



250 Police women return from their training in Turkey by UNDP / Igor Ryabchuk / 2017

STRONGER TOGETHER FOR WOMEN IN THE POLICE

'In the past few decades, women's marginalization has been so structural that it is not an easy job to integrate them now in the police,' states an experienced Afghan police-woman. Persisting fragility and conflict in Afghanistan make it even more difficult. Still, the first woman already joined the police force in 1967 and the inclusion of women has been part of police reforms since 2001. Oxfam has been stressing the importance of women's integration and meaningful participation in the police since 2010. Together with its principal partner, the Women and Peace Studies Organization (WPSO), Oxfam has worked in an informal network with allies in civil society, international organizations, and the Afghan government. This case study report analyses how this informal network maneuvers in a fragile context to create mutually beneficial partnerships by connecting agendas at local, national and global levels to advance the protection and meaningful participation of women in the Afghan police.

NOTE TO START WITH

As the inclusion and meaningful participation of women in the Afghan police force is a sensitive issue in a society that is still predominantly conservative, the names of the Afghan women quoted in this paper have been changed and their quotes have also been mixed up to avoid any direct link with the women that so generously and openly supported the learning and sensemaking process that lies at the basis of this report. Our gratitude particularly goes to them, but also to the following people that have made this report possible with their input, advice and feedback: Elizabeth Cameron, A. Heather Coyne, Joke Florax, Wazhma Frogh, Lisanne Hekman, Reza Kateb, Enayatullah Osmani and Akram Zaki.

This paper is part of broader learning about what works when it comes to the implementation of inclusive security and the Women, Peace and Security agenda, most recently also reflected in Oxfam's report 'A Tale of Two Pragmatisms: How to increase the meaningful participation of women in Afghanistan's police force.'¹

¹ Jorrit Kamminga, 'A Tale of Two Pragmatisms: How to increase the meaningful participation of women in Afghanistan's police force', *Oxfam Discussion Paper* (31 March 2020). Online at <https://oxfamilibrary.openrepository.com/handle/10546/620974>.

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INTRODUCTION

As a child growing up in Herat province, Shaima dreamed of joining the police. Once she was old enough, she applied – but for months she heard nothing. Finally she personally approached the commander in charge of her district and demanded a job.

Shaima’s perseverance mirrors the patience and determination that continues to be necessary for organizations working at local, national and global levels to integrate women in the Afghan police. Oxfam Novib and its partner, the Women and Peace Studies Organization (WPSO), have supported this cause together since 2012. Collaborating with a larger influencing network is crucial: the international community in Afghanistan, the Ministry of Interior (MoI), police headquarters throughout the country and Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) must all work together to support policewomen like Shaima.

The Islamic Republic of Afghanistan has been in conflict in one form or another since 1978; its stability and security have been affected by regional power struggles and internal divisions. After the 9/11 attacks in 2001, an initial counter-terrorist response quickly turned into an international state-building mission. From the beginning, this mission focused on a broad programme of security sector reform (SSR), including reform of the police. As so-called ‘lead nation’ following the Bonn Agreement of December 2001, Germany took responsibility for police reform. In May 2002, 40 donor countries committed to financially support the SSR programme.

Police reform was a major challenge. Traditionally, Afghanistan has not had a professional civilian police force.² The Taliban’s defeat had left the country with practically no police at all. There was a complete lack of equipment and supplies. There had been no systematic police training for around two decades.³ The international community had to build up a national police force essentially from scratch.

Although perhaps not the biggest priority, the inclusion of women was part of the police reforms from the start. Here there was some historical precedent, as Afghanistan’s first policewoman joined the

² Qayoom Suroush, ‘Assessing EUPOL Impact on Afghan Police Reform (2007-2016)’, *AREU Research Paper* (January 2018), p. 5. Online at: <https://areu.org.af/publication/1807/>

³ Markus Feilke, ‘German Experiences in Police Building in Afghanistan’, *GRIPS Policy Research Center Discussion Paper*, Nr. 10-2 (January 2010), p. 3. Online at: <http://www.grips.ac.jp/r-center/wp-content/uploads/10-02.pdf>

force back in 1967. Their inclusion, however, has always met resistance. In 2008, Malalai Kakar – the head of Kandahar’s Family Response Unit, and the first woman to graduate from the Kandahar Police Academy – was killed in a Taliban attack.⁴ Several other high ranking policewomen have been killed throughout the years. Despite this, women have continued to join and progress through the ranks, and in 2014 Jamila Bayaz became the first female district police chief.

Oxfam Novib’s commitment to support policewomen in Afghanistan is currently reflected in the Strategic Partnership⁵ with SOMO, ‘Towards a Worldwide Influencing Network’,⁶ and in the Safhe Jaded project.⁷ Both are funded by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and both emphasize connecting dialogue at local, national and global levels. To learn about how these connections work in practice, Oxfam Novib started a learning trajectory including roundtable workshops for stakeholders.

This paper reflects on the outcomes of a roundtable held from 11-13 November 2019 on the integration of women in the Afghan police, complemented by six months of desk research and

⁴ ‘Top Afghan policewoman shot dead’, *BBC News* (28 September 2008). Online at: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/7640263.stm>

⁵ The Strategic Partnership is a five year project (2016-2020) between Oxfam Novib, SOMO and the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In Afghanistan, its implementing partner is the Peace Training and Research Organization (PTRO). The project is implemented in six provinces (Nangarhar, Takhar, Balkh, Daikundi, Herat and Kabul). Its overall objective is to contribute to and monitor the implementation of the Afghan National Action Plan 1325 (NAP 1325), especially on its second pillar (protection).

⁶ Oxfam defines influencing as ‘systematic efforts to change power relationships; attitudes, social norms and behaviours; the formulation and implementation of official policies, laws and regulations; budgets; and company policies and practices in ways that promote more just and sustainable societies without poverty.’

While lobbying, campaigning and influencing are sometimes used interchangeably, the definition used here shows that lobbying and campaigns can both be parts of influencing. As we emphasize the overall systematic efforts to bring about change, we focus on the term ‘influencing’ in this document. The worldwide network refers to the Oxfam confederation’s work to connect civil society and others all over the world to support the voices of marginalized people.

