

# Inclusive Cities

Toward gender equality, youth empowerment, and non-discrimination

## Discussion Paper #8, March 2015

This paper examines the situation in Afghan cities for (i) women and girls; (ii) returnees and Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs); (iii) youth; and (iv) ethnic minorities. Common to all is their heightened socio-economic marginalisation and vulnerability, exclusion from urban decision-making, and weaker urban safety and security. The paper highlights that framing their priorities and participation as 'cross-cutting' is not enough. Dedicated actions and resources are required if we are to genuinely achieve inclusive cities in Afghanistan.



### Cities for some

It is in and around Afghan cities where increasing inequality and rising poverty is most acute and most visible. Large 'poppy palaces' sit alongside crumbling mud houses and fragile tents in Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps. Cities, far from being hubs of economic prosperity and opportunity for all, have not delivered equitable outcomes for all Afghans.

A decade of international assistance and state reconstruction has done little to build the resilience of poor urban households. As the international drawdown proceeds and economic growth slows it is women and girls, IDPs, youth and ethnic minorities who will be first to suffer, and will suffer the most. This paper argues that the battle for social and economic progress for Afghan women and girls, IDPs, youth, and other vulnerable persons will be largely won or lost in Afghanistan's cities.

### 1. Women and girls

While the national challenges regarding women and girls in Afghanistan are well documented, what are the specific challenges facing women and girls in cities? Afghan cities can be empowering spaces for young, educated women, especially those who have returned from Pakistan and Iran, or other countries of asylum, and for those with tertiary degrees and high-levels of transferrable skills all of which enable their labour participation in public and private sectors. These women, however, are the considerable minority.

The majority of urban women go largely unnoticed and face considerable structural constraints to gender equality in the urban context, including:


- i. **Illiteracy:** Nearly two-thirds of the urban female population is illiterate (62%); double the urban male illiteracy rate of 31%.<sup>1</sup> This is a major obstacle for women to achieve economic and social parity. Basic literacy and numeracy skills are often the keys to women's economic engagement.
- ii. **Few economic opportunities and low labour market participation:** The female labour force participation rate in cities is only 13%,<sup>2</sup> one-third lower than the national average (19%), highlighting that, contrary to popular opinion, the urban environment is not particularly conducive to a higher level of female participation in the labour market. Urban women work in mainly low qualified and low income jobs, such as house help (cleaning) and home based activities (e.g. sewing, tailoring, embroidery), work that is low-paid and inherently irregular. Data for the major cities indicate that women earn only one-fifth of the male average [50AFN (0.9 USD) versus 250AFN per day (4.3 USD)]. According to the Central Statistics Organization, "cultural impediments to a large extent prohibit tapping the economic potential of women in Afghan society."<sup>3</sup>


- iii. **Female-Headed Households**, either due to widowhood or a spouse is unable or disabled, face additional challenges. Urban female-headed households are particularly vulnerable because of their higher poverty, higher dependency ratio, lower income, higher landlessness, limited social and family networks/social capital, and greater vulnerability to abuse and exploitation.
- iv. **Cultural and social barriers** are "still very present in cities, which do not offer the relative safety that village or rural communities may offer".<sup>4</sup> The house is a site of women's work and a site of her considerable contribution to society.<sup>5</sup> Anecdotal evidence indicates that many Afghan women and girls that have migrated to cities with their families have less freedom in cities because they lack the social and community networks that provide socially-acceptable opportunities to leave their houses and undertake independent activities separately from their male relatives.
- v. **Poor urban safety and security:** including harassment, abuse, and unsafe routes for girls to walk to school, which plays a decisive role in parents' decisions on whether or not to send their girls to school.
- vi. **Poor of access to public services:** Women and girls, typically responsible for household activities/work, are often the hardest hit by poor basic services such as water, sanitation, electricity, health and especially limited safe, affordable and


