-August 2017

34 Interview with representative of Badakhshan's Governor Office, Bdkhsh 06 also interview with the rest of the involved stakeholders in the advocacy Bdkhsh 05, 07, 08, 10, 11

35 Bdkhsh 06, 08, 10

36 Bdkhsh 06

37 March 2018

38 Interview with the Badakhshan coordinator and interviewees with code : Bdkhsh 05,

deal has changed in the last two decades, the gender inequality has created a wide gap in terms of access to education, job opportunities, health facilities, legal rights etc. These limitations for many women start within their families at early ages. Young girls are forbidden to attend school and their marriages have been arranged, more often than not, without their consent. Gender discrimination and domestic violence usually continues amid the in-laws' house. Women are deprived of access to health care and financial resources, and often play the main role in raising children and being responsible for unpaid labor at home, as well as within agriculture and the livestock sector. Any dissent or resistance from women subjected to such unfair treatment is countered with domestic violence.

The main reason for violence against women and their oppression stems from a lack of awareness amongst men and women. Similarly, the case study conducted by APPRO in Laghman and Bamyān, argues that awareness raising and deterrence by the Justice sector are the two main approaches to eradicate violence against women.³⁹ Wherever women are unaware of their rights, women are more vulnerable and are more likely to be oppressed by their male counterparts. As for men, they perpetuate violence usually due to society's marginalized view of women. Women are perceived as subordinate to men, thus, not entitled to the same level of rights and privileges. Awareness raising within the community, especially in rural areas where a woman's life is more at risk, can change mindsets and improve gender equality.

Considering the limited budget, it was not possible for most of the networks to conduct separate community awareness campaigns or to hold big conferences. A smarter solution as suggested by the Bamyān and Daikundi PWNs was to communicate with the DoWA, which has its own campaign sessions with the public and to ask for a session for the PWN within their events. The networks particularly mentioned the 16 days of activism and women's day as opportunities where the MoWA has extensive programs at the provincial, district and village levels throughout the country.

The networks also agreed that awareness raising on the prohibition of VAW via Khatibs is an effective approach as their advice tends to be well received by the communities hence can bring changes in views toward women. Moreover, Laghman and Badakhshan PWNs cited that awareness raising can reach the maximum public exposure in schools and learning centers especially by involving teachers who can later spread the message among larger groups of students. However, some other PWNs were concerned that MoE has its own limitation and will not grant permission for conducting the sessions.

The following section elaborates further on the different approaches that the networks undertook to eradicate violence against women.

i. Awareness raising sessions in educational centers

As per APPRO's research recommendations,⁴⁰ Laghman's Provincial Women Network suggested that raising awareness on women rights and the prohibition of domestic violence could be very effective to decrease domestic violence cases. In support of this aim, the network prepared an advocacy strategy with the objective to spread awareness in educational institutions such as Teacher Training Centers and schools. The network believes awareness raising among students and teachers can reach a high number of beneficiaries. As it is expected that afterwards, these cohorts will have the knowledge and means to spread the message among other students, their family members and other community members.

APPRO's research study also emphasizes that awareness raising, especially in eastern region of Afghanistan, should include information regarding Elimination of Violence Against Women Law (EWAV Law). Accordingly, the network prepared handouts and other materials pertaining to this law and shared them with the participants during the session in each session. Overall the network conducted several sessions in the center of Laghman (Mehterlam) in Mastora, Qala-e-Shaikhan, Qarghaee, Ali Kheil, Sultan Ghazi Baba, Baba Sahib High Schools and Laghman Public Teacher Training

39 Afghan Public Policy Research Organization. (2017). "Violence Against Women and the Implementation of NAP 1325."

40 Afghan Public Policy Research Organization. (2017). "Violence Against Women and the Implementation of NAP 1325." P. 7

Afghan Public Policy Research Organization (2016) "Localization of Nap 1325: A 15 province-Status report.", p37.

Afghan Public Policy Research Organization (2017) "Localization of Nap 1325: A 15 province-Status report.", p55

Center.⁴¹ The network also has held sessions with women in Alishang and Qarghaee and raised their awareness about their rights and the recently approved Law on Elimination of Violence Against Women.

According to the beneficiaries and stakeholders involved in this campaign in Laghman, the sessions have raised awareness to a high level. However, they added that more awareness raising is needed and stressed that the PWN should not stop the school awareness campaign at this level but continue to extend it to other schools especially, in rural areas.⁴²

ii. Approaching Khatibs to raise awareness

In response to APPRO's research recommendation on involving the religious leaders, or Khatibs, in awareness raising to eliminate violence against women,⁴³ the networks in Laghman, Daikundi and Parwan provinces advocated and lobbied with the Department of Haj and Religious Affairs. As mentioned previously, religious elders are respected among locals and since the communities usually follow the Khatibs' advice, they can have a profound influence over shaping culture and norms. Utilizing this opportunity, the PWNs in Laghman, Daikundi and Parwan adapted their advocacy strategy to raise awareness by approaching the Khatibs.

