



AFGHANISTAN RECONSTRUCTION TRUST FUND (ARTF)

Gender Working Group Meeting

Tuesday, August 7, 2018

Summary of Discussions

The ARTF Gender Working Group (GWG) held its monthly meeting on August 7, 2018. Eight donor country representatives¹, the Ministry of Finance (MOF), Ministry of Higher Education, and the ARTF Administrator (the World Bank) attended. The World Bank and Canada co-chaired the meeting.

The agenda featured one item: an update from the Ministry of Higher Education Higher Education Development Program (HEDP), with a focus on the gender aspects of the work. Representatives of HEDP joined the meeting.

Discussion

1. Gender aspects of Higher Education Development Project

- In line with the previously agreed calendar of GWG scheduled discussions, the Ministry of Higher Education made representatives of the Higher Education Development Project available to discuss their work, which includes a particular focus on ensuring women's access to higher education opportunities.
- Project team members offered a presentation of the US\$ 50 million dollar, four year² (2016-2020) project, which includes disbursement-linked indicators, and covers five thematic areas: 1-Increasing Access to Priority Degree Programs for Economic Development; 2 – Modernizing and Enhancing the Quality of Teaching and Learning; 3 – Improving the Qualifications and Skills of University Staff Members; 4 – Strengthening Governance, Quality Assurance, and Accreditation; 5 – Stimulating Development-Oriented Research, as well as infrastructure initiatives (lecture blocks, lab equipment, library support, ICT facilities and equipment, research centers, female dormitories, and child care facilities) and a project support component.
- HEDP incorporates a specific focus on increasing women's participation in higher education, both as students and as lecturers. The HEDP team used gender disaggregated project data to provide updates on the numbers of women who have benefitted from the project's initiatives. Presentation materials and gender statistics are appended at Annexes 1 and 2, respectively. Key gender-focused features of the program include:
 - HEDP aims to increase the number of women enrolled as students in ten priority disciplines where women have been historically under-represented. Places are reserved for women in these disciplines through the university entrance

¹ Canada, Denmark, European Union, Finland, Sweden, Swiss Cooperation, United Kingdom, and United States.

² The project team noted that it is anticipating a restructuring that will extend the project closure date to 2022.

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examination (Kankor) process. HEDP complements the enrolment measures with a range of practical support services (transportation, accommodation, scholarships and student services) targeted specifically to women's needs..

- HEDP aims to increase the number of university lecturers that satisfy minimum educational requirements required by law (master's degree) by providing scholarships for international graduate study. One third of the scholarships for international study are reserved for female academics, and supplemental instruction in English (the language of most partner graduate programs) is offered. The program has worked to establish in-country master's degree programs for women who are unable to travel or live abroad while pursuing studies.
- HEDP aims to promote research within universities, and is organizing its first national academic research conference. The project offers research scholarships for faculty. Female participation in this initiative has thus far been low, but is increasing with active promotion and outreach by HEDP (10 female lectures applied this year, as compared to 4 female participants last year). T
- The Ministry of Finance representative asked if the program is on track in its efforts to engage women in disciplines where they have limited representation at present. The project team noted the importance of supporting female instructors in these disciplines to encourage women's enrollment. In its initial years HEDP had difficulty engaging female faculty with project-funded opportunities for international scholarships for advanced studies, due in significant part to the women faculty members' limited exposure to/skills in English, the language of instruction at the partner universities, which are predominantly in Asia (some study in Europe). Investment in providing English language training was helpful, as is the fact that the pipeline of female faculty with better English skills is increasing.
- In response to queries about graduation rates and employment, HEDP staff noted that the project does not yet have data on the numbers of enrolled female students who complete their courses of study, although anecdotal evidence suggests that most women who secure a place in a university program remain highly committed to completing their studies.
- In response to another question regarding whether legal studies had been included among the priority degree programs covered by the program. HEDP staff noted that NGOs had previously worked on education in this sector, with mixed success owing to varying degrees of alignment with Ministry priorities. The project does not include legal studies among the priority degrees for which women's undergraduate participation is promoted, but in promoting graduate studies for women faculty, HEDP is less restrictive, owing to low representation of female faculty across disciplines. Noting the additional financing that will restructure and extend the project duration through 2022, USAID queried whether women seeking advanced degrees in education will be included among the 150 graduate scholarships for faculty. As with legal studies, the HEDP team noted that while placement of women in undergraduate education programs is not a focus area of the project (as education faculties already have fairly strong representation of female students), there remains greater flexibility for women faculty from a variety of disciplines to access HEDP-funded professional development scholarships. Of the 150, 100 will be for master's degrees and 50 will be reserved for doctoral studies.
- Noting the program's inclusion of a range of support services for female students at (counselling, child care, etc.), a question asked if the program supports anti-sexual

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harassment initiatives at universities. The HEDP team explained that for the first time ever they introduced gender officer positions in all universities most of these positions are already filled. Also they have introduced orientation program for first year students (a two day program for the new students with a focus on female to orient them to the campus, and resources available which is a common practice elsewhere but it was not practiced in Afghanistan) with an exit strategy by including it in the ordinary budget of the university. So far two universities already rolled it out from their budget. Further more the ministry has developed anti-harassment policy and the HEDP program has grievance redress mechanism for all type of complaints and grievances including harassment issues.

2. Updates to ARTF Strategy Group

- The GWG had no updates to present to the ARTF Strategy Group regarding the discussion of HEDP, but it was noted that on July 31, the GWG had convened for a special discussion of the Women's Economic Empowerment Rural Development Project (WEE-RDP), which is under preparation. Task Team Leaders for WEE-RDP had briefed donor partners on the project's proposed "Component 3", which would support private sector initiatives. Discussions had raised questions about whether the initiative could potentially be more efficiently handled by modalities other than a recipient-executed project. Task Team Leaders had queried international partners on whether existing programming or funding outside the ARTF would be capable of supporting the work. Several partners had indicated that they had no capacity to support the work, but some discussions followed with other partners. The GWG had agreed to update the Strategy Group on this point, and also to note that the GWG expected to review the WEE-RDP project appraisal document before it was submitted to the ARTF MC or to the IDA Board for approval.

3. AOB

- The Administrator and GWG members congratulated Mr. Michael Rymek of Canada on completing his assignment in Afghanistan, and thanked him for co-chairing the GWG. Ms. Juliet Walton of DFID will assume the co-chair position beginning in September.
- The next GWG meeting will be held on Tuesday September 4, 2018.