### Gender inequality in Afghan cities



 **62% of the urban female population is illiterate**, double the urban male illiteracy rate of 31%

 **Only 13% of urban women work**, one-third lower than the rural and national average of 19%

 **Women in the urban informal sector earn 75% less than men**

 **less than 1% of urban land and property is held by women**

1. Central Statistics Organization (2013) NRVA 2011/12

2. Central Statistics Organization (2013) NRVA 2011/12

3. Central Statistics Organization (2014) Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey (ALCS). p. 6

4. Samuel Hall (2014) A Study of Poverty, Food Security and Resilience in Afghan Cities." For DRC and PIN. p.66

5. UN-Habitat (2014) Women and Housing: Toward Inclusive Cities. UN-Habitat: Nairobi.

6. NRC (2014) Strengthening Displaced Women's HLP Rights in Afghanistan. p11

7. GIRoA (2007) National Action Plan for Women of Afghanistan 2008-2018

<http://mowa.gov.af/en/page/6686>

8. UNHCR (2014) IDP Monthly Update. December 2014.

9. IDPs (Internally Displaced Persons) are persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular, as a result of, or in order to, avoid the effects of armed conflict, situation of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized state border. (Refer: Section 3.1, Afghanistan National IDP Policy, November 2013).

accessible public transportation, which limits women's and girls' mobility and access to the city; a clear violation of the right to adequate housing.

- vii. **Housing, land and property rights:** It is estimated that less than 1% of urban land is held or owned by women yet women's access to housing, land and property "is a crucial element of economic empowerment. It increases participation in household decision-making, expands their range of choices, enables them to deal better with economic loss and crisis, and provides them with security and protection if and when they lose access to a man's income through widowhood or divorce."<sup>6</sup>

The National Action Plan for Women of Afghanistan (NAPWA) (2008-2018)<sup>7</sup> sets ambitious goals for gender empowerment and equality, yet is largely 'urban blind'. It is hoped, however, the ongoing exercise to review and revise the NAPWA indicators might address this issue, in order to reflect the true challenges women and girls face in the urban environment, as well as the opportunities for change.

### Empowering city women and girls - OK, but how?

*Gender responsive plans and policies are best implemented through an area-based community-led approach because this is where there is more freedom to engage and where change can be sustained. Following the 'urban solidarity' model (described in Paper #2), women's Community Development Councils (CDCs) have been established in the major Afghan cities as a vehicle for women to engage in needs prioritisation and decision-making. Implemented sub-projects have included 'soft' activities (e.g. productive skills and computer literacy courses); and 'hard' interventions (e.g. urban design improvements, such as street lighting and safety improvements). This proven approach needs to be embedded with relevant government agencies' plans and programmes, and then systematically scaled-up and replicated in other cities. Integrated CDCs should be promoted, so as to avoid unintentional marginalisation or perceptions that women are to be seen separate from the community in terms of services and support. At the same time, national and municipal budgets and programmes must be gender-responsive and resources must be earmarked for programming for the empowerment of women in all sectors.*

## 2. Returnees and Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs)

Since 2002, over 5.7 million refugees have returned to Afghanistan and, as of December 2014, over 805,000 Afghans are estimated to remain internally displaced throughout the country.<sup>8</sup> While tracking the movements of IDPs<sup>9</sup> is difficult, especially in cases of multiple displacement, evidence suggests that many displaced Afghans live in and around Afghanistan's urban centers. Cities are magnets for IDPs because of their relative security from conflict, and higher employment opportunities and access to services; "Towns and cities, and mainly Kabul, disproportionately absorb households that have a displacement history."<sup>10</sup>

Urban IDPs are extremely vulnerable, particularly in the first year after their displacement.<sup>11</sup> They often lack documentation which

limits their access to justice and education services for their children. Urban IDPs have limited access to water and other basic services, live in sub-standard housing conditions with lack of privacy, have little or no access to livelihoods and face a whole range of protection challenges from insecurity, neglect and marginalisation<sup>12</sup> to increased risk of Gender Based Violence (GBV), child exploitation, and negative coping mechanisms. Additionally, they have limited access to land, housing, and tenure security; have significantly higher illiteracy rates and lower paid jobs. They have a clear 'skills disadvantage' compared with other urban residents, even the urban poor.

In many cases returnees and IDPs that have settled in or around Afghanistan's towns and cities, inevitably ending up in overcrowded, precarious and under-serviced housing arrangements. In other cases returnees have been settled in specific sites under the Government's Land Allocation Schemes (LAS) as part of Decree #104, but these have not always produced sustainable solutions due to their poor location - too far from livelihoods/employment opportunities - and limited access to basic services (including potable water), infrastructure, educational opportunities, and health care; a situation which is worse for women and girls.

What is clear from the research and lessons learned from over ten years of experience is that many uprooted Afghan women, men and youth do not want to, and will not, return to their rural places of origin. A representative household sample from the five major cities found 90% had no intention to leave the city<sup>13</sup> - a common demographic and socio-economic trend in most developing countries. The preferred durable solution for these people is local integration in sustainable urban locations. Where this has been achieved, positive outcomes can be seen. For example, emerging evidence from Kabul shows that the majority of returnees and IDPs who could locally integrate in good locations tend to reach living conditions and access to services on par with the local population after three years.