In Laghman in close coordination with the DoWA, the network asked the Haj and Religious Affairs Department to raise awareness on the prohibition of domestic violence in Islam and to preach on the importance of women rights. In response to that, the Department instructed all of its subordinate Mosques to include the issue in their Friday sermons.⁴⁴ Confirming this activity, the representative of this Department in Laghman explained:

*"Within four weeks, the Khatibs were instructed to raise awareness on women rights and the prohibition of violence against them from the Islamic perspective. We have instructed all the mosques including Bazar, Sultan Ghazi, Ikhlas, Ali Kheil, Sabzi Mandawji, Yunuz Square, Qala-e-Daman and Terqari Central mosques ... Sermons are the most effective awareness raising approach and have changed views toward women and to some extends decreased violence against women in comparison to the past."*⁴⁵

Similarly, the network in Daikundi conducted the same advocacy with the Department of Haj and Religious Affairs and the author agreed to cooperate. As a result, Khatibs preached in their sermons on the issue in 50 mosques, including Imam Sajad mosque in Shahrriстан, Imam Husain mosque in Mirmor district, Wali Asr mosque in Ashterli, Sahib Zaman mosque in Shang Takht, Khatam-ul-Anbia mosque in KiTi district, Imam Zaman mosque in Kajiran district and Hazrat Mohammad in the Center of Nilli. Khatibs specifically raised awareness on EAW law, women rights according to Islamic Fiqh and prohibition of any kind of violence against women.⁴⁶ As the awareness raising was large scale and conducted at a high number of the mosques, therefore it is assumed that must of have had a notable impact in changing public views. A stakeholder who accompanied the network in the advocacy with the Department said:

*"The extensive awareness raising through Khatibs has successfully decreased violence against women in the Center of Daikundi. It is very important to extend the campaign to the rural areas to bring changes."*⁴⁷

The network in Parwan also received support from the Department and following that the Khatibs raised awareness in about 40 mosques, for instance Monjid Mahdia, Hazrat Anas and Sad wa Yak Baba mosques. The Khatibs preached in their sermons on the prohibition of violence against women according to Islam were able to reach a significant number of locals in the center of Parwan.⁴⁸

APPRO's research in 2017 revealed that efforts in Herat were not able to decrease violence against women and still

41 Lghmn 01, 05, 06, 08 and also interview with the coordinator and the PWN members

42 Lghman 01, 04, 05, 08

43 Afghan Public Policy Research Organization. (2017). "Violence Against Women and the Implementation of NAP 1325." P. 56

44 Lghmn 02, 03, 04, 06

45 Lghmn 02

46 DKND 02, 05, 08

47 DKND 02

48 PRWN 01, 02, 03, 04, 05

violence in its different forms continues to threaten women. The study recommended continued awareness raising as a preventive measure should be considered.⁴⁹ However, it is important to note that the PWN advocacy strategy for this province was designed to reach out to a subset of vulnerable women, IDP women, rather than the community in general. However, heeding the study's advice, the network approached the Haj and Religious Affairs Department to have these bodies spread awareness to eradicate violence. As a result, Khatibs in different mosques such as Karkh and Zenda jan raised awareness on the topic of women's role in families and the elimination of violence against women.⁵⁰

iii. Media campaigns

According to the PWN networks in Laghman, Parwan and Daikundi, local radios stations have attracted a significant number of listeners, so the network decided to use media as an effective approach to reach to a high number of community members.

In Parwan, the network coordinated with Shahr ba Shahr and Danish local radio stations to raise awareness. Both the radio stations have allocated sessions for the Khatibs to preach on women rights and the prohibition of (domestic) violence against women. As the broadcast coverage area of both the radio stations is throughout the Center of Parwan (Charikar), it is expected to have contributed locals' mindset change to a significant degree.

As a result of lobbying and conducting advocacy on women rights with the Department of Information and Culture, the network could raise awareness by broadcasting audio messages on women rights and the eradication of violence against women. Local radio stations such as Milli, Nowikht and Kawoon Ghag supported the network in developing the messages as well as its daily spread throughout the Laghman province. Furthermore, with support of the Swedish Committee for Afghanistan (SCA), the PWN set up 150 posters on the elimination of violence against women and to denounce the early marriage of girls as well as women's right to access to education. The places chosen to put up the posters in areas with high chance for public exposure, such as clinics, schools and institutes in the Center of Laghman as well as Qarghaee and Alishang districts.⁵¹ A representative of Laghman's DoWA said during the interview:

*"The network has coordinated to broadcast audio messages on the elimination of violence against women specifically, indecent custom and forced marriage which could reach a lot of people and have positive effects.... Similarly, many posters have been put up in different areas which illustrate pictures and messages on prohibition of violence against women. They are available in crowded areas with the potential to influence the public perception of women."*⁵²

iv. Sessions with community members

The other approach that Daikundi PWN undertook to raise awareness was direct interaction with community members. The network struggled to raise women's awareness on their rights and elimination of violence against women. In coordination with women council and elders, the network gathered around 90 women in Nilli, the center of Daikundi within four rounds. According to the involved stakeholders and some of the participants, the sessions successfully raised awareness among women on UNSCR 1325 and the Anti-Harassment Law, types of violence including domestic violence and approaches to control these. The sessions have socially empowered women to prevent violence and protect themselves in case of any incident.⁵³

Due to the limited budget, the Daikundi PWN could not independently reach out to communities in rural areas where domestic violence critically threatens women. In order to cover these areas, the PWN communicated with the DoWA and asked for them to allocate a session within their programs. In each quarter and also during the international campaign, 16 days of activism (November 25 to December 10), DoWA gathered community members and conducted programs in different districts. Utilizing this opportunity, along with DoWA, the network raised public awareness in the villages of Sang-e-Moom, Dasht and Zarnai as well as villages located in Nilli. A wide range of male and female participants including CSO representatives, university students and community members were invited and, in each

49 Afghan Public Policy Research Organization (2017) "Localization of Nap 1325: A 15 province-Status report."

50 Herat 07 and 08 also interviews with the coordinator and the selected members

51 Lghmn 06, 07, 09

52 Lghmn 06

53 DKND 01, 03, 04 and the interviews with Daikundi PWN coordinator and the selected members

session, 20 to 70 individuals took part. Additionally, information on the available laws and conventions on women rights, the negative impact of violence against women and approaches to encounter it were discussed.

It is worth mentioning that the relevant respondents confirmed that the awareness raising sessions were very effective. However, they agreed it should be conducted more frequently especially, in rural areas.⁵⁴ During the interview, the representative of DoWA said:

“People have to understand that awareness raising is a potential approach to tackle violence. Communities in these areas (where awareness raising sessions have been carried out) become aware and their response to the imparted information was positive. However they all firmly, stressed that awareness raising should be expanded to the rural areas.”⁵⁵

c) Addressing the problem of suicide attempts

Suicide attempts by Afghan women are linked to various factors, such as social, physical and cultural traumas.⁵⁶ In Afghanistan these suicide attempts particularly self-immolation cases, are usually associated with violence against women.⁵⁷ During the interview with the Department of Women Affairs in Bamyan, the respondents stressed that women’s suicide rates were extremely high three years back (during year 1394), however the issue was still very crucial.⁵⁸ APPRO’s annual reports show that the number of suicide attempts among women in Bamyan in 2017 increased from zero to four, in comparison to the previous year.⁵⁹ According to DoWA, in early 2018 the number of attempts was already at five.⁶⁰ As it shows a rising trend, there are concerns that more girls and women will commit suicide in the future therefore this should be addressed.

The PWN assumed that with the available time and budget, media and public awareness were the two main effective approaches to control the increasing rates of suicide. As suicide is Haram in Islam and on the other hand, religious elders have a great influence over the communities, the PWN approached the Department of Haj and Religious Affairs in Bamyan for raising public awareness during their Friday sermons. The idea was welcomed by the Department and accordingly, the Department instructed its Khatibs to conduct sermons on the elimination of violence against women, the prohibition of suicide and its negative effect on families. According to the department, all the 12 main mosques in the center of Bamyan have been instructed to raise awareness on this issue.⁶¹ Moreover, the department agreed to include other issues related to the elimination of violence against women, which are the main reasons of violence such as prohibition of denying women’s heir right, decree on women’s divorce in their absence as well as lack of provision of dowry.⁶² A respondent from this Department stated:

“In the Fuladi area, a lady cut her throat and there was another lady who hanged herself. To prevent more suicide attempts along with the community elders, we raised awareness. I, myself, have preached on the negative consequences of suicide in the Shahid Mosque”⁶³

In order to reach out to more people, the network arranged a radio discussion inviting representatives from Independent

54 DKND 01, 02, 03 and the interviews with Daikundi PWN coordinator and the selected members

55 DKND 01

56 World Health Organization. (2014). “Preventing Suicide: A Global Imperative.” Retrieved from: http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/131056/9789241564878_eng.pdf;jsessionid=157AC8F8DF4981BEDAE282E548C9CCBD?sequence=8