⁷ The Safhe Jaded (‘New Page’) project is funded by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs through the third Dutch National Action Plan (NAP) on UN Security Council Resolution 1325. It was initially a three-year project, running from January 2017 to December 2019, but was extended to December 2020. It is implemented by three national partners (Woman and Peace Studies Organization (WPSO), the Hamida Barmaki for the Rule of Law Organization (HBORL), and Afghan Women’s Educational Center (AWEC)) and two international NGOs (Cordaid and Oxfam). It is a continuation of the Bayan II: Inclusive Governance and Improved Security through Influencing project, implemented within the second Dutch NAP 1325. Covering Kabul and six provinces (Herat, Balkh, Parwan, Nangarhar, Daikundi, and Paktia), it aims to contribute to creating an enabling environment for increased participation and protection of women and girls in Afghanistan, and the implementation and monitoring of Afghanistan’s NAP 1325.

interviews. The first part of this paper illustrates the work of the influencing network at local, national and global levels. The second part draws lessons from that work and the roundtable to answer four learning questions:

- How to co-create influencing work in a network (formal and informal) in a mutual beneficial manner?
- How was district- and national-level influencing work in Afghanistan linked to international initiatives?
- Did programmatic activities interact with the influencing part of the work?
- What capacities of different actors (individual and organizational, as well as the enabling environment) helped the influencing network to work well?

The paper concludes with recommendations for future programming.

I. WORKING TOGETHER TO INFLUENCE POLICY AND PRACTICE

THE NATIONAL STRUCTURE OF THE POLICE FORCE

The Afghan National Police (ANP) falls under the responsibility of the Ministry of Interior (MoI). Within the MoI, the Deputy Ministry of Policy and Strategy (DMPS) was tasked in 2014/2015 with implementing a ten-year vision for the ANP to become a *'unified, capable, and trustworthy civil police service'*, with improved working and living conditions for staff.

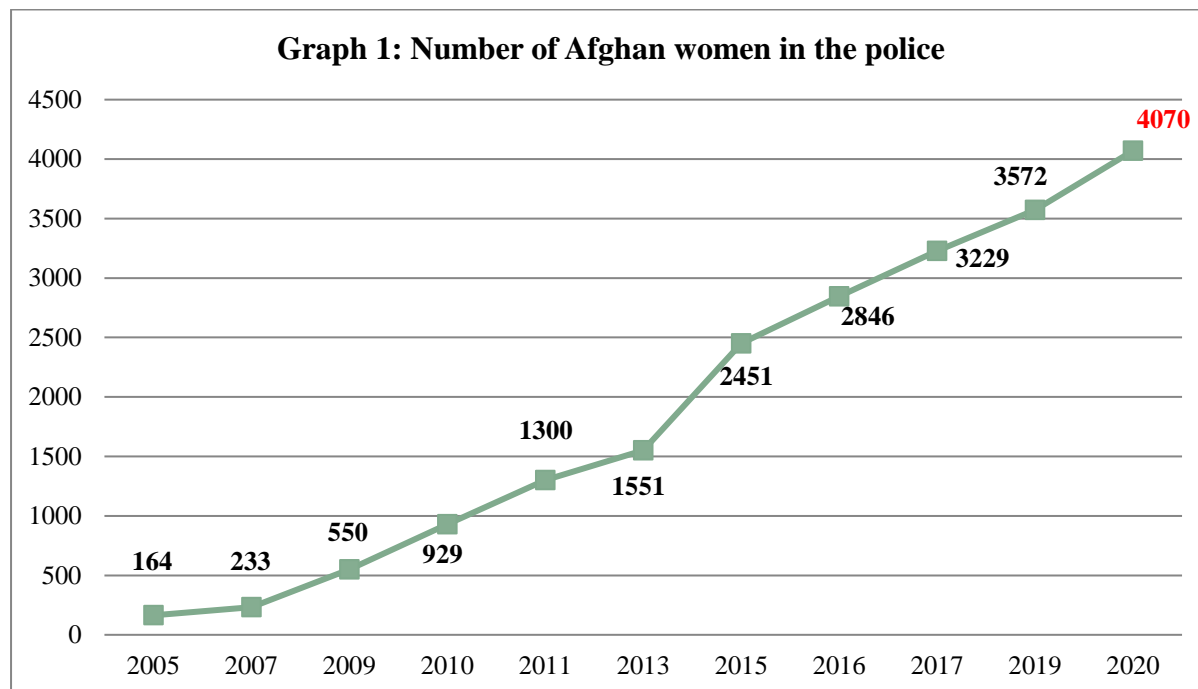
The DMPS is also responsible for the MoI's female personnel recruiting strategy, sometimes referred to as the female integration strategy, which aims to increase women's participation at various levels. The DMPS has developed a Strategy for the Management of Affairs of ANP Female Personnel, which is effectively a roadmap for implementation of the female integration strategy. The strategy was developed by a commission with broad representation.⁸ It covers recruitment and retention, training, capacity building, prevention of harassment, and creating an enabling working environment. Its long-term aim is for women to comprise 10 percent of the total force.

The MoI hosts the Directorate of Human Rights, Child Rights and Gender, established in 2007 as a gender department and subsequently expanded to include human rights and child rights. With around 80 staff, it coordinates the recruitment of qualified female applicants, training and awareness raising. Its status as a General Directorate – directly under the ministry's Chief of Staff – was a sign of prioritization, as it meant short reporting lines to the Minister. However, institutional reforms downgraded the Directorate at the end of 2019, moving it to the Legal Department.

Despite all the efforts over recent years, progress has been slow. Graph 1 shows the estimated numbers of policewomen since 2005. At the time of finalising the research (April 2020) there were

⁸ Including the Deputy Minister of MoI for Policy and Strategy, deputy directors of various ministerial departments, the Ministry for Higher Education, UNAMA, the International Police Coordination Board (IPCB), UNDP, and EUPOL.

4,070 policewomen – around 3.6 percent of the total force of 112,439.⁹ This is far below the interim target of 10,000, which has now been set for 2025.



Source: Oxfam/WPSO research based on various sources; latest two figures from Mol.

