

Excerpt from:

## *Guide for Facilitating the Preparation of Women-Focused Development Plans*

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The full document was also shared with partner organizations, such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and several donor governments

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### **1. LAYING THE FOUNDATION**

#### **1.1 CONTEXT**

"The citizens of Afghanistan, whether woman or man, have equal rights and duties before the law." – Article 22 of *The Constitution of Afghanistan*

A developing community resembles a bird. Men and women are the wings of this bird. A bird can't simply fly unless its two wings are equally balanced!

Under the Afghanistan law, women have equal rights to men. However, local culture and tradition throughout rural communities in Afghanistan greatly limit opportunities for women, including their involvement in development endeavours such as the establishment of District Development Assemblies (DDAs) and District Development Plans. In some villages, women are allowed to attend government-sponsored community meetings with men, but not to travel outside the village. In others, such as in Kandahar and much of the Southern and Eastern provinces, women are not allowed to leave their houses, let alone travel.

In addition, women in rural Afghanistan have enormous household responsibilities; they simply cannot afford to spend the same time in development meetings as men. Women also lack of experience in participating in development activities and community discussions, planning and decision-making, and leadership responsibilities, and their lack of understanding of abstract issues related to project development, project planning, budgets, savings schemes, etc. Illiteracy is also an obstacle.

Still, involvement of women in DDAs is slowly happening across rural Afghanistan, the result of ongoing outreach and trust-building efforts. Local government staff under NABDP, who participate in organizing DDAs have established relationships with local male leadership, and this relationship allows them to personally encourage support of women's engagement in DDAs. Women's participation in DDAs is equally critical to men's, as a DDP must come from and serve all local people. Therefore,

ongoing strategies must be identified and undertaken that will substantially increase such participation, while being empathetic and respectful for cultural constraints and women's substantial household responsibilities.

This non-threatening strategy of encouragement through established relationships has led to women being allowed to participate, even if in a limited capacity, in such meetings thereby allowing women's unique views and needs, equal to those of men, to be at least somewhat, if not equally, represented. Even in several districts of Kandahar, men have gradually allowed their women to participate in DDA/P exercises.

## **1.2 SCENARIOS**

The ultimate goal is that all women and men will contribute in DDA and to DDPs equally. The goal is not only to identify development projects to benefit women, but to also build their capacities regarding actively participating, organizing and leading community meetings and activities. But organizers must realize that this is not usually possible from the very beginning and takes much time, support, and non-threatening encouragement to happen.

Those who have been closely-involved with helping to cultivate these opportunities in DDA/P exercises feel that rural women can meet for a maximum of two days, in order not to greatly interfere with their substantial household responsibilities. These one to two-day meetings generally follow the same planning formulation as the men, but in an adapted way that is more specific and focused on matters pertaining to rural women.

In some provinces, mixed DDAs (where men and women meet together) are possible, per culture and tradition. In other areas, male and female DDA members meet separately, with the facilitators working to ensure that in any final decision-making, women's issues will have equal weight to men's. Negotiations and communications between the two groups is done by a trusted male community member to whom many of the women have kinship with and who is accepted by the female group, by a trusted elder community woman who has kinship and is accepted by the male group, or by an outside facilitator accepted by both groups.

If women DDA cannot be established due to the cultural concerns, barriers, or lack of human resources, a women sub-committee should be established. This sub-committee is different from a full women's DDA in that there is not a requirement that women's priorities come from all clusters or districts; rather, women's priorities are identified through a group analysis of common trends in the district. In the case of a sub-committee, three or four selected sites across the district, once carefully facilitated, should produce a list of common priorities that can mirror forth the overall priorities of women in the entire district. This is a general feature of the NABDP Community Empowerment Component: its focus on common priorities rather than specific needs of a particular group.

Whether a full women's DDA is established or a women's sub-committee, there must be a needs assessment to justify either action, together with a letter of justification authorizing the establishment of DDA or women's sub-committee, sent to the provincial governor on behalf of the relevant community.

NABDP recommends that women's DDA establishment begins where men's DDA establishment has already taken place, and where there is a strong feeling of mutual trust and support between facilitators and DDA members.