57 Afghan Public Policy Research Organization. (2016). “Self Immolation: An Explanatory Study.”, p19.

58 Bam 04

59 Afghan Public Policy Research Organization. (2016). “Localization of Nap 1325: A 15 province-Status report.”, p19.

Afghan Public Policy Research Organization (2017) “Localization of Nap 1325: A 15 province-Status report.”, p48

60 Department of Women’s Affairs in Bamyan, 10th July, 2018

61 Bam 02

62 Bam 02 and Department of Haj and Religious Affairs, 11 March, 2018

63 Bam 03

Human Right regional Commission, Civil Society and the Haj and Religious Affairs Department to raise awareness and discuss the different factors that lead women to commit suicide, its negative consequences, Islam's view and its preventions. The program was held via Paiwand local radio and was broadcasted four times in the entire of Bamyan. During designing the advocacy, the network proposed approaching DoWA for joint awareness raising programs in the community and village level and to reach out to rural areas. Each quarter, DoWA holds programs in different areas of Bamyan, gathering a large number of women from different levels of society. The PWN considered this a monumental opportunity to raise awareness on the issue. However, after several advocacy meetings, the director of DoWA agreed to allocate a session for PWN within their programs to raise awareness, but the plan did not succeed. The director become ill and the other DoWA staff did not cooperate with the network.⁶⁴

The network did not stop its campaign and conducted sessions for women in Hazhdar village in the Center of Bamyan. The network coordinated with the village council and gathered the locals to raise awareness on the issue.⁶⁵ The PWN members also contributed in provision of the logistic support and refreshments for the beneficiaries. The stakeholders from Bamyan who participated in this study confirmed that awareness was one the best approaches to cut down the suicide rates. Nevertheless, most of them stated that more awareness raising session is needed to eradicate it totally especially in rural villages with higher potential of suicide cases. Furthermore, according to these stakeholders, awareness raising is a long-term process and needs time to emerge its impact.⁶⁶

C. Increasing the recruitment of women

In July 2015, the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (GIROA) adapted a National Action Plan on UNSCR 1325 (NAP 1325), including enhancing women's participation in policy and decision making as one of the resolutions' four main pillars. In support of this goal, the Afghanistan Independent Administrative Reform and Civil Service Commission amended the law to place more female employees in a variety of civil servant positions.⁶⁷ It also incorporated affirmative measures, such as setting a 30% quota for female employees to be staffed governmental offices and adding five extra marks for female candidates for vacant positions.⁶⁸

In spite of these efforts, the number of female civil servant staffing positions has a large gap in comparison to male employee positions and this gap is even more critical for key and policy level positions. According to Independent Administrative Reform and Civil Service Commission of Afghanistan (IARCSC), the number of female civil servants employed in 2017 stood at just 4,359, only 16% of the total government workforce for that year.⁶⁹

The main challenges that hinder the recruitment of women are attributed to institutional, social and cultural factors. Specifically, male dominance and a lack of political will were the obstacles that often limit women's advancement to key positions. Beside a traditionally held negative perspective on women who work outside the home, a lack of suitable workplaces for female employees is the other challenge. Most governmental offices do not have separate desks, computers, rest rooms and kindergartens for female staff.⁷⁰

Based on the Barometer research report in Faryab, Nangarhar and Kunduz provinces, the percentage of participation of women in local government departments is quite low to such an extent that in Faryab, in some government

64 Interview with Bamyan PWN coordinator and five members as well as the interview code: Bam 04

65 Bam 04, 05, 06, 08

66 Bam 01, 04, 05, 06

67 Ministry of Foreign Affairs. (2015). "Afghanistan's Action Plan on UNSCR 1325 Women, Peace and Security." Retrieved from: https://unama.unmissions.org/sites/default/files/wps-afghanistan_national_action_plan_1325_0.pdf

68 IARCSC. (2018). "Policy on Increasing Women's Participation by 2% in Civil Service for year 2018." Retrieved from:

https://iarcsc.gov.af/en/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/2017/11/Policy-on-Increasing-Women-Participation-in-Civil-Service_-_English.pdf

69 Ibid.

70 MoWA. (2016), "Workplace Obstacles: Analysis and Recommendations Report".

departments there are no women working in even low level positions.⁷¹ In rural areas, women are totally marginalized and are deprived of their basic rights, however their marginalization in terms of not being involved in local government departments is a serious one, which generates very devastating consequences for women in the long run. The enhancement of women's peace and security requires PWNs to step in and empower women, which in turn will enable them to have active participation in governmental departments, political decision-making, and the peace processes. Furthermore, APPRO's research revealed that unemployment is a factor which can increase violence against women and therefore recommended more women to be recruited. The research findings also stressed that women's representation in government should be enhanced in key positions.⁷² The networks across different provinces worked to enhance women's employment and their efforts had an impact. This resulted in increasing the employment of a high number of women, yet considering the limited time and budget, the positions were mostly at lower level positions and not key positions. One of the main challenges that the network was faced was the centralized system of the Independent Administrative Reform and Civil Service Commission Office, which limited the initiative at the provincial levels.

