Dear reader,

It’s with great pleasure that UN Women in Afghanistan introduces the first edition of Together with Afghan Women. Our aim with this publication is to provide you with updates on the work of the country office, the progress of Afghan women and girls and the challenges faced by them. In the last decade significant improvements have occurred in the lives of women and girls but they are fragile and it is of vital importance to ensure that they are both sustained and further extended in the transition period. The Afghan government, particularly the Ministry of Women’s Affairs (MOWA), as well as women activists in the Civil Society and the Parliament will be in the driving seats but UN Women is committed to work with them to ensure women’s empowerment and gender quality.

UN Women has been working in Afghanistan since 2002, and has supported the development, monitoring and implementation of policies that both protect and promote the rights of women. For the current planning cycle of 2013-2017, significant transitional events will occur within the political and security arenas that could negatively impact women if interventions are not made that can ensure women’s active participation. Ensuring women’s participation in elections, peace negotiations, and overall engagement in governance and government at national and sub national levels will help preserve gains made to date. We have identified three key programmatic Pillars through which programming will be channelled for the current cycle, namely: 1) Political and Economic Empowerment 2) Elimination of Violence Against Women (EVAW) 3) Coordination and Advocacy.

UN Women’s programme in Afghanistan strives to impact the lives of women and girls in a manner that allows them to reach their human potential and promote communities that enables women to live with self-dignity and respect. It is our intention, with the publication of a quarterly newsletter, to share with our stakeholders both news and stories that reflect on the steps taken in that direction. We hope you enjoy reading this edition and that it will be well received by all those that so generously support us in fulfilling our commitments to Afghan women.
United Nations call on Afghan authorities to ensure full implementation of EVAW Law

The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and UN Women have urged Afghan authorities to step up their efforts to ensure the full implementation of the law on the Elimination of Violence Against Women (EVAW), in line with their international commitments. “Progress in implementing the EVAW law contributes to deterring harmful practices and protecting women from violence in their daily lives,” said the Secretary-General’s Special Representative for Afghanistan and head of UNAMA, Jan Kubis. He added that the law is critical, not just for women and girls, but for all of Afghan society. The international community also has firm expectations of the Government on increasing respect for women’s rights which can affect the assistance it provides to the country.

“I call upon the Afghan Government and Parliament to fully respect and defend the fundamental rights of women and girls by ensuring that the EVAW law is respected and implemented,” said the UN Women representative in Afghanistan, Ingibjorg Gisladottir. “It is imperative for the development of Afghanistan that women are able to exercise their rights and be free from violence in their homes and workplaces.”

The landmark EVAW law, enacted in August 2009, criminalises child marriage, forced marriage, selling and buying women for the purpose or under the pretext of marriage, ba'ad (giving away a woman or girl to settle a dispute), forced self-immolation and 17 other acts of violence against women, including rape and beating. It also specifies punishment for perpetrators. The law was enacted by presidential decree and has yet to gain parliamentary approval. Judicial and law enforcement authorities are implementing the law but challenges persist in enforcing it.

In a report produced in December 2012, Still a Long Way to Go: Implementation of the Law on Elimination of Violence against Women in Afghanistan, UNAMA found that although prosecutors and courts were increasingly applying the EVAW law in a growing number of reported incidents of violence against women, the overall use of the law remained low indicating there is still a long way to go before women and girls in Afghanistan are fully protected from violence through the EVAW law.

Improving “access to justice for all, in particular women, by ensuring that the Constitution and other fundamental laws are enforced expeditiously, fairly and transparently,” and ensuring “that women can fully enjoy their economic, social, civil, political and cultural rights” are key goals agreed to by the Afghan Government in the Tokyo Mutual Accountability Framework (TMAF) in July 2012 with the international community. A key indicator is the demonstrated implementation, with civil society engagement, of the EVAW Law. Continued on page 4

Women in rural areas participate in economic and livelihood programs

UN Women in partnership with Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development (MRRD) conducted a two day training workshop on mainstreaming gender for economic empowerment for the staff of Provincial Rural Rehabilitation and Development Departments (PPRDS) of the five northern region provinces. More than 25 gender focal points from Jawzjan, Faryab, Sar-e-Pul, Samangan and Balk provinces participated in the workshop organized in Mazar-e-Sharif.

The objective of the training was to ensure that the gender focal points who work with community level programs would be able to create awareness and raise concerns on gender when economic livelihood programs are being initiated. The training session were mainly focused on gender concepts, gender awareness lobbying and advocacy and methods and strategies to gender mainstreaming and integration into economic empowerment. Ms. Malika Popal, MRRD’s Gender Advisor marked the training as step-forward for the women’s empowerment in business and other economic sectors “I thank UN Women for organizing such important training. I’m sure topics discussed in the sessions will help our gender focal points to work closely and further support women and girls in communities.” Said Malika.

Based on the agreement signed with MRRD, UN Women supports the ministry gender structure with capacity development trainings both at central and provincial levels.
Educate Women and Girls; Educate the Society
Afghanistan is committed to equal education and equal employment for women and girls.

Beheshta has a dream: “Educating women and girls and women's empowerment in our community is my dream. I'm aware that it takes a long time but I'm hopeful to see this happen and be part of this valued process.” Beheshta, 20, is a young Afghan girl, who participated in classes offered by the UN Women-funded Information, Communication and Technology (ICT) Centre in northern Parwan Province.