Recognising this, the 2013 National Policy on Internally Displaced Persons provides a framework for three stages of displacement: pre (preventing displacement), during (emergency and protection), and after (durable solutions). In line with the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement,<sup>15</sup> the policy clearly outlines three options for durable solutions: (i) return to place of origin; (ii) resettlement elsewhere in the country; and (iii) local integration in current location (e.g. in city of current residence). Importantly, the Policy is clear that it is the choice of IDPs where to settle. This is also in line with the right to freedom of movement enshrined in the Constitution of Afghanistan (Art. 39). In order to effectively address displacement, including durable solutions, Municipalities are called on to develop Municipal Action Plans, under the umbrella of the Provincial Action Plans, and these should promote area-based interventions for providing basic infrastructure, tenure security and livelihood opportunities in viable locations.

Going forward, the first challenge is to first identify and profile urban IDPs in order to provide credible baseline data to authorities and humanitarian and development actors to effectively plan for resource allocation, work on sustainable solutions and improve the delivery of public services. In this regard, access to documentation (particularly birth certificates and *tazkera*) is critical. Second, it is crucial to provide urban IDPs and returnees with tenure security in a

10. Central Statistics Organization (2014) NRVA 2011/12; and Afghanistan Living Condition Survey; Mid-term results. December 2014, p. 27.

11. UNHCR (2014) IDPs Sample Survey in Kabul City, p. 10.

12. UNHCR (2014) IDPs Sample Survey in Kabul City, p. 13; and NRC, IDPs Profiling Project in Kabul (PDs 8 and 13) for UNHCR, p. 1.

13. Samuel Hall (2014) A Study of Poverty, Food Security and Resilience in Afghan Cities." For DRC and PIN.

14. UNHCR (2014) IDPs Sample Survey in Kabul City, p. 10.

15. See <http://www.idpguidingprinciples.org/>

16. Central Statistics Organization (2014) Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey. Mid-term results. December 2014.

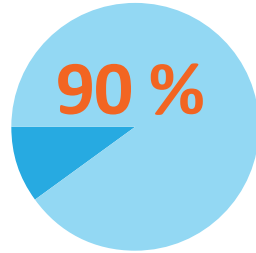
17. Central Statistics Organization (2013) NRVA 2011/12.

18. UN-Habitat (2012) The State of Urban Youth 2012/13: Youth and the Prosperity of Cities. UN-Habitat: Nairobi.

suitable location (with access to water, livelihood opportunities, basic services and infrastructure). This requires: (i) overcoming the lack of political acceptance of local integration as a durable solution for displaced in and around cities; (ii) securing commitment from local authorities to devote adequate resources to implement local integration projects (settlement regularisation/upgrading); (iii) an improved regulatory and legal framework for land management (including revision of Decree #104); and, importantly, (iv) mobilising adequate financing (donor, and on-budget through line departments and NPPs) for the incremental upgrading of IDP settlements.

**Here for good**

A representative household sample from the five major cities (Kabul, Kandahar, Mazar-e-Sharif, Jalalabad, and Herat) showed:



**90% of urban IDPs have no intention to leave the city**

**3. Youth bulge**

Afghanistan has one of the world's youngest populations. Over three-quarters (79%) of the Afghan population is under the age of 35 years; including nearly half below the age of 15 (47%); and roughly a third (32%) between 15 and 35 years of age.<sup>16</sup>

Cities continue to attract thousands of young Afghans every year. This is particularly true for those aged between 15 and 24, who constitute nearly a quarter of the urban population (23.6%), notably higher than in rural areas (17.8%). "These different age structures are to a considerable extent caused by ... in-migration of students and young adults looking for education opportunities and jobs in the urban labour market."<sup>17</sup> The youth bulge presents a unique opportunity.<sup>18</sup> Urban youth represent a key dynamic human resource to contribute to Afghanistan's development objectives of peace, security and prosperity for all.

Urban youth, however, face many challenges, including (i) almost complete exclusion from participation in urban governance, management and decision making; (ii) lack of transferrable skills for effective labour market participation; (iii) limited provision of dedicated youth services and amenities, which are fundamental for providing recreational and personal development opportunities; (iv) poor urban safety and security, especially for young women and girls; (v) psycho-social problems, including being torn between the traditions, culture and religion of their elders, and the modern urban messages with prevails in the media and is more prevalent in cities.