As a step in the right direction, the PWN in Faryab, Nangarhar and Kunduz provinces collaborated with other government stakeholders and conducted advocacy meetings with the Independent Administrative Reform and Civil Service Commission Office and Department of Labor, Social Affairs, Martyrs and Disabled as the primary government stakeholders to advocate for women rights and women's participation in the governmental departments.

According to the Faryab PWN, nepotism, lack of awareness and limited announcement of vacant positions are among the main reasons for low women's representation in governmental offices in this province. To tackle this issue, the network lobbied and advocated with the IARCSC office in Faryab and asked for the office to share a list of the vacant positions for a wider announcement and awareness raising among the women. As a result and with agreement from the Commission, a list of the recently announced governmental positions was shared with the PWN. Moreover, the network introduced 120 eligible female candidates to IARCSC in Faryab as a CV bank for the commission.⁷³

The other opportunity for the PWN to advocate for the recruitment of women was through a United State Agency for International Development (USAID) internship program implemented by DAI Global, LLC (DAI) in Faryab. The network reached out to DAI and introduced 100 girls and women for possible inclusion in the program. After being screened for their qualifications, 35 women were invited to participate in a six-month program. Additionally, three female prosecutors were recruited in the Faryab court and Appellate Prosecution Office, where they will have the opportunity to support cases of female clients. Overall, the network in Faryab was able to successfully place 10 women as permanent employees in different governmental sectors, such as education, justice and the public health sectors, which is a significant achievement.⁷⁴

The Faryab network believe that women's limited access to information is also the main barrier in women's recruitment. To address this the network adapted their advocacy strategy to raise women's awareness and to train them on the policies, procedures and ways to fill out governmental job applications. For this aim, the PWN communicate with women councils of the villages in the Center of Faryab to gather literate and interested women. Subsequently, the network facilitated five awareness raising sessions; each gathered around 25 to 50 women.⁷⁵ A participant explained: *"During the session information on filling out the governmental job applications was presented ... the information was very useful, and the participants showed interest in applying for jobs. For instance, my mother who also participated in this program, after the session and with support of the network, was recruited to the NRC office."*⁷⁶

Faryab's PWN network also attempted to further raise awareness through Khatibs and the Friday sermons. With their lobby and advocacy, the Department of Haj and Religious Affairs agreed to cooperate and instructed 131 Khatibs to

71 Quarterly coordination meeting with the Provincial Women Network coordinators and members-August 2017

72 Afghan Public Policy Research Organization. (2017). "Violence Against Women and the Implementation of NAP 1325."

73 PWN Advocacy Meeting with IARCSC in Faryab – 16 Nov 2017 and the interview code: Far-01

74 Interview with coordinator and PWN members and the interview code: 06 and 07

75 Far 04, 05, 07

76 Far 05

preach in support of women's work outside the home.⁷⁷

Similarly, in Nangarhar the network advocated with the Department of Labor, Social Affairs, Martyrs and Disabled for organizing skill trainings for women. Out of 20 women who the network introduced a few of them participated in courses and finally, two ladies were recruited as the principal of the Musa Shafiq high school in Kama district and a kindergarten teacher at the same district. The interviewees stated that since most of the introduced women were living in faraway districts, it was very difficult for them to attend the courses without a transportation allowance and this was a barrier for the active participation of most of the introduced women.⁷⁸

For increasing women representation in civil service, Kunduz PWN held a widespread campaign calling upon eligible female candidates to apply for governmental jobs. At the first place, the network communicated with the IARCSC office in this province and asked for the recently announced positions. Fortunately, the commission supported the initiative and shared the list of the vacant positions. Subsequently, each PWN member campaigned in her living area to raise women's awareness on the vacant positions and to encourage them to apply. The members also supported women in obtaining and filling out the job application forms. The awareness raising was further enhanced by two TV round table discussions with participation from a representatives DoWA, IARCSC and well-known CSOs in Kunduz. The programs were broadcasted live and discussed reasons for low women's representation in the governmental civil service, challenges that women usually face and affirmative actions to help compensate them.⁷⁹

As a result of this extensive movement, 6,000 women throughout Kunduz applied for the governmental jobs out of which 3,000 would go on to get shortlisted within the commission.⁸⁰ According to the commission's recent policy and procedure, the interviews for job for higher and key positions are supposed to be conducted at the national level in Kabul. During the data collection time, the supported candidates were waiting for the announcement of the exam date.⁸¹