OXFAM AND PARTNERS SUPPORTING WOMEN IN THE POLICE IN AFGHANISTAN

Around 2010, Oxfam’s international Rights in Crisis campaign began work in Afghanistan on the protection and promotion of women’s rights as part of the peace process. In 2011, Oxfam launched a briefing paper, *A place at the table: Safeguarding women’s rights in Afghanistan*,¹⁰ which called on the Afghan government to ‘increase substantially women recruits in the security and justice sectors’ and implement the Law on the Elimination of Violence against Women. Early on, there was quite some traction on this topic with international donors, in part because they were concerned with having enough female police to enable women’s participation in the elections of 2009 and 2010. Oxfam managed to use this external hook successfully to influence around women in the police.

⁹ The calculation of the total force size does not take into account an estimated additional 30,000 members of the Afghan Local Police. The April 2020 number comes from Mol. The number of the total actual size of the police force is based on the following report: US Department of Defense, *Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan*. Report to Congress (December 2019), p. 28.

¹⁰ Louise Hancock and Orzala Ashraf Nemat, ‘A place at the table: Safeguarding women’s rights in Afghanistan’, *Oxfam Briefing Paper*, Nr. 153 (3 October 2011). Online at: <https://www.oxfam.org/en/research/place-table-safeguarding-womens-rights-afghanistan>

The focus on violence against women was an indirect entry point for our work on inclusive security, and particularly on the integration and meaningful participation of women in the police. The assumption was that more women in the security forces would contribute to better protection of women in general. More specifically, it was thought that more women in the police would increase women's willingness to report incidents of violence, and the proportion of these reports being documented. This is why the report stressed the importance of Family Response Units, which handle cases of domestic violence and child abuse. Oxfam still believes that this assumption is correct, but acknowledges that progress has been slow.

Another important step was the launch of an advocacy report on women in SSR in May 2011, *No Time to Lose: Promoting the Accountability of the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF)*,¹¹ which had a section on the importance of women in the police. One recommendation reads: *'Increase the number of women in the ANSF, as well as in the design and implementation of ANSF training and mentoring programs'*. This was seen as essential to increase the sensitivity and responsiveness of the security forces, particularly in areas where social norms dictate that women may report crimes only to women. The National Police Strategy at the time recognized that *'gender imbalance in the police affects relationship building between the police and society.'*

The report also recommended developing and supporting systems to ensure adequate protection for women in the police force. Increasing the number of women in training and mentoring teams was expected to help allow for women's safe participation and train the ANSF to better understand and respond to the differing security needs of women and men.

By then Oxfam had clearly incorporated in its advocacy strategy the protection of women in general and policewomen in particular. An evaluation concluded that this work on 'inclusive security' had limited media impact and there was no evidence of significant impact on the number of women in the police force. Nonetheless, it helped keep the women in the police on the international community's agenda.

BUILDING A NETWORK ON FEMALE INTEGRATION IN THE AFGHAN POLICE

From 2013, Oxfam intensified its campaign work on women and the police. It realized that campaigning would be effective only if it went hand-in-hand with programming – which meant

¹¹ Rebecca Barber, 'No Time to Lose: Promoting the Accountability of the Afghan National Security Forces', *Civic, HRRAC, Oxfam and PTRO Joint Briefing Paper* (11 May 2011). Online at: <https://www.oxfam.org/en/research/no-time-lose>

working in alliances and with local implementing partners, the government agencies responsible for inclusive security, and international allies (see boxes 1 and 2).

The Research Institute for Women, Peace and Security (RIWPS) – now WPSO – became Oxfam’s key strategic CSO partner. It was established by Afghan women activists after the first Consultative Peace Jirga in 2010. The partnership grew organically after Oxfam interviewed WPSO’s founding director, Wazhma Frogh, for its research on women and the police. The organizations decided to work together, starting with a one-year pilot during which WPSO supported the launch in 2013 of the research report *Women and the Afghan Police: Why a law enforcement agency that respects and protects females is crucial for progress*.¹² WPSO later became involved in other activities such as advocacy and training of women in the police.

Box 1: Oxfam and international training and advisory efforts

Oxfam developed an informal relationship with UNAMA, the NATO Training Mission – Afghanistan (NTM-A) and other international actors that supported inclusive security. Elizabeth Cameron, Oxfam’s policy advisor between 2013 and 2014, says: *‘The launch of the 2013 Oxfam report really made a difference in terms of our access. We were suddenly invited by the US Embassy to present our findings, and also became the first external persons to be invited to the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) Gender Coordination Group. We also had regular but informal contact with the ISAF gender advisors to exchange information for mutual benefit: to contribute to situational awareness but, for example, also to hear about funding opportunities. Personal connections really mattered to establish relations with international allies.’* (Personal communication, 4 October 2019).

A. Heather Coyne, former police advisor to UNAMA and NGO liaison for NTM-A, adds: *‘We relied on Oxfam to tell us what we were doing wrong. That was our first question to civil society in general. The women’s groups were saying “you are taking the wrong approach”, so civil society’s input was crucial. The Oxfam reporting went much more in detail than we could ever do. For example about the amount of rape and harassment; that level of research and analysis was something we did not have. And the information was very useful to build our case for certain projects and initiatives.’* (Personal communication, 23 November 2019).

WPSO added particular value as one of the few CSOs to be working with the MoI at the time. Engagement intensified after 2014, when WPSO signed an MoU with the Ministry. Wazhma Frogh says: *‘At the time, there was no easy entrance into the Ministry. Advocacy mostly took place from the outside. When we managed to get an MoU with the Ministry in 2014, this opened the door for a more*

¹² Louise Hancock, ‘Women and the Afghan Police: Why a law enforcement agency that respects and protects females is crucial for progress’, *Oxfam Briefing Paper*, Nr.173 (10 September 2013) . Online at: <https://www.oxfam.org/en/research/women-and-afghan-police>.

*formal partnership. After that, work became more systematic and there was also more support from Mol internally. So it became a two-way street.*¹³

Soon afterwards, the Minister invited Wazhma to join a new team of senior experts. This allowed her to identify internal allies, some of whom still support the training Oxfam and WPSO are working on now. Personal connections matter, including for practical needs such as permission to enter police headquarters.

Box 2: Informal partnership between Oxfam Novib and the Dutch police

Since 2013, Oxfam Novib and the Dutch police have informally collaborated on women's integration and participation in the Afghan police force. Both are signatories to the third Dutch NAP for UNSCR 1325: the Dutch police provides training, mentoring and expertise to the Afghan police and Mol, while Oxfam Novib and partners work on research, public campaigning and awareness raising and policy influencing, as well as training and mentoring.

