

AFGHANISTAN RECONSTRUCTION TRUST FUND (ARTF)

Gender Working Group Virtual Meeting

Tuesday, May 11th, 2021

Summary of Discussions

The ARTF Gender Working Group (GWG) held its monthly meeting virtually on May 11, 2021, which was co-chaired by the World Bank (the Bank) and US. Representatives of 7 donor partners¹, MoF, MoWA and the ARTF Administrator attended the meeting.

The agenda for the March meeting was the following: (i) Updates on WEE projects- WEE-NPP PPG, WEE-RDP (including concept note in operating in fragile areas); (ii) CPPR – portfolio wide issues on gender; and (iii) AOB

Irene Ramatala (Program Management Specialist in the Gender unit– USAID) was the cochair on behalf of Vikki Stein. US co-chair asked if donor partners have taken a short survey requested by Vikki Stein. The purpose of the survey was to gather input from the members on how to drive the GWG discussions in the future meetings. A number of GWG members informed that they have not seen the survey (including the ARTF administrator) and the donor co-chair agreed to re-circulate the survey.

WEE-RDP updates, including concept note in operating in fragile areas: ██████████, WEE-RDP Executive Director, made a presentation on the current operational status of WEE-RDP and the government's decision to move the responsible line ministry from MRRD to MOWA. The transfer of the project implementation responsibility and the budget was already completed from the government's perspective and the MOF officially informed the WB a few weeks ago. The process to officially move the implementing agency is underway.

WEE-RDP is being implemented in all 34 provinces covering 76 districts. The project is focused on the Community Mobilization and Institution Development (CMID) implemented by the project staff (in 11 provinces) and Facilitating Partners (FPs) (in 23 provinces). The project is building on the mobilization efforts undertaken by CCAP-MRRD. Ms. Majidi presented the WEE_RDP strategy in high-risk areas.

The security situation is deteriorating in some provinces covered by FPs. There have been several discussions with the FPs regarding the impacts of the security situations on daily operations. The data showed that there are 3705 CDCs under the project. Eight provinces (Baghlan, Badakhshan, Wardak, Logar, Ghazni, Paktika, Zabul, and Urozgan) have been reported to have critical security situation. As part of the data on the pending community mobilization in high-risk areas, it was mentioned that while there are currently six FPs under the project, three FPs have reported pending community mobilization in 767 out of 1293 CDCs across these high-risk areas. The presence of Armed Opposition Groups (AOGs) in these regions prevents women from moving freely and forming women's Self-Help Groups (SHGs). The project's concept note (working document), presenting several options for operating in high risk area, was presented at the meeting. These options include formation of men's SHGs as an entry point in the village/CDC, mobilizing only men while using them as targets for gender equality and combination of several levers that could be altered per district/CDC and negotiated with relevant AOGs. A few other alternative approaches were also discussed including the formation of men only VSLAs and transfer of the second trench of the seed capital grants to men-only VSLAs.

¹ Canada, EU, Denmark, Finland, Sweden, UK, and US

Following the presentation, the donor partners have raised several questions and concerns including MRRD's advisory role in developing and implementing the strategy; likely scenario of further increase in gender gap by targeting men rather than women; possibility of focusing on areas where more women's SHGs could be supported instead of the areas with no female SHGs; considering couple approach in groups (both male and female group members from the same households to be considered as group members), among others.

The project team responded that there is a steering committee and there will be an advisory committee with the involvement of all stakeholders, especially MRRD that has enough experience in this regard. The concerns raised are primarily around the proposed approach to replace female leaders with male leaders is likely to increase their power in controlling the household finances, but at the same time, some concerns were raised regarding completely excluding a community and the government presence for the project due to security situation. Also, since the project is targeting 80% of women and 20% of men, it still seems to be feasible to reach the target despite having male only CDCs, as the finances obtained by male members of HHs would still be benefitting the female members of HHs. It was emphasized that the strategy is a working document, and that once agreed, a few pilot would be implemented in the next 3-6 months and further refine the strategy as necessary.

Other concerns raised by some donor partners were about the anticipated timeline for the final decision and having a revised approach of the strategy, options/evidence available in terms of approaching couples instead of either male or female member of HHs, likelihood of the recent fall of these areas under AOGs, girl's enrolment in schools and bargaining it with creating more male SHGs, project's support to vulnerable groups if the plan is not implemented, and WB's evaluation of the existing strategy through gender filters.

The project responded regarding some GWG members' concerns about focusing more on the male SHGs rather than the female ones as the project is already having 83% female involvement (against 80% target). There will be considerations regarding couples or families, where the money provided will already be utilized by the family as a single entity. There are active conflicts in some areas where project staff are not allowed to visit, and most of the interactions are happening through FPs with community councils and elders in those areas. Using CDCs as entry points have proven useful in mobilizing the community, in addition to engaging with the FPs. The team will continue to consult with stakeholders and make necessary adjustments to achieve development results despite highly challenging situations in some areas.

The WB gender team cautioned the project team on the possibility of exacerbating the gender gap in insecure areas if the project considers male only groups.

Updates on WEE projects- WEE-NPP Project Preparation Grant (PPG)

briefed the GWG on the status of the project. The PPG started in July 2017 with the initial US\$ 5 million grant, providing ARTF support to the establishment of the Program Coordination Office (PCO) for WEE-NPP. However the PPG budget was revised and 4 million of it was repurposed for Covid-19 response in 2020. The PCO had a mandate of coordinating, monitoring, reporting, and establishing relations with 14 different line ministries and agencies to coordinate various women empowerment projects and programs. The PPG achieved all its indicators. The PPG suffered from multiple transitions (from MoLSA to MOF and most recently to MOWA), and high turnover of especially senior staff. The considering the upcoming closing date in June 2021, MOF and WB decided not to move the PPG operation to MOWA, while the WEE-NPP as a national program led by the government has already moved to MOWA.

Reflection on the CPPR discussion on gender: Since the GWG ran out of time, it was agreed that the group will discuss reflections on CPPR once gender as a cross-cutting issue has been discussed in the coming week.

Agreed Actions:

- US Cochair to reshare the survey on gathering donor partners' inputs on their preferred ways to drive the future GWG discussions
- Presentation on WEE-RDP and WEE-NPP should be circulated by the ARTF co-chair.