

PERCEPTION SURVEY  
ON KNOWLEDGE,  
ATTITUDES, AND  
PRACTICES ON  
WOMEN'S RIGHTS  
AMONG  
RELIGIOUS LEADERS  
AND COMMUNITY  
MEMBERS



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# Executive Summary

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Enhancing Gender Equality and Mainstreaming in Afghanistan (EGEMA) programme – implemented from 2016 to 2018 – proposed to explore the knowledge, attitudes, and practices on gender equality among religious leaders specifically related to Friday sermons in order to determine religious leaders' ability to positively contribute to the advancement of women's rights in Afghanistan. A survey with more than 180 religious leaders and more than 40 focus groups with community members were undertaken in Bamyan, Balkh, and Herat provinces by Thousand Plateaus Consultancy Services.

## Key Findings

- About 35% of religious leaders participated in the training delivered by UNDP and are mostly satisfied with the training contents, length, distance to the training, and usefulness of the trainings for changing knowledge, attitudes, and practices among religious leaders in terms of women's rights.
- A variety of organizations deliver trainings on women's rights in the studied areas. Nonetheless, religious leaders not trained by UNDP expressed the need for trainings on women's freedom of movement, forced labour, marriage rights, the position of women inside the family, men's rights, self-immolation, 'respect of women,' child marriage, causes of violence, property rights, and harmful traditional practices such as *baad*.
- The Department of Hajj and Religious Affairs' ability to monitor sermons is often limited as these lack adequate resources.
- When asked regarding daughters' share in the parents' property according to Islamic teachings, 84% of religious leaders answered one half and 14% one third of the brother's share. Ninety-eight percent correctly answered that women are allowed to pray in mosques and the same percentage regarding the right to education for women in Islam. Ninety-eight percent also correctly identified the

wife as the person, who should receive *mehr* in Afghanistan. However, when asked less obvious teachings derived from religious texts, less clarity is found among religious leaders.

- Based on the Rights and Privileges of Men Subscale of the Gender Norms Attitudes Scale, the average recorded is 1.82 (on scale from 1 to 2) – where less agreement with men having more rights and privileges than women reflects a more egalitarian perspective – is telling on religious leaders' tendencies towards egalitarianism. Based on the Equity for Girls Subscale – with an average of 1.58 – which should be read as somewhere in the middle between traditional and egalitarian with an inclination towards egalitarianism. Also the Gender Equitable Men Scale, adapted to the Afghan context, with an average of 2.73 on a scale from 1 to 3 (with higher numbers representing high support for gender equitable norms), was high among religious leaders.
- Support of female education, including studying in another province and another country, is very high among religious leaders, considerably higher than statistics established by a perception survey at national level.
- When asked about the ideal age for girls to get married, the average established by the survey is 17.7 (compared to boys' 19.4). Almost 50% of religious leaders reported an age under 18. Considering the negative impact that marriage has on a girl's health due to the risks related to early pregnancy, interrupted education, and consequently her future prospects in general – regardless of laws prevailing in Afghanistan – the latter could not be considered a positive finding.
- Some references to religious texts remain questionable among religious leaders, such as violence against women being sometimes permitted or women as being servants of men. The latter often find base in the so called 'beating sura' or 4:34. The non patriarchal readings of the verse suggest that such reading would completely contradict other verses where gender equality is emphasized in the Qur'an aside the general uneasiness of past commentators with the specified verse.
- Religious leaders mentioned delivering Friday sermons with messaging on women's rights: once a week (9%), twice a month (28%); once a month (47%); once every 2 months (12%); and very small percentages less often.
- Regarding the topics addressed during the

sermons, 67% mentioned inheritance, 61% violence against women, 54% women's education, 14% political rights, 51% alimony, and 33% civic rights. Other topics included also child marriage and forced marriage; forced labour; mehr; wedding expenses reduction; freedom of expression; marriage rights; and property rights.

- Among the most important factors influencing the effectiveness of Friday sermons is their basis in religious texts. Religious leaders are also overwhelmingly perceived as having authority, influence, and as being highly regarded and respected members of their communities.