The two organizations co-facilitated a workshop in 2014 with the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs on 'An Integrated Approach to Gender in Afghanistan', to discuss how WPS-related efforts could work together in an integrated way. In 2015, Joke Florax – gender project manager with the Dutch police – was invited to speak at a summer school on WPS, organized by Leiden University and Oxfam Novib, about the experience of the Dutch police in Afghanistan and particularly the importance of operational effectiveness when integrating women in the police.

Later that year, representatives of three Afghan partner organizations – including Wazhma Frogh of WPSO – visited the Dutch police training center in Apeldoorn. Discussions there resulted in an [article](#) on the *Grote Midden-Oosten Platform* in 2017, a [book chapter](#) published in 2019, and an [Oxfam Discussion Paper](#) published in March 2020 called *A Tale of Two Pragmatisms: How to increase the meaningful participation of women in Afghanistan's police force*. The Oxfam office in Afghanistan is also in contact with the Dutch police advisors of the Police Institutional Advisory Team of NATO's Resolute Support mission.

Oxfam Novib and the Dutch police complement one another. The Dutch police gain information and understanding from the research and grassroots perspective of Oxfam and WPSO. Oxfam Novib, which predominantly sees women in the police as an issue of women's protection, equality and empowerment, benefits from the Dutch police's practical experience and professional insights.

Development of the female integration strategy offered a key influencing moment. WPSO provided the baseline data from their research for Oxfam to the committee that was working on the strategy. Wazhma worked with Dr. Sima Samar of the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) on the strategy's complaints mechanism. When the strategy was adopted, WPSO raised

¹³ Wazhma Frogh 2019, pers. comm., 20 November.

awareness about its importance. Wazhma says: *'We turned it into a tool in our police training to create more accountability at provincial level about the integration strategy.'*¹⁴ Her main allies in this work were the Minister's Office, the Department of Policy, and the International Relations directorate.

The model of critical but constructive engagement deepened under the Safhe Jaded project (2017-2020), as the Ministry employed a consultant – a former Deputy Director – to mentor two female focal points and review policies and procedures on gender integration and inclusive security. The presence of the two focal points has increased capacity to collect information on harassment in the police, report cases, consult with victims, and communicate with police Shuras and departments in the provinces. One measure of success is that the MoI has expressed the ambition to scale up this model and have focal points trained in the provinces.¹⁵

TIMELINE OF EVENTS

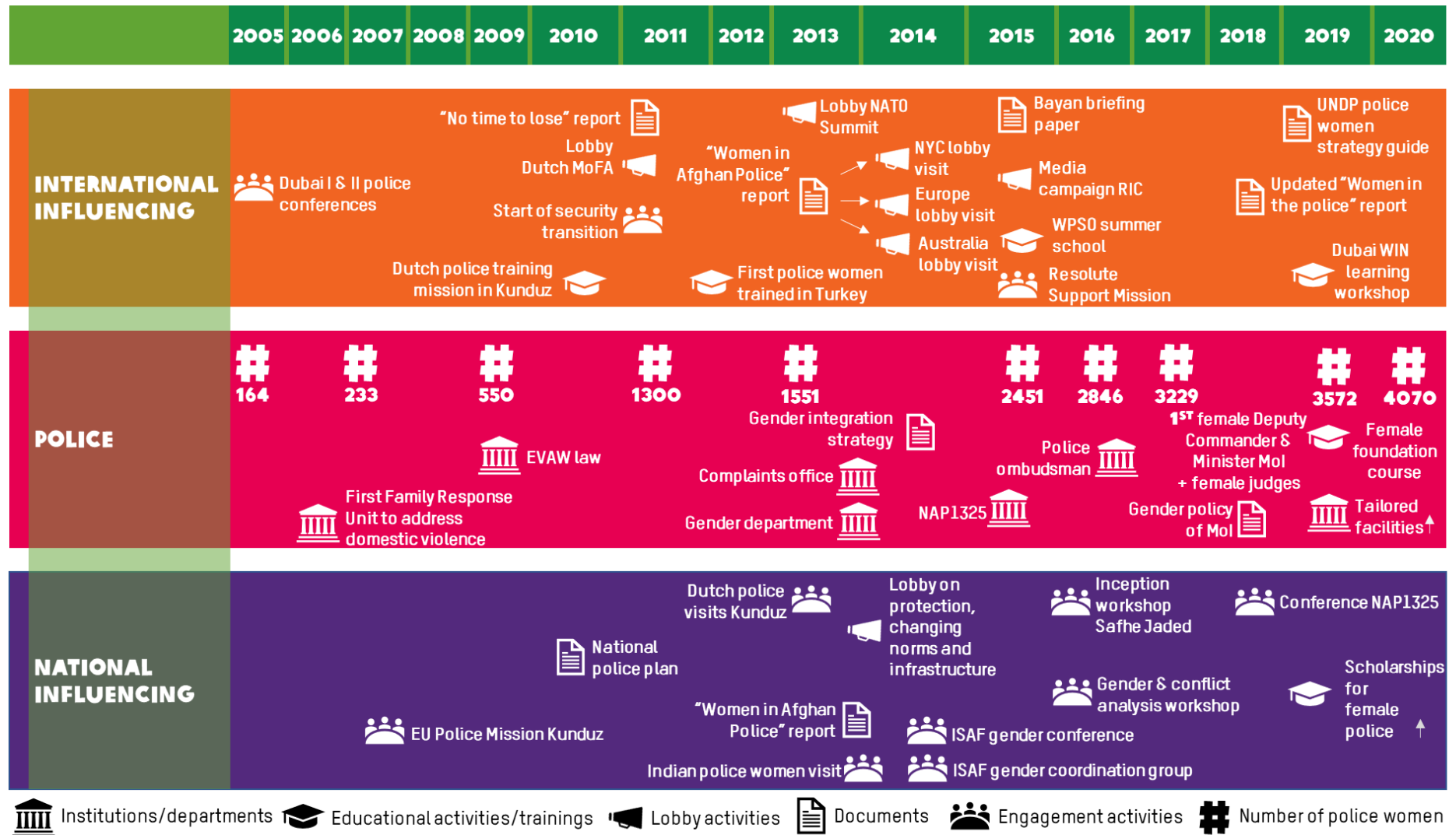
Figure 1 (on the next page) visualizes the timeline of efforts over the last 15 years to support women's integration in the Afghan police, with the MoI's actions in policy and practice given the central position between dynamics in the international community and the national actions of civil society.

