

## ARTF Gender Working Group Meeting

April 18, 2017

### Meeting Minutes

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An ARTF Gender Working Group (GWG) Meeting was held on April 18, 2017<sup>1</sup>. The meeting was co-chaired by Wezi Msisha (Senior Operations Officer, World Bank), and Johan Norqvist (Human Rights and Gender Advisor, Swedish Embassy). Ms. Sousan R. Rasuli [WEE\_NPP Program Director, Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs, Martyrs and the Disabled (MoLSAMD)], Ms. Naila Ahmed (Senior Social Development Specialist, WB), Ms. Shubha Chakravarty (Sr. Economist, WB), Ms. Izabela Leao (Rural Development Specialist), Azada Hussaini (Rural Development Specialist, WB) and Ms. Najla Sabri (Social Development Specialist, WB) also participated in the meeting. The main agenda item was discussion of the Women's Economic Empowerment National Priority Programme (WEE-NPP) and the World Bank's proposed support for it.

#### Discussion Highlights

The Chair of the meeting Wezi Msisha welcomed the participants, followed by a short tour de table. The representatives from MoLSAMD made a short presentation of the Women's Economic Empowerment National Priority Programme (WEE-NPP).

WEE-NPP is a firm part of the ANPDF which was presented at the Brussels Conference on Afghanistan in October 2016. WEE falls under the third pillar of the ANPDF/SMAF. Based on a concept from late 2015 the programme has then further developed and has six components which were all duly presented. The WEE is a joint effort involving eleven (11) ministries and aims to strengthen women's economic empowerment throughout the country. The envisaged programme plans to reach all of Afghanistan (34 Provinces). The programme will largely focus on scaling up of existing initiatives and programmes implemented by various line ministries including projects financed through the World Bank (ARTF & IDA).

**WEE NPP Components:** Component 1 of the Wee-NPP addresses statistical aspects (disaggregation of gender statistics) as well as legal impediments for women in Country focusing on economics rights (bank loan, inheritance, landownership etc.). There are many data gaps which need to be covered and better understood. Component 2 will review legal as well as cultural barriers for women to develop their skills and livelihoods. Component 3 aims to improve literacy and numeracy of women (business management) and to improve skills levels, in recognition of waste differences amongst participant's base on their background. Component 4 tries to ensure women's inclusive access to finance (informal credit schemes/systems etc.). Component 5 focuses on improved agricultural outputs involving women, and finally Component 6 aims to promote access to creative economic markets (Afghan women brands; focus on both import and exports).

The programme interventions and coordination and oversight are the responsibility of MoLSAMD

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<sup>1</sup> Attendees: Canada, European Union, Finland, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom, USAID, World Bank.

and involving participation of both the private sector and NGOs/CSOs. The overall financing envelop is planned to be US\$100 million over a five-year period (2017-2021). The World Bank through the ARTF will provide a project preparation grant of up to US\$5 million in 2017 for a three-year period. This allocation will support MoLSAMD to set up the WEE-NPP structure and for initial innovative work in launching the programme as planned and to support the early implementation phase. Hence WEE is an umbrella program and not intended to replace other ongoing initiatives, but rather to create synergies between programmes to have maximize results for women's economic empowerment.

**Issues raised included:**

1. Security aspects and how that will be considered with the intended private sector engagement as highlighted in the WEENPP. The World Bank stated that the NPP would build on the existing projects and acknowledged security concerns for which a degree of flexibility is needed.
2. Relationship between the WEE NPP and the NAP 1325 and the need to liaise better with respect to planned activities in order to avoid duplication of efforts.
3. The importance of men's engagement (Male Champions etc.) and religious leaders and community elders.
4. The issue about credits which is planned to be used/issued through the "Associations and Cooperatives" is always problematic and there can be certain risks linked to this. A question was raised on how the Government and WB view this issue, and whether or not there are other avenues feasible for example building other/better financing solutions using "real banks (read established)" in Afghanistan? The World Bank responded by stating that in a context such as in Afghanistan access to formal banking system is extremely low, with approximately 10% and 4% of the male and female population respectively have a Bank account. So there are not many options currently to informal banking opportunities. Group savings can prove to be useful. Further mapping is needed to get a clearer picture of microcredits and other potential solutions. Maybe there could also be more experimental and innovative ways of working, one such suggestion has been suggested is mobile banking trying to reach in particular remote areas and rural poor people.

***Any other business***

The World Bank and MoLSAMD raised the issue of finding out who of the development partners are involved in private sector and women's economic sector support at large and how those interventions/programmes could be linked to the WEE-NPP. It was agreed that the GWG would send information on existing bilateral programs to MoLSAMD if needed. Once a decision has been reached the Bank will communicate with the ARTF GWG.

The World Bank indicated that a next meeting should happen in a month time, and as soon as a fixed date will be recognized this will be transmitted to the Gender Working Group. One suggestion floated was that the next meeting should focus on the pipeline basic education project (EQRA) which is currently under preparation. The World Bank education team has a mission tentatively planned in May, hence the GWG could be organized to coincide with this visit.