- Religious leaders acting as role models was also raised as an important aspect of sermons' effectiveness. However, based on the survey findings, 6% of religious leaders have two wives, which is a type of violence against women, regardless of state laws that in some instances permit it in Afghanistan. Fifty-seven percent also have a wife, who is illiterate.

- Religious leaders as obstacles for including messaging on women's rights into the sermons mentioned: lack of knowledge on women's rights (55%); insecurity (51%); threats from powerful community members (7%); threats from regular community members (7%); lack of financial resources (16%); threats from armed opposition groups (26%); community disinterest in the topic (12%); lack of transportation (10%); community opposition to the topic (10%). Respondents also mentioned other (12%), including 'customs and traditions' prevailing in Afghanistan (3.1%) and the illiteracy of community people (8%).

- Community members are also unanimous on the persuasive power of religious leaders and the changes that sermons on women's rights brought to their communities: increase in girl's education; reduction of violence against women, including baad, child marriage, and forced marriage; an increased freedom of movement for women, including for work and health access; an increase in access to inheritance and mehr; men supporting women in house chores; and a general improvement in communication between spouses and the family at large.

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## Acronyms

DoHRA	Directorate of Hajj and Religious Affairs
DoWA	Directorate of Women's Affairs
EVAW Law	Elimination of Violence Against Women Law
FGD	Focus group discussion
GEP	Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality Project
RL	Religious Leader
MoHRA	Ministry of Hajj and Religious Affairs
MoWA	Ministry of Women's Affairs
UNAMA	United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
VAW	Violence Against Women

## Definitions

*Baad* Girls or women given to an aggrieved family to “compensate” for a crime, which is a punishment usually decided by a local Jirga.

*Eid* There are two official holidays in Islam: Eid Al-Fitr and Eid Al-Adha. Eid Al-Fitr is celebrated at the end of Ramadan (a month of fasting during daylight hours), and Muslims usually give zakat (charity) on the occasion. Eid Al-Adha is celebrated on the tenth day of Dhu al-Hijjah and lasts for four days, during which Muslims usually sacrifice a sheep and distribute its meat in 3 parts: among family, friends, and the poor.

*Mehr* In Islam, mehr is a payment, in the form of money or possessions paid or promised to by the groom, or by the groom's father to the bride at the time of marriage, that legally becomes her property.

*Muharram* Is the first month of the Islamic calendar. It is one of the four sacred months of the year. For the majority of Shi'a Muslims Ashura marks the climax of the Remembrance of Muharram, and commemorates the death of Husayn ibn Ali, the grandson of Muhammad at the Battle of Karbala.



# PROJECT DESCRIPTION AND STUDY RATIONALE



## About UNDP

UNDP supports stabilization, state-building, governance, and development priorities in Afghanistan. UNDP support, in partnership with the Government, the United Nations system, the donor community and other development stakeholders, has contributed to institutional development efforts in Afghanistan. Over the years UNDP support has spanned such milestone efforts as the adoption of the Constitution; Presidential, Parliamentary and Provincial Council elections; institutional development through capacity-building to the legislative, the judicial, and executive arms of the state, and key ministries, government agencies, and commissions at the national and subnational levels.

## About Enhancing Gender Equality and Mainstreaming in Afghanistan (EGEMA)

Based on experiences and lessons learned from the Gender Equality Project (GEP)-II (2013 to 2015), the new phase of GEP now called Enhancing Gender Equality and Mainstreaming in Afghanistan (EGEMA) - implemented from 2016 to 2018 - includes four pillars:

- 1) Institutional Strengthening of the Ministry of Women Affairs (MOWA)
- 2) Creating a national pool of Gender Experts
- 3) Women's livelihoods strengthening and
- 4) Gender Transformative approaches to support social and behavioural changes at grass-root level

The objective of the project is to strengthen the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan to be better able to fulfil national and international commitments supporting the social equity of women, youth, minorities, and vulnerable populations. The project proposes to achieve this through building on the progress made from previous GEP projects, which strives to strengthen MOWA to fulfil its mandate, create a pool of nationally educated

Gender Experts available for national and sub-national service, and to strengthen MOWA's capability to engage with line ministries to support rural women's economic empowerment as well as socio-cultural and behavioural transformation.