The visualization makes clear the amount of work and attention that has gone into the subject. The MoI has developed mechanisms to safeguard women working in the police, and trained policewomen. Support of the international community has been highly influential: for example, through funding police salaries through the Law and Order Trust Fund (LOTFA), administered by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and many advanced training programmes. Important international actors also include the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), AIHRC, the Ministry of Women's Affairs, the Combined Security and Transition Command – Afghanistan (CSTC-A), the governments of Japan, Canada, the US, Turkey, the Netherlands, Sweden, Denmark and Germany, and international CSOs such as Oxfam. At the local level, civil society supports MoI in implementation through training and mentoring programmes.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Meeting with MoI in Kabul on 27 January 2019.

Figure 1: timeline of efforts over the last 15 years to support women’s integration in the Afghan police



II. FOUR LEARNING QUESTIONS

Six months of research into the events outlined above, culminating in a roundtable workshop with key stakeholders in November 2019, explored the learning questions assessed below.

QUESTION 1: HOW TO CO-CREATE INFLUENCING WORK IN A NETWORK (FORMAL AND INFORMAL) IN A MUTUAL BENEFICIAL MANNER?

The MoI, the international community and Afghan civil society worked extensively together on developing the female integration strategy. Final responsibility for implementing the strategy lies with the MoI. In the beginning, all the different departments which form the MoI were involved, informed and committed. However, after a year or so this togetherness fragmented as frequent ministerial changes weakened political will.

Implementation has been hampered by bureaucracy: the MoI's departments were described as having overlapping mandates, responsibilities were not always clear, and how effectively the MoI leadership performs its oversight role could depend on personal relationships, as informal networks co-existed within formal structures. The international community has had significant scope to influence decisions – in our actor analysis, organizations such as CSTC-A and UNDP/LOTFA were considered to be very influential, though generally lacking any direct connection to Afghan people and communities – but the confusing overlap of mandates made it critical to have intimate knowledge of the system.

INFORMAL NETWORKS

The complexity of the MoI's bureaucracy helps to explain why informal networks were so important to get things done. Men had always used 'old boys' networks' to do business with their peers, but women have had to find other ways of networking (see Box 3). There have been some success stories: for example, women working in different departments and communicating through WhatsApp have been able to resolve issues such as the case of a woman who was not accepted for a police job in Nimroz despite her eligibility.

Box 3: Building alliances among policewomen

During the learning workshop and expert interviews, it became clear that policewomen needed assistance to support each other: interviewees mentioned that this did not happen enough because of perceived competition and lack of trust.

A. Heather Coyne says: *'We brought women together in Policewomen Councils to help create alliances between them. But you also need to provide an enabling environment for these alliances to be built. The problem is the Ministry, the institution itself, not necessarily the men. So you need to create the networks of women to build up a critical mass of women that are increasingly respected. The men inside the MoI cannot really help doing what they do if the institution is not changing.'* (Personal communication, 23 November 2019).

At the moment, the female integration strategy has some male champions within the MoI who can smooth implementation internally. In the past, there were also important advocates in MoI and the Ministry of Hajj and Religious Affairs. Such male champions were described as crucial for gaining support from other male allies and encouraging fathers to let their daughters become policewomen. This institutional support has become increasingly important since the downgrading of the gender directorate within the Ministry and the removal of its direct line to the Chief of Staff. Another policewoman, Freshta, says: *'Making informal networks effective really depends on the personal connections and relations that somebody has.'* Outside the MoI, the formal roles of police officers restrict their ability to influence. This makes it more difficult to establish relationships with key stakeholders such as the Ministry of Women's Affairs, the First Lady's office or the Women's Affairs Commission of Parliament.

The Directorate of Human Rights, Child Rights and Gender also has informal linkages to the international community, which is generally perceived as driving the agenda on female police issues and can influence the MoI leadership by, for example, including the integration of female police as a prerequisite for funding. Throughout the roundtable discussion, there was recurrent mention of the dominance of international actors, which seems to be at odds with local ownership, which is also considered one of the cornerstones of SSR.¹⁶ International actors are also service providers – as with the Turkish training programme in Sivas and the Dutch police training Afghan policewomen – but there are constraints. For example, the recent evaluation of the Dutch police training

¹⁶ See, for example, the website of the International Security Sector Advisory Team (ISSAT) of the Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance (DCAF): <https://issat.dcaf.ch/Learn/SSR-in-Practice/Principles-in-Practice/Local-Ownership>.

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mission in Kunduz concluded that the short duration of the mission made it difficult for the trainers to establish good working relationships with their counterparts.¹⁷ Security protocols restrict international actors to training in secure locations (or even abroad in the case of Sivas) rather than on-the-job in communities.

Afghan CSOs could bridge this lack of contact with Afghan society, but most are not very involved in the female integration strategy: only WPSO has been involved from the start, helped by Wazhma's advisory role at the MoI, while others such as the Afghan Women's Network have only sporadically engaged. Explanations include CSOs seeing security sector work as too sensitive or technical, or lack of financial support for such civil society programming. As a former MoI policy officer explains: *'We are an aid economy, so the government works primarily with bilateral and multilateral partners. When it comes to the local level, they are not really taking any advice from the communities, but only listen to those that are providing the money.'*

FORMAL WAYS OF WORKING TOGETHER

WPSO and MoI have a formal relationship on the implementation of the female integration strategy. The MoU signed in 2014 enables WPSO to request official meetings without having to use informal channels. WPSO and MoI have developed a model of constructive yet critical engagement that involves WPSO supporting MoI with knowledge and capacity, while also advocating to keep gender on the agenda. Freshta mentions: *'In joint conferences with WPSO, we also bring different parts of society together in our partnership. What WPSO brings are the civil society voices.'* WPSO is also considered a bridge between MoI and the international community – for example, through its relationship with Oxfam in Afghanistan.

Despite its independency, it seems WPSO has almost become an implementing arm of the MoI, coordinating with the gender directorate on events and the department of staff on trainings, and reaching out to regional departments. At provincial level, WPSO coordinates with the community policing, legal, women's rights and education departments. It delivers trainings at grassroots level to newly recruited policewomen.

