

# AFGHANISTAN RECONSTRUCTION TRUST FUND (ARTF)

## Gender Working Group Virtual Meeting

**Tuesday, April 14, 2020**

### Summary of Discussions

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The ARTF Gender Working Group (GWG) held its monthly meeting virtually on 14<sup>th</sup> April 2020, which was co-chaired by the World Bank (the Bank) and Australia. Representatives of 10 donor partners<sup>1</sup> and the ARTF Administrator attended the meeting.

The meeting agenda was the following: (i) status update of the actions agreed at the March GWG meeting; (ii) COVID-19 response and gender; (iii) gender considerations in the ARTF financing strategy/PFFP (Partnership Framework and Financing Program); and (iv) AOB

**Status of the actions agreed at the April GWG meeting:** The WB policy notes are currently with the ODI (Overseas Development Institute) for a review focused on fragility/conflict and the political economy perspectives. Ministry of Finance (MoF) also plans to consult with key ministries within a couple of weeks. The notes will be shared with the development partners once finalized. Women's Economic Empowerment – Rural Development Project (WEE-RDP presentation) in the March meeting had been shared with the GWG. On the funding issue faced by WEE-RDP due to the development budget approval timing at the beginning of each fiscal year, the Bank confirmed that Directorate General of Treasury of MoF sent a circular to inform that projects should be allowed to access 1/12<sup>th</sup> of their annual project budget on monthly basis at the beginning of each financial year until the parliament approves the new financial year development budget. To receive temporary funding, project teams were required to submit their budget during the first week of the financial year. Since it was the first time this approach was taken to resolve the funding issue, some projects failed to submit the annual budget in time to access the temporary funding.

A question was raised on to what degree the on-going political and COVID-19 related tensions affect the policy notes. The Bank explained that while both these issues are significant, the policy notes look at medium to longer term policy recommendations based on ongoing dialogues with the government over the past years.

**COVID-19 response and gender:** The Bank's Social Development Specialist made a presentation on key gender aspects to consider as we prepare response to the crisis. Given the differential impacts COVID-19 will have on women, men, girls and boys, gender issues ought to be considered by task team while preparing responses. Important issues include expected risk of SEA/SH; Gender-based violence; mental health issues due to lockdown, school closures and fear due to lack of information on the pandemic; diversion of focus and resources from routine health care and essential services to controlling the pandemic; lesser or no representation of women in the leadership and decision making around tackling the outbreak; and lack of or lower rate of sex-disaggregated data collection.

While the project document for the Bank's \$100 million COVID Emergency Response Project did not spell out gender considerations in its design as the project was prepared in an emergency situation, the Bank will advise the government to ensure that during implementation: a gender-sensitive approach will be taken; sex-disaggregated data are collected; and emergency health facilities are gender-sensitive, etc.

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<sup>1</sup> Australia, EU, Norway, Netherlands, Denmark, US, Canada, Finland, UK, and Sweden

The Bank's Social Development Specialist also briefed the GWG on its recent communication with various entities handling GBV issues (UN agencies, MOWA, shelters, etc.) and shared that "family support helpline 6464", the only GBV hotline available in the country providing psychosocial and legal advice, is no longer in operation. Funding shortage of the NGO that has managed the helpline caused the closure of the hotline services and the NGO is currently managing another helpline ("166") focusing on COVID-19 related matters. The NGO has indicated a possible resumption of the 6464 services when and as funding becomes available. Medica Afghanistan's provision of a helpline is currently in the planning phase. Considering the situations, a GBV specific GRM is needed more than ever and the Bank has held discussions with various gender experts. The Bank's Social Development Specialist also highlighted (according to MOWA) limited resources, spaces, and funding of the shelters, and some shelter's reluctance to accept new women due to the fear of COVID-19 infection in the absence of a proper testing available for the new comers.

A development partner raised two concerns, male-centric COVID-19 diagnostics and the government-led campaigns regarding COVID-19 directed exclusively at men. The concerns were acknowledged and the Bank promised to convey the message to the MOPH through the Bank's health team.