In Balkh province, the PWN advocated with the municipality to considering gender balance in their workforce and finally the municipality recruited three women to posts.⁸² Similarly the Paktia's PWN advocating with the Education Department has increased the recruitment of women in the province. In this province, the lack of female teachers was determined to be the main reason for low admission and attendance of female students. By coordinating with the Department of Education, the PWN contributed to the recruitment of about 20 female teachers in the districts of Mirzaka, Sayed Karam and Ahmad Aba.⁸³

D. Protecting police women in their workplaces

Providing a safe and gender-friendly environment for women is considered very important in Afghanistan for hiring more women and retaining current female staff. Unfortunately, the harassment and discrimination of women has been in ongoing issue in workplaces which already have limited female representation, leading to women's exclusion in the workforce. Providing a suitable workplace environment for women is very critical in the police sector given the number of female police women is very low. In Balkh province in particular, the number has even reduced. APPRO's 2017 research study noted that number of female police staff was still low, and even decreasing, due to the volatile security situation.⁸⁴ According to a case study conducted by APPRO in Balkh, women in the Afghan National Police (ANP) have complained about different types of sexual harassment in their work environment. The research further revealed that

77 Far 02, 07 and interviews with the coordinator and the selected PWN members

78 Nang 03, 04, 05, 06

79 KNDZ 02

80 KNDZ 01, 02, 04, 05, 06, 07

81 11/3/2018

82 Balkh 01, 06 and the interview with the Balkh PWN coordinator and the selected members

83 Pak 09 and the interview with Paktia coordinator

84 Afghan Public Policy Research Organization. (2017). "Violence Against Women and the Implementation of NAP 1325."

female police staff have shown a lack of awareness of the protective resources available to them.⁸⁵

The network in Balkh suggested that women in the police sector should be empowered and supported to counter this harmful social situation. Towards this, Balkh PWN adapted their advocacy strategy to raise awareness and establish a committee amongst female police staff to share their experiences and to collectively counter it. The network lobbied with the Balkh police headquarters, including the gender unit of this office, to take action against the rise of harassment in this sector. A committee of 10 employees of the female police force was formed and headed by the of the Balkh police headquarters' deputy of the Gender Unit. The committee held monthly meetings to identify and solve issues female police are concerned about.⁸⁶ The committee also has coordination and advocacy meetings with the of 707 Pamiir Police Zone's Gender Unit which has a higher authority to enforce law and deter perpetrators of violence and harassment.⁸⁷

The other objective of the Balkh PWN advocacy strategy was awareness raising and the network conducted outreach with the Police Headquarter to get their cooperation in awareness raising sessions. The PWN also prepared awareness raising materials, including a PowerPoint presentations and handouts. As a result, about 60 male and female police employees joined the sessions and learned about information on stopping sexual harassment and inappropriate police behavior and the available law to encounter violence.⁸⁸

To address the concerns raised by APPRO's case study,⁸⁹ the Network held an advocacy meeting with the Gender Unit of the Ministry of Interior about concerns of harassment of women working in the police force. Unfortunately, in response the claim of the existence of any type harassment of women the police force was rejected as without merit. However, the interviewee did admit that there are challenges regarding the provision of a separate room for women to change into their uniforms.⁹⁰

As number of police women working in Paktia was very limited, the Network increased its efforts to advocate with the Police Headquarters and the Governor Office for greater inclusion of women in the workforce. As result of this campaign, the number of police women increase significantly from five in (late 2016) to 25 (in 2017) women. During an interview, a representative of the Police Headquarters in Paktia said:

"Previously, women employees working in the police sector was very rare. But now due to Paktia PWN's efforts, 12 women were introduced and recruited. They conducted more awareness raising in this regard and involved women's councils, which led to increasing the number of police women to 20 – 22".⁹¹

E. Outreach to IDP women

According to research on "Displacement Dynamics," the economic isolation that stems from rural to urban migration in Herat is significant. Due to the recent war and conflict, a significant number of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) have fled to Herat from the neighboring provinces to seek shelter and safety. According to this study, more women than men indicated that they lacked skills to find employment. Economic pressures often led them to beg on streets, which added to their vulnerabilities. This was especially true for female-headed households lacking the support and income of male family members, making them more economically vulnerable and likely to succumb to begging. APPRO research also underscored the dire situation IDPs are facing in Afghanistan. The study stated that Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development's (MRRD) assistance does not cover the needs of the IDPs and recommended that besides livelihood support, vocational training for women should be considered as well.

To address the issue, the PWN in Herat included skill trainings for women IDPs in their advocacy strategy. The network

85 APPRO. (2017). "Sexual Harassment and Women in Afghan National Police"

86 Balkh 01, 02, 04, 05

87 Ibid.

88 Balkh 01, 03, 04, 05,

89 APPRO. (2017). "Sexual Harassment and Women in Afghan National Police"

90 KBL 02 and the interview with Kabul PWN coordinator and the selected members

91 Pak 11

believed that it could provide a new source of income for them could prevent situations where they were forced to resort to begging.