There is a risk that WPSO may become so closely involved with MoI that it loses the critical voice of civil society, especially as each new Minister can change the terms of

¹⁷ Policy and Operations Evaluation Department (IOB), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Netherlands, 'Op zoek naar draagvlak: de geïntegreerde politietrainingsmissie in Kunduz, Afghanistan', *post-mission evaluation report*, summary (November 2019), p. 9.

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engagement, and given the general trend towards the shrinking space for influencing.¹⁸ WPSO also faces the challenge of having minimal interaction with society due to insecurity, making it harder to tackle persistent social norms that undermine the acceptance of women in the police. Such restrictions put a limit to what formal and informal networks can achieve to help implement the female integration strategy.

QUESTION 2: HOW WAS DISTRICT- AND NATIONAL-LEVEL INFLUENCING WORK IN AFGHANISTAN LINKED TO INTERNATIONAL INITIATIVES?

The political landscape and commitment to the Afghan NAP 1325 should increase local, national and international support for integration of women in the police of Afghanistan. The international and national level are linked mostly through the support of countries and international institutions for SSR and integrating women in the police. Linkages between national and provincial level are mostly through the top-down, hierarchical structure of MoI, reinforced by national CSOs such as WPSO that coordinate projects in Kabul with implementing partners in the provinces.

The weakest links are between provincial and district level. Beyond the chain of command within the police force, there seems to be no comprehensive network to effectively reflect the needs of citizens – an important gap, as conservative traditions and harmful social norms are strongest in the districts furthest from provincial centres. This is also where fewer policewomen can be found. Monitoring reports of the AIHRC or internationally funded projects do collect information about grassroots needs in terms of protection and security, but such assessments are not necessarily directly or effectively linked to the police itself. Critical and constructive engagement with the MoI in Kabul needs to be complemented by mechanisms for citizens and civil society groups to connect with the police and justice providers at grassroots level.

¹⁸ In Afghanistan, government agencies are becoming more conservative and controlling. They are described as perceiving civil society as competitors and outside of their control. In this regard, the positive outlook on the role of civil society that was evident at the Brussels Conference on Afghanistan in 2016 seems a thing of the past. President Ghani has been critical about the limited impact of money spent by NGOs (roughly 815 million euro in 2017) and wants to increase control over donor funding and NGO operations. Like in many other countries, CSOs are suffering from increased bureaucracy and restrictions, and there is much less funding available than a few years ago. Starting activities is complex, as permissions are needed at national level and in each province. This may worsen, as the Ministry of Economy has recently circulated a stricter draft policy which would mean increased government control over CSOs. Partner experience also shows that the government is asking CSOs to align with government priorities and provide more tangible support, such as facilities or infrastructure, instead of only soft components.

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THE WOMEN PEACE AND SECURITY AGENDA SET BY A NETWORK OF ALLIES

Implementation of the female integration strategy in Afghanistan – and the broader inclusive security agenda – has been boosted by the increasing international recognition of women’s participation in conflict resolution and peacebuilding after the adoption of UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (WPS) in 2000.¹⁹ As of May 2020, a total of 84 countries have adopted a National Action Plan on UNSCR 1325, with many more national and regional protocols, projects and programmes, and ten Security Council resolutions.²⁰

Many donors in Afghanistan have embraced this agenda, funding civil society programming. Afghanistan’s NAP was adopted in June 2015 and is now in its second phase. However, it has not been fully implemented, in part because of lack of agreement between donors and the Afghan government on its financing, and in part as the signatory ministries – in addition to funding – still also lack knowledge and commitment. WPSO tries to address this through evidence-based advocacy, linking MoI decision makers and the international community. The WPS Working Group in Kabul brings together representatives of civil society, the government and the international community, including the embassies of some countries funding work on women in the police, but it is more an information exchange forum than a catalyst for action.

INFLUENCING THE MINISTRY OF INTERIOR AS A TOP-DOWN STRUCTURE

Afghanistan’s government structure is top-down, with financial and planning decisions made by ministers in Kabul. In previous Oxfam programmes such as Citizens First (2012-2016), the limitations of district- or provincial-level influencing trajectories were revealed when important financial decisions were required.

With the MoI, implementation happens at provincial (headquarters) or district (police station) level, but decisions come from Kabul. Despite its top-down structure, however, the MoI has many different agencies and departments working in parallel on gender issues, and there is still a lack of shared understanding amongst them. As a result, the

¹⁹ P. Kirby and L. Shepherd. 2016. Reintroducing Women, Peace and Security. *International Affairs*, 92:2, pp. 249-254.

²⁰ Currently ten UN Security Council resolutions make up the Women, Peace and Security agenda: 1325 (2000); 1820 (2009); 1888 (2009); 1889 (2009); 1960 (2010); 2106 (2013); 2122 (2013); 2242 (2015); 2467 (2019) and 2493 (2019).

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people in charge of implementing gender integration in the provinces often simply do not know how to go about it – especially given that gender norms tend to be more conservative at provincial level.

The gender integration strategy is still considered a positive, comprehensive strategy by all actors we have engaged with. Gulalai, a policewoman, mentions: *'In the past few decades, women's marginalization was so structural that it is not an easy job to integrate them. So this strategy represents solidarity with women.'* Her colleague Freshta agrees: *'This strategy can guide men and women's actions and make sure they are better integrated.'* At the highest level, there is a sense of joint purpose, but a lack of ownership translates into slow progress in implementation, which is further complicated by the persistence of institutional barriers.

The introduction of a division of police roles into three types – one for women only, one for men only, and one for both – is perceived as hampering the long-term aim of gender equality. The MoI currently offers ten types of incentives for women, from recruitment bonuses to relocation and housing allowances, but these may be backfiring as men consider them to be unfair.²¹ The roundtable discussions highlighted many examples of policewomen not being accepted as full members of the force – for example, being given only basic tasks – and facing consequences if they speak out about this.

Policewomen interviewed for the 2018 Monitoring Report²² of the two ongoing Oxfam projects mentioned instances of workplace harassment within the police department as well as on the street. In some police departments, the leadership was described as being indifferent to such abuse. Lack of women-specific facilities remains an issue: in 16 provinces, there are still limited or no separate facilities for women to eat, wash or change clothes.