A Co-chair suggested a separate meeting to discuss the status of the women's shelters and the GBV hotline by interested development partners. The Bank invited interested donors to join a meeting planned with UNWOMEN and UNFPA on these topics. USAID expressed their interest to support the shelters and the helpline. Norway highlighted a potential increase in the needs of shelters due to planned release of about 1,000 female prisoners based on the President's decree. It was urged that this issue may be discussed at the forum as well.

Besides the first phase relief effort through the Bank's COVID-19 Emergency Response Project, a question was raised on whether additional responses to COVID-19 are considered through the ARTF program. The Emergency Response Project was a first phase effort to provide the immediate relief of health-related crisis. Cancellations of non-performing projects and repurposing of existing projects have been discussed to make resources available to provide the second phase response to COVID-19. Taking advantage of the established social infrastructure through CCAP, WEE-RDP, etc., a social protection project that provides cash and food transfers is being considered.

The Bank's efforts to ensure gender and GBV considerations in its response to COVID-19 were appreciated. As development partners prepare their bilateral COVID-19 response support, the GWG agreed that emphasizing with the government for more and better attentions to gender and GBV issues will be important.

**Gender considerations in the ARTF financing strategy/Partnership Framework and Financing Program (PFFP):** The Bank's Social Development Specialist presented how the current PFFP (2018-20) includes gender consideration in the strategy document. The document highlighted the Bank's support toward gender mainstreaming agenda of the government and the WBG's gender strategy pillars focused on closing the gender gaps in human development, removing constraints to women's access to more and better jobs, improving women's access to resources, and enhancing women's voice and agency and engaging men and boys. The PFFP also mentions the Bank's gender-tagging strategy as a means to ensure (i) operations have a proper gender-gaps analysis in the relevant sector; actions and specific gender interventions are articulated; and (iii) a clear set of indicators to measure the progress is included. The ARTF GWG's work is also highlighted in the PFFP as a body to ensure sustained attention to gender across the ARTF portfolio. Lastly the PFFP highlights the importance of the Third-party Monitoring as a tool to ensure gender aspects of projects are supervised regularly through the work of female enumerators in the field.

The gender specialist presented proposed gender considerations for the upcoming PFFP (2020-24) maintaining the emphasis on gender-tagging and TPM, more attention to closing gender gap in human

capital and economic empowerment, and WEE (women's economic empowerment) initiatives. Additionally, following gender interventions were suggested by the Bank to be captured in the future ARTF strategy. (1) targeted recruitment of female employees in projects; (ii) ensuring recruitment of gender specialists in all projects; (iii) continue policy dialogue on the role of GUs (Gender Units) within line ministries; (iv) work on GBV GRM; and (v) gender-disaggregated data collection and sharing.

Additionally, social inclusiveness, such as improving ID4D by mass ID/*Tazkira* distribution with identification of disabilities; inclusion of disabilities especially female and child disabilities into social inclusion target groups; among others were proposed to be considered or at the minimum to be discussed in the process of developing the future ARTF strategy in order to raise the profile of these issues amongst the development partners.

The Bank requested GWG members to share their recommendations/comments on the PFFP with the Bank to which the donor Co-Chair agreed to volunteer to consolidate all the feedback from the development partners and present at the next GWG meeting in May.

In response to a question on how the Bank generally defines inclusion (e.g. vertically/horizontally), implement, and monitor, the Bank acknowledged that it is a challenge and underscored the need for analytical work as mentioned in the Gender Policy Notes.

**AOB** – The Bank provided some tips on running video-conference meetings especially for improved virtual GWG meetings experience in the future. Suggested points include to mute when not speaking, use the 'raise your hand' button when one wants to raise a question/comment, and send comments in writing in the chat panel.

**Agreed Actions:**

- Development partners will discuss among themselves their recommendations on the gender considerations for future PFFP (2020-23), which is currently in drafting process. Donor Co-Chair to present the consolidated comments at the May GWG meeting.
- The Bank will share the latest revised gender and social inclusion policy note with the GWG members.
- The Bank will share the full set of policy notes with the development partners once finalized.