### Training of Religious Leaders

Under EGEMA's predecessor project, GEP II, UNDP has been training religious leaders on an annual basis on the topics of women's rights in Islam and on civil laws in Afghanistan. They were selected based on criteria set by the Women's Rights Steering Committee, a body composed of UNDP, MoHRA, MoWA, Kabul University, and 2 other members, including a member from the Islamic Sisters' Association. MOHRA and UNDP proposed and recommended most of the training programmes and the training curricula for the RLs related to women's rights and gender equality. The trainees were selected from all 34 provinces and were mostly from the lines of the DOWA and DOHRA. The DoWA Directors brought a gender perspective whereas the DoHRA Directors religious perspectivist to the training. Other attendees included influential leaders. These trainings were delivered at regional and at national level.

In the first year of EGEMA (2016), an additional 150 religious leaders from all over the country were trained on gender equality and women's rights issues in Kabul (and another 150 were targeted for 2017). The training was designed by UNDP and included topics such as the right to education, ownership of property, marriage, and political participation, all within an Islamic perspective. These topics are also officially included in the annual list of topics for registered mosques, and oblige scholars to provide information on them during Friday sermons on a quarterly basis. The booklet used for the trainings – developed by the MoHRA with the support of UNDP that includes articles taken from the Qur'an and Hadiths referring to women's rights – is supposed to be used by RLs and their counterparts as a reference module and resource book during these sermons. The handbook was printed and disseminated recently.

The goal of these activities is to capacitate the RLs on women's rights so they could preach during Friday sermons and raise awareness of the community members on the same topic, which would eventually lead to cultural behaviour change. On average, the



attendees of such sensitization and awareness raising Friday sermons that are focusing on men in the communities can reach more than 100 participants. However, based on information provided in the mid-term review the audience number ranges from 200 to 1000 depending on the population and sizes of the mosques.

In total, approximately 2000 religious leaders were trained over the different phases of the programme. However, based on the findings of the mid-term evaluation approximately only a third of the trained religious leaders actually perform Friday sermons.

## Study Rationale and Objectives

UNDP proposes to explore the knowledge, attitudes and practices on gender equality specifically related to Friday sermons and the religious leaders' ability to positively contribute to the advancement of women's rights in Afghanistan.

The overall objectives of the study are the following:

- Collect data from the selected regions on the effectiveness of the Friday sermons dedicated to women's rights in Islam that were administered to promote socio-behavioural change within the communities, i.e. community awareness, community behaviour, community satisfaction
- Interview the RLs and their community members to evaluate their perception about women's rights and gender and provide an analysis on whether their perceptions are being changed following Friday sermons
- Explore the knowledge, attitudes, and practices towards women's rights among RLs, who have undergone the training delivered by UNDP
- Provide a final report evaluating the impact of the program on RLs' capacity building on women's rights in Islam
- Evaluate whether a coordination and peer support mechanisms was created, which could trigger an effective delivery of women's rights to the communities

# CONTEXTUAL OVERVIEW



# Changing Gender Norms

Gender norms change as a result of macro-economic development, migration, policies, education, exposure to new ideas, to name only a few. New ideas, knowledge and practices are typically spread through everyday communication – people seeing what others do.<sup>1</sup> A change in norms could be explained as where sufficient numbers of people have adopted a new practice and believe it is the right thing to do, the norm associated with that practice can be said to have changed.<sup>2</sup> Studies of behaviour change have found that what other people do has a greater influence than what they say, particularly for visible behaviour:

For behaviour that others can see – such as sending daughters to school or child marriage – seeing what others do (or don't do) may be just as important as what they say – and what people actually do in practice may change before the norm that governs the practice changes. For behaviour that is less visible (such as girls and boys sharing housework), new norms and practices are more likely to be spread by people talking about and endorsing them, rather than simply by imitating others.<sup>3</sup>