The social norms that hold back female integration are deeply ingrained and difficult to tackle. Strategies include drawing attention to role models, building the capacity of supportive individuals (champions) within the MoI, and liaising with the international community – but the recent downgrading of the Directorate of Human Rights, Child Rights and Gender within the MoI shows how far is left to travel at national level, let alone in the

²¹ US Department of Defense, 'Enhancing security and stability in Afghanistan', *Report to Congress* (June 2018), p. 97.

²² APPRO, PTRO and Oxfam, *Afghanistan's National Action Plan 1325: Regional Monitoring Report* (October 2018).

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provinces and districts. It seems a gradual process of normalisation can succeed, spurred by increased visibility, meaningful participation and growing institutional and societal support, but it remains unclear how this process can be accelerated in the most effective and safest way – making sure that policewomen are not sent in harm’s way.

CONSTRUCTIVE ENGAGEMENT WITH THE MOI

Working with the MoI in a critical and constructive way has been one of the key success factors of the past years. However, as Box 4 illustrates, heavy bureaucracy makes it hugely challenging to set up programming work in the provinces. Bureaucracy affects not only the MoI’s partnerships with CSOs such as WPSO, but also their own implementation of policies – and, according to workshop participants, the personal development of officers. Workshop participants consider the lack of implementation of the female integration

Box 4: The challenge of bureaucracy in Afghanistan

Every time WPSO wants a meeting with the MoI, they need to submit a request spelling out the purpose and agenda. When WPSO has a contract with a funding agency for a project such as Safhe Jaded, they need to submit to the Ministry of Economy, in English: 1) the contract; 2) MoU with the target ministry, in this case the MoI; 3) a concept note with proposed activities; 4) the project budget; 5) the project action plan; 6) a project summary; and 7) a special project form template. They also need to submit documents to the MoI, and give a presentation.

If approval is granted for work in the provinces, the MoI gives WPSO a letter addressed to the provincial Departments of Economy (DoE). In addition to this letter, WPSO needs to submit to each provincial DoE the same documents as above, now translated from English into Dari or Pashto, and with the budget and action plan specific to the province. Again there will be a presentation. The DoE will then provide WPSO with a letter to present to relevant departments, such as the police. Once these entities confirm their agreement, the DoE will issue an implementation letter.

strategy as a good example of the problems created by there being too many formal structures and processes.

Nonetheless, WPSO emphasizes that when all bureaucratic hurdles have been cleared, there is room for real collaboration. For example, different departments of MoI and provincial police departments are working together closely with WPSO to organize information sessions and support the onboarding of newly recruited policewomen. Over time, WPSO has built up a level of trust with the MoI and in the provinces where they have worked. Whilst work on women in the police is taking off only in a few of the more liberal provinces, it is a basis for influencing work to address the social norms in governance that hamper implementation more widely.

QUESTION 3: DID PROGRAMMATIC ACTIVITIES INTERACT WITH THE INFLUENCING PART OF THE WORK?

As described in Part I, Oxfam quickly learned that campaigning for women in the police would need to be complemented by on-the-ground support for implementation of the female integration strategy. This dual role of civil society requires a delicate balance between independence and partnership.

The annex to the female integration strategy sets out steps for implementation which seek to combine safeguarding of women in the police with recruiting more women. According to the roundtable discussions, these can be difficult to reconcile, as lack of safeguarding makes it harder to recruit women, but more recruitment is necessary to create a critical mass of women who can make the case for more effective safeguarding. Shaima illustrates one side of the debate: *'No woman will come to work for the police if she feels threatened. (...) Protection is key.'* Her colleague Naghma disagrees: *'Participation is more important. If you do not take the risk and participate, you will also never get the protection. So these two things are related to each other.'* At the end of the roundtable, there seemed to be a general agreement about the need for participation and protection to go hand in hand.

Protection within the department – such as separate changing rooms, and complaints procedures – is only part of the problem. The lack of societal protection is identified by the participants as a big gap. Policewomen are generally not accepted by the public, which brings huge risks to those performing public-oriented tasks – but only by being more visible can policewomen become more accepted. Freshta explains: *'To change and improve the [security] situation, we need to take the risks. This is the reality (...) If, for example, a women escapes home because of domestic or sexual violence, the first stop for her would be the police station; If there is a women in that station, she can trust more the woman. This means that their role is very important.'*

Considering the need for protection and participation to go hand in hand, the influencing work tries to propose solutions for implementation. For example, after WPSO and AIHRC convinced the MoI to include a solid complaints mechanism in the female integration strategy, WPSO held trainings to raise awareness of both male and female police officers about their right to raise complaints and how to do so. The appointment of the two female

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focal points to the MoI in Kabul has increased capacity to collect information on harassment and could be replicated in the provinces.²³

There is a limit to the services that civil society can or should provide. While WPSO is involved in training, mentoring and recruiting, many services are best funded by bigger donor projects and funds such as LOTFA, and ideally implemented directly by the Afghan government itself. Civil society should primarily focus on what it can do better than funds such as LOFTA and international organizations: representing the needs and priorities of hard-to-reach communities to the providers of security and justice in Afghanistan.

QUESTION 4: WHAT CAPACITIES OF DIFFERENT ACTORS (INDIVIDUAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL, AS WELL AS THE ENABLING ENVIRONMENT) HELPED THE INFLUENCING NETWORK TO WORK WELL?

Much of the programming work carried out by Oxfam and WPSO involves training, other forms of capacity building and technical assistance to the MoI. It is not only the MoI that benefits: WPSO has become more professional through its constant engagement with the MoI, and has learned from Oxfam about strategic advocacy work; Oxfam depends on WPSO for local knowledge about how the government and security sector works, to inform its campaigning and programming.

At the individual level, results are driven by motivation, passion and determination. Mentors play a powerful role in supporting women in the MoI or police – indeed, the mentor-focal point model may be more effective than training, as a more practical, on-the-job type of capacity building. There are also opportunities for ad hoc capacity building through role models and strengthening networks.

Box 5 shows the different training opportunities women have when joining the police. On paper, individual capacity building should lead to organizational development – but this is difficult to quantify due to high staff turnover, the changing environment and different understandings of gender. In practice, the impact of training on building sustainable operational knowledge may be quite limited.