After graduation from high school, Beheshta wanted to pursue higher education in a government university, but she was not successful in passing the “kankor”, or entrance exam. According to the Afghan Constitution, education is the right of all citizens and education up to bachelor level is free of charge and supported by the State. Every year more than 100,000 school graduates attempt the “kankor”, but due to lack of sufficient spaces and limited capacity, less than half the number of students find their way to the government universities and higher education institutes. Those who fail either go to private institutions, which are very expensive and are not in the reach of most Afghan families, or try to pass the exam again.

Beheshta’s parents were not able to pay for her education in a private institute, so when she had the opportunity to join the English language class in the ICT Centre, it was a second chance for her.

“It seemed to me like a fairy tale that I would get a job and earn for my family and support women and girls as a whole”, she said. She successfully completed the course along with 80 other girls, and is currently teaching English language to new students in the same ICT Centre where she was learning.

Opened in 2011, the Parwan Women’s ICT Centre’s key objective is to create an enabling environment for women’s economic participation through sustainable transfer of skills in English Language and ICT. The Centre also provides job placement support for graduates.

Afghanistan acceded to the Convention of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) on 5th March 2003 without any reservation, and is currently preparing for the CEDAW Committee review of its first-ever periodic report in July 2013. As a companion to the Government’s report, UN Women supported the preparation of the Civil Society Shadow Report, prepared by the Afghan Women’s Network and submitted in April 2013. Among other recommendations the report urges the Government to develop programmes that will support girls to prepare for entrance exams to the universities and to overcome key barriers and challenges experienced by women in entering the economic arena.

As Afghanistan moves forward to ensure its commitments on women’s and girls’ education and employment, UN Women will continue its work with the Ministry of Women’s Affairs and other national partners to ensure the dreams of girls like Beheshta become reality and that they become an active and contributing part of Afghan’s future.
Engaging university students on Women, Peace and Security initiatives


UN SCR 1325, adopted by Member States in 2000, was the first Security Council Resolution recognizing women’s roles in creating and maintaining peace, security, and to support their strong participation in peace negotiations and decision making level.

Titled “Training on UNSCR 1325- Engaging University Students in Women, Peace and Security” gathered 365 university students and lecturers to raise their awareness on UNSCR 1325 and consequent resolutions. The trainings were conducted in six major universities in Kabul, Balkh, Kandahar, Herat, Nangarhar and Bamyian provinces.

Enhancing women’s economic empowerment

UN Women inaugurated the second Information, Technology and Communication (ICT) Centre in Parwan Province on May 2013. The Jabl-e-Saraj Centre aims to create and enabling environment for women’s economic participation through sustainable transfer of skills in English language and ICT. The Centre also provides job place support for graduates.

In the inauguration ceremony, attended by Roberta Clarke, the UN Women Regional Director in Asia and Pacific, the Provincial Governor Abdul Basir Salangi, marked the opening of such an institution “an important step towards increased participation of women in paid jobs and eventually improving women’s economic status.” Meanwhile, Ingibjorg Gisladottir, UN Women Country Representative in Afghanistan reaffirmed UN Women’s support to the Afghan women and girls.

Including Parwan, UN Women supports the Departments of Women Affairs in Daikundi and Baghlan provinces towards the establishment and running of the ICT centers.

United Nations call on Afghan authorities...

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UNAMA and UN Women – as the UN Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women is known by – have called on international donors to support the Government in meeting its TMAF commitments on gender equality, women’s empowerment and the implementation of the EVAW law by developing a joint monitoring framework with specific indicators to measure progress in these areas, with development assistance based on progress made.

The international community – as well as the UN Security Council – expects that Afghan authorities will respect and promote Afghanistan’s domestic and international obligations and legal norms in the field of human rights, notably the rights of woman children. In its latest resolution on Afghanistan, adopted in March 2013, the Security Council recognized that despite some progress on women’s rights, enhanced efforts were required to secure the rights of women and girls and to “ensure all women and girls in Afghanistan are protected from violence and abuse, enjoy equal protection under the law and equal access to justice.” The Council also called on the Afghan Government and international donors to adhere to the commitments made at the Tokyo meeting. Other international instruments which Afghanistan is legally bound to uphold include the Convention on the Elimination of All Form of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), which is often described as an international bill of rights for women. Through it, States commit themselves to undertake a series of measures to end discrimination against women in all forms.

Incidents of violence against women in Afghanistan still remain largely under-reported due to cultural restraints, social norms and taboos, customary practices and religious beliefs, discrimination against women that leads to a wider acceptance of violence against them, fear of social stigma and exclusion, and, at times, a threat to life. Prevailing insecurity and weak rule of law have further hampered women’s access to formal justice institutions. Those incidents that reach law enforcement and judicial authorities or receive public attention due to their egregious nature represent the tip of the iceberg of incidents of violence against women throughout the country. In its December 2012 report on the implementation of the EVAW law, UNAMA made 29 recommendations to the Government and its international partners urging them to ensure that promotion and protection of women’s rights are an integral part of peace and reconciliation efforts and the country’s political, economic and security strategies.

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