Following the Herat advocacy strategy, the network lobbied with Danish Refugee Council (DRC) to include internally displaced women in their skills trainings to empower them to establish entrepreneurial activities or to find a job and financially contribute to their families. The network conducted a brief assessment of the number of IDP women interested in and in need of support such as this, which was conducted with the assistance of Ms. Zakia Ahmadi, a PWN member. Around 200 IDP women were introduced to the skills trainings DRC conducted on economic empowerment initiatives for women, including sewing, embroidery, legal services and psychology.

According to the study stakeholders, the courses were launched and were effective. Unfortunately, some of the IDP women introduced to these workshops explained that while the workshops were very useful, they were could not attend all the courses due to the far geographical distance between the IDP camp and the training center. The PWN did not have a budget to assist the women and DRC did not provide a transportation allowance for the training. The network searched for a trainer who could voluntarily train the IDPs, but that failed as well.

The network made efforts to find another resource to empower the IDP women and reached out to the Department of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock. However, according to the Department, supporting IDP was not a part of their plan. Despite this, the Department did agree to provide job opportunities for these women within a greenhouse project. In support of this, the network shared a list of 30 women IDPs with the Department to be recruited later. The Department has promised to employ these women as soon as they start their project. Most respondents said the main problems internally displaced women were faced were poverty, ethnic and religious discrimination, social and cultural problems, gender discrimination, health problems, a lack of access to schools for their children.

In addition to Herat province, other provincial networks have also advocated for IDPs. While Helmand, Daikundi and Faryab provincial networks reportedly did not have a specific advocacy strategy for IDPs, the networks nevertheless reached out to IDP women based on APPRO's study recommendations.

According to the network in Faryab, the Department of Refugees and Repatriation has been very active in the identifying and reaching out to IDPs in close coordination with international organizations. However, due to a lack of awareness among IDPs of these resources, their identification has been challenging. With the support of the network, eight IDP households who did not receive any type of livelihood assistance were introduced to the Department. With further coordination with the NPO, the families received livelihood and cash support.

As a result of the network advocacy in Helmand province, 15 internally displaced households were introduced to the Department of Refugee and Repatriation. The beneficiaries were provided a migrant card which enabled the family to receive livelihood support. During the interview, one of the members of these displaced families said:

"We were suffering from a very bad life situation and even did not have food to eat. But with the help and support of this network, we obtained a migrants' card that would give us food. The major problems for displaced people are poverty and lack of a suitable shelter for life."⁹²

Similarly, in Daikundi, the network worked in close coordination with the Department of Refugees and Repatriation and Directorate of Natural Disasters and Firefighting, to provide cash assistance and livelihood items for 25 families. As IDPs are vulnerable and prone to developing psychological traumas, the network reached out to Move organization in Daikundi province, which provides legal, psychological and health services for vulnerable individuals. The network coordinated for the needs of 10 IDP women, who benefited from these vital services.

F. Elimination of illiteracy in women

Three decades of war has fundamentally affected the education system in Afghanistan. According to the World Bank estimation for 2011, the adult literacy rate in Afghanistan stands at 31% and the percentage for women is just 17.6%,

92 Helm 10

indicating a significant gender gap. Illiteracy among women is one of the main factors making women vulnerable and hinders other development initiative for women such as women recruitment and their participation in politics, peace process and other key aspect of the society. Furthermore, literate women are more successful in raising the children that's why illiteracy does not only affect a women's life but also the next generation.

According to the PWN in Uruzgan, the literacy rate among women in this province is drastically low. Factors such as social stigmas against girl's education, insecurity and lack of female teachers are the main reasons that limit women's access to education in this province. To combat the issue, the network in Uruzgan adjusted their advocacy to hold literacy courses for women.

As per the APPRO's research recommendations,⁹³ the network in Uruzgan held awareness raising sessions to promote girl's education. In close coordination with DoWA, five awareness raising campaigns were held in DoWA's main hall where women from different areas in the province gathered. In addition to this, the network conducted five more campaigns in various areas in Trinkot (the center of Uruzgan), including rural areas such as Khairo Kariz and Sar Chakhlo, where illiteracy is a critical challenge that women face. Each campaign was attended by 15 to 30 women. According to the PWN, while the initiative was supported by many women, however negative feedback came from some of the participants who criticized the promotion of girls' education as unwelcomed by the society and something that can increase safety risks for women.⁹⁴

After the campaigns, the network selected 30 women interested in participating in the literacy courses. With the support of two volunteer PWN members, two courses started in late September 2017 and lasted about three months. During this time, the women were trained in basic literacy skills. The courses were regularly monitored by the Education Department, which also supplied the network with stationary for the beneficiaries. Besides liaising with the Department, the network communicated with the Afghan Development Association (ADA) and UNICEF regional offices, which also provided stationary and office supplies.⁹⁵ One of the beneficiaries of these courses said:

*"The course was very beneficial, and we were trained in basic literacy, including reading and counting. Before this, I was not able to read but now I am able to understand the texts and figures in my children's vaccination card, which can further help me to take care of them better."*⁹⁶

As the education of girls in the rural areas of Uruzgan is still considered taboo, the network also attempted to raise awareness via the Khatibs, who culturally have a strong voice and are well respected in this province. Accordingly, with support and coordination of Haj and Religious Affairs in Uruzgan, Khatibs in 13 mosques raised awareness about women's right to access to education following an Afghan-appropriate intervention. Following the directive of the Department, the Khatibs were also instructed to preach on women rights, elimination of violence against women and harmful customs.⁹⁷

V. Conclusion and way forward

In alignment with the findings of APPRO's and Cordaid's research, the PWNs in all of the 15 targeted provinces prepared their advocacy to address issues found to be threatening women's peace and security. There were several main concerns according to the research. For example, violence against women was the main problem in almost all of the provinces. A lack of women representation was also the other main issue highlighted, which was followed up by the networks in Kunduz, Faryab and Nangarhar. In Paktia, Helmand, Badakhshan and Kandahar, the PWN advocacy efforts were chosen to fight indecent customs of Baad and bride price. Similarly, the Uruzgan PWN endeavored to combat illiteracy in their community.

93 Afghan Public Policy Research Organization. (2017). "Violence Against Women and the Implementation of NAP 1325." P.56

94 URZGN 03

95 URZGN 01, 02, 04, 05, 06, 07, 09, 10, 11, 12, 13

96 URZGN 12

97 URZGN 08

As detailed in the report, it is apparent that the PWNs's advocacy and raising awareness campaigns could be significantly complimented with support of the Khatibs, educational institutes and media campaign advocacies. The network in Paktia involved elders to put an end to the practice of Baad and high rates of bride price, which also proved to be effective. This experience shows that involving religious and influential elders has the potential to be very persuasive in changing the mindsets and social norms in communities.

During the advocacies, insecurity and lack of budget was the main challenges the networks faced. A centralized system of the recruitment process was the other challenge which impacted the network's struggle to increase women's employment at the provincial level. Additionally, network members and majority of the involved stakeholders insisted on expanding the activities to more rural areas where women are facing critical situations.

Working according to an already prepared advocacy strategy in consultation with the experienced network at the local level, could be a more effective approach to battle harmful social practices. In comparison to the previous scattered advocacies, an advocacy strategy with a stronger design at the local level could greatly equip the networks to efficiently use the available resources and opportunities and achieve better results.

However, as detailed earlier in this report, the network has succeeded in bringing about some changes yet there are still a number of challenges that need to be addressed. Definitely, advocacies are long term processes and need follow up. Violence against women is still one of the main threats for women and awareness raising will not be enough to tackle it. The advocacies should continue with the police sector and the judicial system to enforce law and punish the perpetrator, yet with the limited budget and time was not able to be addressed during this round of the PWN advocacy. On the other hand, with efforts of Paktia's PWN combined with the Haj and Religious Affairs Department, the harmful practice of Baad and high rate of bride price to Islamic culture has been illuminated in the Center of the province, while the challenge remains in the rural areas. The network was advised to implement the same activities to eliminate this practice in far districts of Paktia as well.

Fighting adult illiteracy, not only in Uruzgan, but also for the rest of the provinces should be a top priority which the networks need to consider for their future advocacies. For Uruzgan, the introduction of literacy courses had a great impact in enhancing the literacy skills of the beneficiaries, however due to the ongoing conflict, it was not possible to expand this initiative to a wider area.

In conclusion, as the previous examples show, the Network advocacies have the potential to successfully bring profound changes to their communities. The Networks should continue to expand their activities to reach more beneficiaries, especially in rural areas. As the communities at the local level need such networks for addressing women's concerns, supporting the sustainability of the network in the long-term remains an important issue to address for both the Networks and donor organizations.

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EQUALITY for Peace and Democracy (EPD) is a nonprofit, non-governmental organization dedicated to empowering women and youth at the community and policy levels in Afghanistan. EPD was established in early 2010 by Ms. Nargis Nehan. EPD works to build the capacity of women and youth in order for them to be the front face in presenting their needs in development, peace building and democratic processes of the country. EPD further aims at mass mobilization of women and youth to contribute to overcoming the challenges of instability that Afghanistan is facing. EPD establishes platforms for women and youth to come together, establish networks, build trust and confidence, and strive jointly for transforming Afghanistan into a democratic country free of all forms of violence and discrimination.