²³ Meeting with the Deputy Director of the Directorate of Human Rights, Child Rights and Gender of MoI in Kabul on 27 January 2019.

Box 5: Capacity building opportunities for policewomen in Afghanistan

Training opportunities for policewomen in Afghanistan vary according to levels of entry. Most trainings focus on technical skills, rather than soft skills such as leadership and communication. The Directorate of Human Rights, Child Rights and Gender has a central role in assigning policewomen to trainings that best fit their career aims and abilities, while WPSO supports the rolling out of trainings. Figure 2 shows the training options new female recruits get offered through Mol and figure 3 shows the additional technical training the Safhe Jaded project is supporting. Additionally there are trainings available through the international community, like a police training in Turkey, funded by the Japan International Cooperation Agency and training from CSTC-A and UNDP/LOFTA.



Figure 2: Training options for new female recruits offered through Mol



Figure 3: Additional training offered through the Safhe Jaded project

The main focus seems to be on changing organizational culture through more gender training and awareness raising. There is progress – the Directorate of Human Rights, Child Rights and Gender is headed by a woman and since 2018 there is a female Deputy Minister of Interior for Policy and Strategy. – but it is slow: gender units in provinces are still often

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run by men and not necessarily by the male champions that are crucial for progress. Organizational capacity on gender is often locked into such gender units, which can be marginalized and far away from decision-making on inclusive security; knowledge about the female integration strategy and broader agendas such as Women, Peace and Security is still very low, even among senior officials.

Programming has so far focused less on the enabling environment than on capacity building, despite the fact that social norms cannot be addressed through capacity building. As Zargul's story (Box 6) illustrates, changing social norms starts in the family: policewomen tend to have the support of at least one male family member. After training, another difficult question is where to place policewomen: many do not want to work close to their homes as they do not want their local community to know they are working for the police. However, at the same time, placements do not take into account women's safety of travel to and from work. The experience of another policewoman who participated in the roundtable, Parveen, is representative: she must either use five different forms of public transport, or travel in a car with other policewomen – which may

Box 6: Zargul's story – the effects of family pressure

Zargul, one of the policewomen interviewed, first expressed an interest in joining the police force when still at high school. Her family was against it, telling her it was not a good working environment for a girl. By the time she left school, six years ago, a new training programme was being advertised that allowed women to enter the police at a more senior level. Her father reluctantly allowed her to take the exams, and she was accepted into the programme. Zargul says: *'My father's opinion was that joining the police was not the right choice because of my safety, but he allowed it because of my happiness.'* All her brothers, however, were strongly opposed and still do not approve of her police career. In deference to her family's concerns about her safety, Zargul has not taken up an operational role, instead she works in the personnel department.

make her even more vulnerable to attacks.

Despite vast investments in literacy courses during the past two decades, many policewomen are still perceived to be uneducated, which means the opportunities and roles open to them are limited. There is a clear exception to this: the majority of policewomen comes from the Hazara community, which was described as generally having good levels of education and being more tolerant about allowing their wives and daughters to join the police and army. In general, those women who are under pressure to earn quickly – for example, if they are widows and not supported by their family – may

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have little choice but to enrol in the shortest capacity building module, which teaches them to work at a check point. This is a high-risk role, with many casualties due to attacks.

The female integration strategy aims for meaningful participation of women in the police force, not just representation: only if women rise to senior and respected roles will patterns of stigmatization and discrimination be broken rather than unintentionally reinforced. Positive discrimination is one solution, but it can create challenges if women are promoted to roles for which their capacity has not yet been built. Men may also resent differential treatment: for example, it was mentioned in the discussions that policewomen trained in Sivas, Turkey, are automatically promoted to second lieutenant, a rank which men need much more time to attain.

More educated women who join the police prefer to work in administrative positions, which are safer but do not offer operational experience or visibility. The social acceptability of such roles is increasing. Tasneem says: *'Four years ago, it was shameful to send a girl to the police, but nowadays some of the neighbours are coming to me asking how their relatives could join the police.'* However, this is the case only in more liberal provinces, and a shortfall of the staffing plan is that each province has essentially the same quota for women police officers. That means there are huge waiting lists in more progressive provinces, while in more conservative provinces – such as Nuristan, Kunar and Khost – there are only a handful of female police officers, and the rest of the quota is filled with men.

CONCLUSION: THE WAY FORWARD

Oxfam Novib's current programming to support policewomen in Afghanistan through the Strategic Partnership and the Safhe Jaded projects is coming to an end in 2020. The above analysis points to four key lessons learned, which we hope will guide future programming:

1. Though it is slow, progress is possible. A growing number of champions and role models are contributing to small shifts in behaviour and perceptions, gradually normalizing women's presence in the police force. If a critical mass of women within the police force can be reached and their participation increasingly becomes meaningful, this can reduce the societal and institutional resistance over time. Although the network is still largely informal, leverage is given to its policy asks. Given the slow speed of progress, long-term programming and support commitments are needed, but all with aim to promote local ownership and self-sustainability.

2. Social norms need to be addressed at district level to support the implementation of existing policies for the protection of policewomen in Afghanistan. This requires broader engagement of the network with civil society and communities, as much as the fragile and conflicted affected context allows. Without a structural system in which grassroots concerns and the security and protection needs of women are taken up by the Kabul-centred bureaucratic system in an effective way, it will be difficult to advance on inclusive security.

3. Working through informal networks in the MoI is critical. Informal networks, built on personal relations, are crucial to promote inclusive security and complement more formal, bureaucratic networks. The informal networks of policewomen themselves are at the heart of building more solidarity and support between women, but the networks between civil society and the government; and between civil society and the international support agencies, are equally important. Scaling up the mentoring model could be an important way to expand the network of allies locally, but more ways should be explored to move from training to more practical, hands-on support for women in the police force.

4. Long-term international support is still needed. Although over time, the role of the international support agencies can change and will be reduced, it is important for the

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international community to continue to build the capacity of women and men within MoI and support the implementation of the female integration strategy. Without international support and incentives, this strategy – and inclusive security in general – risks further deprioritisation as the societal and institutional resistance is still so strong. Although international support is not sustainable in the long run, a further push is necessary to create an Afghan-owned enabling environment for the formal and informal networks supporting policewomen in Afghanistan.

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