The same report – aside role models and media - also mentions leaders (whether of formal institutions or informal peer groups) as playing an important role in encouraging people to change their attitudes and practices, thus speeding up the adoption of new norms. For example, in Ethiopia, when the Ethiopian Orthodox Church started supporting the government's position on the minimum age for marriage, people began to change their beliefs and practices, leading to a change in norms about child marriage. But where some Church representatives did not uphold the new attitudes (with some priests themselves taking young brides), this diluted the impact of the Church's official position.<sup>4</sup>

Progress is very slow at first, as a few people gradually start to adopt a new norm but when the tipping point is

reached, change can be very sudden, explained Bicchieri and Mercier providing the example of violence against women:

Imagine a population in which most people would prefer not to beat their wives, but there's a tradition – a norm in fact – to beat them for even small misdeeds. Furthermore, ideals of masculinity, honour, and family values are deeply linked to the practice. At some point, a few individuals may be convinced that beating wives is not the best way to fulfil deeply held values, and they may even decide to abandon the practice. Most others remain unmoved, as the minority is too small. Here core group discussion and organized diffusion would play a crucial role, affecting a gradual change in attitudes. If the minority keeps growing, it may reach a tipping point. At this stage, the minority has grown large enough that most other people feel free to break from the norm and stop beating their wives.<sup>5</sup>

The same authors stress the importance of discussions and deliberations that can be problematic when there are norms on how one should talk about norms; in this case a respected leader represents the solution where trust plays an important role that, however, on its own is not enough. In fact, people should be convinced that they should change their mind where a variety of strategies could be adopted including addressing core beliefs directly and focusing on peripheral beliefs that are associated with the key norm people wish to change.<sup>6</sup> The same authors also stress the importance of avoiding to antagonize listeners, who may then 'shut down' and be unreceptive to further arguments.

While the broad drivers can make change more likely, individual factors should be also considered and these depend on: socioeconomic circumstances; whether changes fit with people's personal beliefs; whether people fear negative reactions of others if they do change; exposure to fora where changes are discussed; individual agency and resilience as embracing new gender norms can expose people to criticism; and supportive families, reference groups, and role models.<sup>7</sup>

1 Rachel Marcus, Caroline Harper, Sophie Brodbeck, Ella Pag, "How do Gender Norms Change?", 2015, ODI, <https://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/odi-assets/publications-opinion-files/9817.pdf>

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid.

5 C. Bicchieri, and H. Mercier, (2014) "Norms and Beliefs: How Change Occurs." *The Jerusalem Philosophical Quarterly*, 63: 60-82, <http://bit.ly/1xgvS39>

6 Ibid.

7 Ibid.



# Religious Leaders and Women's Rights

The involvement of RLs in the promotion of women's rights – an established practice in the development sector – stems from the belief that RLs are respected members of their communities whose perspectives will be trusted and whose directives will be followed. It has been argued that RLs are most often key power holders within communities and can be important allies in the achievement of gender-related development objectives. The inclusion of RLs is seen as being particularly important in relation to sensitive gender-related issues where the involvement of perceived outsiders can be met with fear and suspicion; these are also viewed as key 'gatekeepers' whose support can help dispel fears and lend credibility to projects.<sup>8</sup> The advantages of working with religious leaders are many: it is a way of deflecting accusations of taking a Western stance to the promotion of women's rights; it is an effective means of deflecting religiously driven resistance at the local level and of winning over sceptics; and involving men in general facilitates the pursuit of more equitable gender relations as it was demonstrated in a variety of contexts.<sup>9</sup> The same authors also raised some limitations on working in such frameworks, including working with religious leaders, where the major danger is reinforcing the role of RLs in the community rather than challenging such structures.<sup>10</sup>

Statistical evidence additionally confirms the effectiveness of working with RLs on women's rights issues. Religious leaders have taken an increasingly visible role in the public health arena over the past few decades with the promotion of modern contraception in Indonesia, Bangladesh, Iran, Egypt, and Afghanistan among other countries; and in the promotion of breast feeding and immunization.<sup>11</sup> A study conducted with mosque goers in Jordan with religious leaders receiving training in reproductive health found that intervention mosque goers who recalled messages were more likely to report taking relevant actions compared to those, who were exposed to the sermons of religious leaders that did not receive the

same training. These findings also suggest that trained RLs compared to their counterparts were more effective in message dissemination.<sup>12</sup>

