

AFGHANISTAN RECONSTRUCTION TRUST FUND (ARTF)

Gender Working Group Virtual Meeting

Tuesday, March 17, 2020

Summary of Discussions

The ARTF Gender Working Group (GWG) held its monthly meeting virtually on 17th March 2020, which was co-chaired by the World Bank (the Bank) and Australia. Representatives of Australia and the US, an MOF representative of WEE-NPP (Women's Economic Empowerment - National Priority Project), WEE-RDP (Women's Economic Empowerment – Rural Development Project) team and the ARTF Administrator attended the meeting.

The meeting agenda was the following: (i) introduction of the new co-Chair of the Gender Working Group (GWG); (ii) status update of the actions agreed at the February GWG meeting; (iii) recap of the gender topics discussed at the Country Portfolio Performance Review (CPPR) and during the Policy Notes consultations; (iv) WEE-RDP update (both gender progress and donor-briefing on general progress); and (v) AOB

Introduction of the new co-Chair of the Gender Working Group (GWG): Australia, represented by Ms. Rose Roxburgh, has kindly offered to co-Chair the ARTF GWG meetings for the next six months. The GWG welcomed the new co-Chair Ms. Rose Roxburgh, while expressing sincere appreciations to the outgoing co-Chair, the EU (European Union), represented by Ms. Grazia Redolfi, for her contributions to facilitate important dialogues on gender issues amongst the donors.

Status of the actions agreed at the February GWG meeting: Agreed actions from the February meeting were recapped. The list of the Mar-Jun 2020 discussion topics was shared along with the minutes of the February GWG meeting. The Bank shared its internal checklist to closing gender gap in staffing and the Gender Equality Report Card. USAID was requested to share the list of corporate level gender indicators (work in progress) once it's finalized.

The last agreed action point was for the Incentive Program-Development Policy Grant (IP-DPG) task team to update GWG on the previously provided comments on the planned prior actions/tranche conditions for the IP-DPG 2020 operation in pipeline. The GWG asked whether an additional gender-sensitive results indicator could be added for the e-governance action. The IP-DPG noted that the e-governance law has been dropped as a policy action, given that timelines for preparation of the law do not align with IP-DPG preparation deadlines. In response to a request that the new Supreme Audit Office Law include requirements for gender-sensitive audits, the team noted that basic financial management and reporting systems do not provide for gender-based data, and that the core priority of the Audit Office is basic financial audits. Building gender considerations into audit should therefore remain a longer-term priority.

As for including result indicators specifically focusing on disability, the IP-DPG team noted major challenges with data availability in current program areas.

Responding to a request to include a gender analysis under the IP-DPG, the team confirmed that a thorough gender analysis is undertaken in preparing the program, which is reflected in the final program document (circulated to the ARTF IP Working Group). The agreed program will include specific gender-sensitive results indicators related to: i) increasing the proportion of women within the civil service; and ii) ensuring availability of sex-disaggregated data on land registrations. Gender issues are mainstreamed through the program, and several policy actions are expected to bring significant benefits to women, including:

- Policy actions on land reform will allow for the recognition of a broader range of documents as evidence of land ownership, including marriage certificates, strengthening land property rights of women;
- Civil service reforms will expand merit-based and competitive recruitment, creating broader opportunities for women;
- In relation to e-payment reforms, facilitating the use of e-money and e-transactions, including for the payment of taxes, may ease women's participation in the formal business sector, especially in the context of cultural constraints to women traveling and queueing in some areas;
- In relation to Public Investment Management reforms, new requirement for gender analysis will ensure that public investment projects reflect the different and often more-serious constraints to accessing services and economic opportunities faced by women.

(iii) a) Gender and Social Inclusion Policy Note (PN): The Gender and Social Inclusion PN is among the recently drafted World Bank's Policy Notes. The team appreciated all the comments provided by the development partners during the consultations held on the week of March 8. The gender presentation during the consultations meeting was organized in the order of presenting the key challenges in the sector, priorities and recommendations to improve gender equality and inclusiveness, current IDA/ARTF portfolio contributions to the policy note which are already addressing some of the challenges noted in the note, and the future plan.

The future plans presented includes scaling-up the WEE-RDP project to cover the entire country, and including soft-skills training, especially on GBV and conflict-resolution for the project beneficiaries.

Some donors encouraged the Bank to focus more on inclusion beyond disability and gender and add more on the intersectionality of exclusion and disability, and to mainstream gender equality across all sectors rather than just providing analytical support.

