

**The Rights of Afghan Women during the Transition Period:
Cordaid's Preliminary Research Findings**

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Human Rights Funding News, IHRFG e-Newsletter, June 6, 2013

Introduction

Cordaid, together with the Afghan Women's Network (AWN) and the Afghanistan Public Policy Research Organization (APPRO), commissioned [a qualitative study](#) to document the effects of Afghanistan's political transition on women's security and to serve as a tool for advocacy. In this article, I outline the preliminary results of the first round of interviews with Afghan women. These initial insights provide a nuanced look at the daily reality of women in seven different Afghan provinces, and illuminate several key opportunities for funders at this critical stage. The official launch for the transition monitoring study was held in Afghanistan in the first week of June, 2013, and key findings will be presented to European parliamentarians (MEPs) on June 4, and to the North American Treaty Organization (NATO) on June 7.

The transition monitoring study represents a key component of Cordaid's work. For almost a century, Cordaid has been fighting poverty and social exclusion in fragile and conflict-affected areas. Cordaid helps to build flourishing communities by ensuring security, opportunity and promoting empowerment. This includes building models of justice that respect local traditions and needs and engaging women to build peace. Cordaid's programme on Women's Leadership for Peace & Security looks to the voices of local women as a guide, bringing local women together to connect their input and views to policy makers at all levels. This results in more effective policies attuned to the daily realities of women, which are therefore better positioned to protect their rights.



Source: Cordaid

Background

In 2011 the President of Afghanistan announced the transition of security responsibility to the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF), scheduled to be completed by the end of 2014. This transition means that ANSF is solely responsible for ensuring the safety of the Afghan population – a task that was previously carried out in collaboration with the International Military Forces (IMF). Following this announcement, women across Afghanistan voiced their concerns about the hard-won rights of Afghan women being put at serious risk. These women expressed that the execution of the transition process is focused on military and security matters at the exclusion of priorities involving the rule of law, governance, access to justice, and security from a gender perspective. In addition, anecdotal evidence in the first year of the transition suggested that overall security conditions had deteriorated in the transitioned areas, affecting women's security adversely.

The monitoring study consists of individual interviews and focus group discussions in nine districts across seven provinces in Afghanistan. Starting in September 2012 and over a period of approximately 18 months until the transition process has been completed by the end of 2014, the same people,

mostly women, will be interviewed in four cycles to trace and observe possible changes in their personal security. The assumption is that interviewing the same individuals, to the extent that this is possible, will help with forming consistent observations and allow for tracking changes over time.

Preliminary Results of the Study

One of the most striking discoveries unveiled in our preliminary findings is the confidence most Afghan women expressed in the ANSF and the Afghan National Police (ANP), with women from the Helmand province as the only exception. Interviewees believed that civilian casualties have decreased significantly since the ANSF was given responsibility for the nation's security. Communities repeatedly confirmed that they were pleased with the ANSF assuming greater responsibility. More specifically, communities indicated that they preferred having their houses searched by other Afghans rather than foreign troops. Despite the positive image the ANSF seems to have gained, interviewees also discussed their limitations. For example, many of the interviewees suggested that the ANP and the ANSF should be given more support in terms of technical equipment along with appropriate training.

At the same time, the study revealed that security in several parts of Afghanistan has decreased since the security transition two years ago. Based on our interviews, there are strong indications that rural districts, especially those surrounding some provincial capitals, are becoming increasingly inaccessible to the ANSF and ANP, as well as to government employees, civil society organizations, and civilians, due to the armed opposition groups (AOG) who are assuming control in these areas. Female development workers and civil society staff also interviewed for this study have repeatedly confirmed that, since the security transition in their districts, their freedom of movement in remote areas has become increasingly restricted. This has several implications for women. First, women's access to justice and daily services appears to be increasingly limited. Secondly, women in rural areas are increasingly deprived of potentially empowering opportunities, including education, literacy courses, and vocational trainings. Many development projects offering these opportunities to women have ceased their activities. It appears the international NGOs and development agencies have withdrawn from transitioned provinces alongside IMF forces.

In districts where Armed Opposition Groups (AOG) or the Afghan Local Police (ALP) have gained a stronger hold, women working outside their homes clearly indicated that they felt less secure and worried more about their personal safety. In some of the districts, women have resigned from work, or are under growing family pressure to remain home as a result of increased direct and indirect threats and intimidation from different actors such as the ALP, religious leaders, AOG, and even unknown sources. In places where AOG have reasserted themselves and where parallel justice and rule of law systems are fully functional, women's situation with regard to overall security and access to justice, work, services and their mobility has worsened significantly and now resembles the period before 2001, when foreign troops first appeared in Afghanistan.

This baseline study's findings are both encouraging and discouraging. Additional research is needed to offer a more in-depth look at the comprehensive impact of the security transition in Afghanistan. The next research cycles will continue to shed light on the ways in which the transition process is affecting the rights of women in Afghanistan.

Opportunities for Funders

Cordaid will continue to support this research and will continue to work with the Afghan women's

organisations to bring this critical local perspective on peace and security to policy and decision-making levels. However, additional funding is needed for research as well as for advocacy work and other activities. The study offers a range of recommendations for funders based on the initial insight from Afghani interviewees. These recommendations may offer guidance to funders interested in supporting initiatives leading to increased security, especially for women. Funders can play an important role in the following areas:

- Expanding the scope of research from the initial seven Afghani provinces included in Cordaid's study to examine the remaining provinces where the security transition has yet to begin
- Supporting women's shelters will increase women's access to justice and protection from violence
- Awareness programs for men about the existing laws as well as the negative impact of violence against women on society as a whole will help prevent further violence
- The development of civilian oversight mechanisms will help to institutionalize the rule of law and ensure the protection of women
- Training the ANSF in women's rights will help incorporate rights-based knowledge among troops
- Support the institutionalization of the ALP and its incorporation into the ANP, with oversight mechanisms to ensure accountability¹

Increasingly, there is global awareness of the need to centralize women's perspectives in peace and security processes in order to attain more sustainable progress towards peace.² The preliminary results of this study confirm that women's voices must be prioritized. Cordaid's funding approach involves strengthening women's collective voices and elevating them to the policy- and decision-making levels, then continuously checking progress with local women and their realities. Funders can contribute to change in women's daily realities at the community level by ensuring that their local perspectives on peace and security is considered in all interventions.

Cordaid welcomes the opportunity to share experiences, views, and practices and to collaborate with other funders. For more information, contact Corneliëke Keizer at cornelieke.keizer@cordaid.nl. Cordaid's study "Afghanistan: Monitoring Women's Security in Transition" can be found [here](#).

¹ The ALP is not as institutionalized as the ANP, in terms of recruitment policy, training, hierarchy, reporting and accountability mechanisms. For example, they do not wear formal uniforms, so it is difficult for civilians to distinguish them from the AOG. The ALP consists of civilians who have been given arms, without proper trainings, reporting mechanisms, rules and regulations, unlike the ANP.

² United Nations Security Council Resolutions 1325 (2000), 1820 (2008), 1888 (2009), 1889 (2009), and 1960 (2010).