## The Religious Architecture of Afghanistan

Studies on a religious architecture of Afghanistan are scant, especially in English. While no fixed hierarchy exists amongst Sunni religious leaders, a broad distinction can be made between the mullah imam (the local mosque leader, who interprets and extends the religion as it is experienced in daily life); and the ulema (high-level religious scholars, who act as the interpreters and upholders of the religion's law and scriptural tradition).<sup>13</sup> The ulema are formally educated religious leaders schooled in madrasas and in the religious faculties of universities, and are often organised in loose networks around RLs, mosques and madrasas themselves and they are the interpreters of Sharia (Islamic law).<sup>14</sup> Imam khatib (or wa'ez, depending on the area) preach sermons during Friday prayers each week. As a MoHRA official explained: "*The imam leads the five prayers every day. The imam khatib preaches on Fridays when he also leads the prayers.*"<sup>15</sup> Imam khatib perform their duties in the Friday mosques and the imam in smaller mosques, the same official explained.

According to a document retrieved from the MoHRA website, the imam should be present in the mosque for all five prayers a day; should provide educational classes for male and female students; and should preach according to the MoHRA guidelines.<sup>16</sup> The document also stresses that the imam should play the role of peace builder when conflicts or tensions arise among community members but at the same time he should preserve a neutral stance. Among other requirements, the imam should also work based on the policies as established by MoHRA, coordinate with the 'preacher's council' of his respective areas, follow 'religious and national principles' in his preaching, and communicate any security issue to the DoHRA.<sup>17</sup>

8 Nida Kirmani, "Gender and Islam," *Progress in Development Studies*, Volume: 11 issue: 2, page(s): 87-99, April 4, 2011; April 1, 2011

9 Ibid.

10 Ibid.

11 C. R. Underwood, S. S. Kamhawi, "Friday sermons, family planning and gender equity attitudes and actions: evidence from Jordan," *Journal of Public Health*, Volume 37, Issue 4, 1 December 2015, Pages 641-648, <https://doi.org/10.1093/pubmed/dfu090>

12 Ibid.

13 Kaja Borchgrevink and Kristian Berg Harpviken, "Afghanistan's religious landscape: politicising the sacred," Noref Policy Brief, March 2010, <https://www.prio.org/utility/DownloadFile.ashx?id=540&type=publicationfile>

14 Ibid.

15 Kabul, Interview with Department for Religious Studies official, MoHRA

16 Ministry of Hajj and Religious Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, "Procedures for Appointing Imams and Mueezins, MoHRA," n. g., <http://mohia.gov.af/fa/page/1914/13977>

17 Ibid.

According to information obtained from an Islamic law specialist, there are around 300,000 mosques in Afghanistan and only around 65,000 – therefore less than 25% - are controlled and registered at the MoHRA and these are mostly located in the provincial/district centres. The rest of mosques are located in small villages and Ministry of Haj and Religious Affairs (MoHRA) has virtually no oversight over their activities.<sup>18</sup>

Established in 2002 in Kabul, the National Ulema Council had, within two years, expanded to all 34 provinces of Afghanistan making it the biggest official religious body. According to a study conducted in 2012, it has 3,000 members, both ulema and mullahs, approximately 80 from each province. A majority of the members are Sunni, but there is a sizeable Shia minority of 25 to 30% – something that was not seen in similar pre-war councils. The Shi'as additionally have their own separate council of ulema. Most members of the National Council have a 1980s jihadi background but come from a whole range of mujahedin factions (tanzim). Its membership makes the Council an equivalent to an average Afghan ministry's staff, and the monthly stipend of between 5,000 and 10,000 Afghani is equal to the salary of an average Afghan government civil employee.<sup>19</sup>