Some donors encouraged the Bank to closely coordinate with other partners on GBV related work. The Bank is closely coordinating with partners including UNFPA, WHO, and UN WOMEN to address GBV and is planning to go beyond just awareness raising on this matter and form a robust mechanism to deal with GBV in the future – e.g. keeping in mind referral, response, and mitigation aspects.

The Bank explained that all 19 policy notes prepared by the Bank will incorporate critical comments provided by development partners and government counterparts to better articulate sectoral priorities and the Bank's engagement plan. These PNs will be used to assist the new government administration to develop its new strategy as well as to refine and prioritize ARTF programming under the new financing strategy – Partnership Framework and Financing Program.

A short discussion took place on the contribution of various development partners on disability including UNDP, Australia, Canada, and UNMAS (United Nations Mine Action Service). It was acknowledged that there was a lot of work to do, institutionally and in Afghanistan, on disability inclusion. Putting disability topics in the policy note itself is a good step forward helping raise the profile of the issue and start the dialogues with the government and in the development community.

b) Gender discussions at the Country Program Portfolio Review (CPPR) – The Bank team highlighted that inadequate support from the leadership of the ministries as well as of the Project Implementation Units for gender equality work is among the biggest challenges. Another challenge is the capacity of the Gender Units (GUs) as well as lack of professional gender experts in Afghanistan. A third challenge is the pervasive existence of sexual harassment in the workplace and GBV incidents across the country, particularly GBV cases in education and health sectors are more prevalent. Weakness of the GRM (Grievance Redress Mechanism) particularly at the field level where women lack awareness and access to the system is yet

another challenge. Finally, the low number of female staff at the project level as well as the civil service in general is a challenge.

Responding to a question regarding the female staffing target at the PIUs, the team stated that setting a target in some of the sectors such as extractives, public work such as transport and infrastructure is difficult for two reasons: social norms preventing women to work in these sectors; and a shortage of professional female experts. A suggestion made during the CPPR discussion was to develop a guideline through the MoF to ensure that the design of projects promotes women's participation, and sets a quota for staffing for each project.

(iv) WEE-RDP Update – Since the most recent WEE-RDP's mission could not engage donors, the WEE-RDP update included both progress on gender and on all other results indicators. The Project Acting Director explained the on-going active community mobilization activities with many new Self-help groups formed, and around 16 Facilitating Partners (FPs) are already on board and oriented. The project covers 76 districts where offices have been established, and more than 83% of all the recruitments is completed, including Social Organizers, District Coordinators, and District Officers at the field level with meeting the targets of 50% being women.

In terms of specific gender-related progress, the Project Management Office and regional level offices have 18% female staff, while the field level staffing has around 56% of staff being women. More than 80% of the Self-Help Groups are female while it reaches to 100% in the VSLAs and Enterprise Groups. Around 15 exhibitions organized so far have benefited around 750 entrepreneurs among which 95% were female entrepreneurs. A GBV study will help develop various trainings for women in the future.

Availability of funds due to the gap (of around two to three months) created between the two fiscal years has stalled project activities. Another challenge discussed was the fact that there is more demand from the communities' men to cover more male beneficiaries. However, the project considers this challenge a positive sign since it proves that the project is doing well, and the communities are willing to get involved. There were persistent social and cultural sensitivities in some regions. The project team will soon share the annual report that is under work right now.

The GWG participants thanked and appreciated the detailed presentation of the WEE-RDP project and the progress made so far. The Bank stated that the issue of unavailability of funds as a result of crossing of the fiscal year was brought up during the last year's CPPR (November 2019) where the Bank had requested MoF to issue a notification that allows the DG Treasury (Director General) to propose monthly payment equivalent to 1/12th of the allocation of the previous FY to be disbursed in advance so that the projects do not face any shortage of funding. This was done across the portfolio to avoid the cash flow challenges. The Bank will look into this issue and see how the execution of the agreed approach is going.

Agreed Actions:

- The WB requested donors to share any further comments on the draft policy notes before March 26.
- The WB will share the policy notes with the development partners once finalized.
- The WB will share the WEE-RDP presentation and the video link with the GWG participants.
- The WB will check with the MOF to see if the DG Treasury has been able to address the funding shortage as a result of the changing of the FYs.
- The GWG to share feedback on how we can improve the format of virtual meetings as we expect more of these to take place in the coming months.