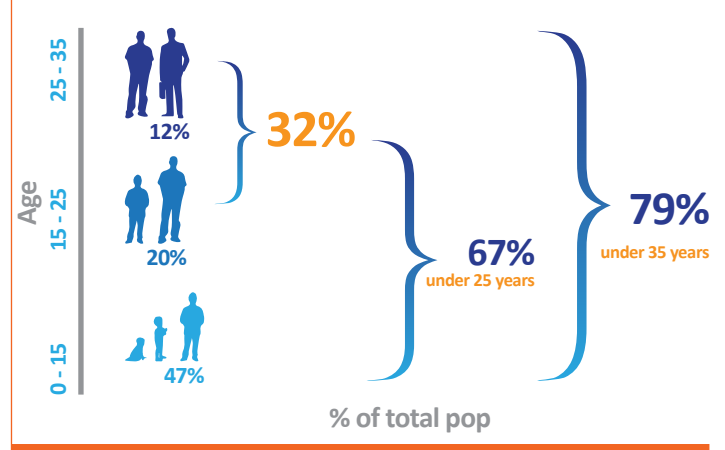
Above all, there are simply insufficient educational and employment opportunities to meet the demand resulting in high youth unemployment and underemployment. It appears that this has worsened in the last two years given the economic slowdown and international withdrawal.<sup>19</sup> Young women and men who typically have the most precarious jobs have been most affected. The urban labour market is increasingly characterized by a skills mismatch and problems of job quality in both the informal and formal sectors.<sup>20</sup> With limited alternatives urban children and youth, predominantly

boys, end up begging, selling items, and working as child labour (e.g. in brick kilns and carpet weaving factories).

It is therefore not surprising that Afghanistan's cities are increasingly hostile places for youth, especially girls and young women, and that their energy and enthusiasm are being tested. With little hope in their future, boys and young men living on the margins of urban society are at risk of recruitment by Anti-Government Elements (AGEs), extremists and by criminal elements, including those working in the lucrative and flourishing narcotics trade. This erodes the educational gains made and undermines the massive investment by the international community over the past decade. Furthermore, Afghan youth are increasingly seeking illegal passage to other countries, and in the process becoming caught in a dangerous web of international traffickers and faced with abuse and exploitation, and deportation.<sup>21</sup> Young girls are particularly at risk of trafficking and sexual slavery.

Recognising these challenges, the Afghanistan National Youth Policy provides a framework as a way forward. The policy highlights that youth are part of the development solution, not passive recipients of programmes: "young people's meaningful participation in all aspects of social, political, and economic decision-making processes is particularly crucial in a young democracy where youth participation enables the exercise of citizenship."<sup>22</sup>

**Afghanistan's Youth Bulge**



**4. Ethnic minorities**

The nomadic *Kuchi* are one of the ethnic minority communities which have suffered the most from the past years of conflict. Nonetheless, the *Kuchi* are urbanising too. An estimated 40% have exchanged their nomadic lifestyle for a fixed abode - mostly settling in the peri-urban areas of the large cities.<sup>23</sup> This urbanisation transition is attributed to a loss of livestock and grazing opportunities, but also the availability of alternate, non-pastoral incomes from the urban economy.

Kabul City features prominently in *Kuchi* urbanisation. The 'new city' (*Deh Sabz*) was previously only a stop on their seasonal migration route but now is permanently inhabited with many *Kuchi* working in the neighbouring brick kilns and in the construction sector in Kabul. Across all social and economic indicators *Kuchi* rank at the bottom, even below the urban poor. Nationally, 53% live in poverty, much higher than the average of 36%.<sup>24</sup> The *Kuchi* also face increasing

19. Samuel Hall (2014): 60% of households in five big cities reported a deterioration in their economic situation over the last 6 months, particularly in Herat and Mazar-e-Sharif.  
 20. ILO (2012) Afghanistan: Time to move to Sustainable Jobs. Study on the State of Employment in Afghanistan. ILO: Geneva.  
 21. UNHCR and AREU (2014) Why do Children Undertake the Unaccompanied Journey. December, 2014.  
 22. GIROA (2014) National Youth Policy p.22.

23. Foschini, Fabrizio (2013) The social wandering of the Afghan Kuchis. Afghanistan Analysts' Network. p 12.  
 24. Central Statistics Organization (2013) NRVA 2011/12.  
 25. Samuel Hall (2011) Jogi, and Chori Frosh communities: a story of marginalisation. For UNICEF.  
 26. Samuel Hall (2014) Urban Displaced Youth in Kabul City: A Left-Out Category and a Lost Generation.

social stigma, and are increasingly involved in inter-communal tensions and disputes (often over land use and water access), which are increasingly common due to urban expansion. They are subjected to the pressures of the urban land market, and new housing development projects which place increasing forcible eviction pressure upon *Kuchi* households and communities.

While the *Kuchi* are well known there are other ethnic minorities that are almost wholly invisible among the urban poor, including the *Jogi*, *Gorbat*, and *Chori Frosh*.<sup>25</sup> Like the *Kuchi*, but numbering only between 1500 - 3000 households, these previously-nomadic ethnic minorities have increasingly settled on the outskirts of the major cities, especially cities in the North. Their income is half that of neighboring urban poor and mainly derived from begging. *Jogi* women's labour participation rates average 60%, which contributes to their social exclusion. Food insecurity stands at 70%, compared with 25% for non-*Jogi*; and they are at risk of statelessness due to their lack of documentation, with the majority (80%) having no documentation which is a fundamental barrier to social inclusion, access to education and services.

The above description of the urban *Kuchi*, *Jogi*, *Gorbat* and *Chori Frosh* is an account of ethnic discrimination and marginalisation. This stands in contrast to prior assumptions that a move to sedentary urban lifestyles would improve contact with state institutions, access to public services, opportunities for urban employment and improved livelihoods; and reduced conflict and security-related challenges. Rather, the opposite appears to be the case for these groups.

### Intersectionality: multiple forms of discrimination

'Intersectionality' refers to the 'intersection' between multiple forms or systems of discrimination. In simple terms, for example, the urban experience of being both a female and an IDP cannot be understood purely in terms of these two traits independently, but rather the interaction of these characteristics which often reinforce each other and increase vulnerability and urban exclusion.

Anecdotal evidence reveals no surprises: urban dwellers with multiple vulnerabilities (women and girls; youth; those with a migration history, especially IDPs; persons with disabilities; and ethnic minorities) are poorer, have lower access to services, and inhabit in the worst housing conditions. For instance, a recent study found 'IDP youth' in Kabul have severely higher deprivations across a multitude of indicators than the youth whom had grown up in Kabul.<sup>26</sup>

### To conclude: glimmers of hope but there is much work to do ?

Weaving throughout the above discussion are three common threads that also suggest a way forward. First, there has been insufficient attention on these issues and the specific needs of these Afghans over the last decade. Second, all is not lost. There are good experiences we can build on (e.g. women's CDCs in urban areas; local integration of IDPs in cities). Third, suitable policies and plans are in place (e.g. Youth Policy, IDP Policy, NAPWA) so now the task is to develop responsive programming. This requires government leadership and commitment, sufficient donor funding, and multi-stakeholder coordination.

## Ways forward

There are four key areas in which focus should be placed in order to address the challenges and optimise the opportunities mentioned above:

1. The guiding frameworks are in place so what is needed now is refinement of the **legislative framework** (e.g. access to land and documentation) and **programme development and implementation at scale**; with the following priorities:
  - Implementation of the IDP Policy in major cities by developing and implementing municipal action plans for a comprehensive response to internal displacement, including local integration as a durable solution;
  - Women's and youth empowerment through skills and livelihoods training, including in the urban informal sector through apprenticeships, and taking account of specific 'intersectional' training needs and capacities;
  - Expand opportunities for the engagement of women, youth, IDPs and ethnic minorities in municipal governance and management, including through community-based approaches (see Discussion Papers #2 and #7)
2. Support the development of a **National Social Policy**, paying particular attention to the specificities of cities and vulnerable populations;
3. Undertake **action-research and analysis** to better understand the nature and extent of these challenges, and to inform responsive policy and programme design;
4. **Advocacy and awareness** raising to improve government, donor, and civil society understanding and responsiveness.

In all of the identified areas, it is critical that all stakeholders have the opportunity to engage fully and consistently, and that the resources linked to the existing frameworks are applied in a gender responsive manner, as well as across social, ethnic and age lines.



The State of Afghan Cities 2014/15 Programme is a one-year initiative supported by the Government of Australia and implemented in conjunction with the Government of Afghanistan that aims to improve knowledge and information on urbanization in Afghanistan by undertaking a detailed review of all 34 provincial capitals. A detailed State of Afghan Cities 2014/15 Report will be published mid-2015.

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