The MoHRA is the key ministry responsible for addressing religious affairs in Afghanistan. Some responsibilities of the Ministry include: sending Afghan Haji (pilgrims) for the performance of Hajj to Saudi Arabia; providing girls and boys with Islamic teachings in the mosques and holy places; the issuance of fatwas and testing of Imams and preachers; better co-ordinating of preaching affairs through mosques and Takia khana; and convening religious meetings and ceremonies. Article 9 of the Elimination of Violence against Women Law – a law enacted by presidential decree in 2009 that still experiences major implementation challenges - also outlines the role of the Ministry of Hajj and Religious Affairs in specifically preventing violence against women, including 1) Developing regular programs for the presentation of preaches and orations regarding Islamic rights and obligations of men and women by mullahs, preachers, and orators in mosques and other religious places and ensuring its implementation; 2) Conducting seminars, workshops and conferences for mullahs, preachers and orators; and

3) Explaining and describing the factors of violence and their consequences based on the provisions of the Islamic Sharia and law through relevant publications.

### Religious Leaders and Women's Rights

Religious leaders preach mainly for promoting Sharia and educating the community of believers on the principles of Islam, where some see this as their main responsibility.<sup>20</sup> Their sermons cover topics from family life to social obligations to political issues and beyond and 'most importantly, they are listened to attentively.<sup>21</sup> In a recent study conducted in the Pakistan Afghanistan border areas where hundreds of local sermons were analysed – despite the findings could not be generalized as representing other parts of Afghanistan - the author reported:

For Pashtuns, however, the modern sermon is far more engaging and authoritative than just an agitated tirade. These are an oratorical tour de force. Lasting for about 30 to 40 minutes, they are delivered without notes in a dazzling style of Pashto that enraptures their audience. Peppered with stories, folk wisdom, humour, impressive quotations from the Qur'an, Hadith, and poetry, the most popular speakers marshal a complex web of argument to sway their audience.<sup>22</sup>

The same study also argues that the impact of sermons is derived from a synergy of four factors: 1) the tuqir 's or sermon's tri-part structure of Arabic khutba, the body of the sermon (in Pashto), and the closing prayer that gains its credence from borrowing an Arabic voice between which the sermon is sandwiched, which is considered the language of truth, 2) messages delivered from a minbar or pulpit are perceived as being infallible as the religious leader acts as passive mouthpiece of the Divine, 3) religious leaders combine a poetic sing-song style with an extemporaneous, content-rich structure which enthralls the hearts and minds of their audience, and 4) because Pashtuns have a rich poetic tradition, sermons with rhyme and rhythm resonate with their audience in ways

18 Telephone interview with consultant on Islamic law, Kabul, October 8, 2017

19 Borhan Osman, "The Ulema Council Paid to Win Public Minds – But do They?," AAN, 2012, <https://www.afghanistan-analysts.org/the-ulema-council-paid-to-win-public-minds-but-do-they/>

20 Ali Wardak, Idrees Zaman, Kanishka Nawabi, "The Role and Functions of Religious Civil Society in Afghanistan: Case Studies from Sayedabad and Kunduz," 2007, CPAU, [http://cpau.org.af/manimages/publications/Religious\\_Civil\\_Society.pdf](http://cpau.org.af/manimages/publications/Religious_Civil_Society.pdf)

21 Kakar and Thapa, "Women and Religious Leaders in Afghanistan," 2012, The Asia Foundation, <http://asiafoundation.org/2012/06/06/religious-leaders-and-womens-rights-in-afghanistan/>

22 Sam Robinson, "Rousing Religion: Islamic Preaching on the Pakistan-Afghan Border," 2017.

which make the message memorable and authoritative.<sup>23</sup>

According to the Survey of the Afghan People, Afghans reported they have the lowest levels of confidence in national government institutions but express the highest levels of confidence in RLs (66.1%) with high confidence also expressed in previous years,<sup>24</sup> which underscores their persistent centrality in Afghan society. A study highlighted the importance of religious leaders in the community as “when a message comes out of the mouth of a religious leader inside the mosque, it receives enormous attention and motivates people to pay special attention to that message.”<sup>25</sup> The same author also stressed a major role that mosques play that is other than religious, which includes mobilization and public leadership tasks, which he explained as ‘if only religious tasks were performed in the mosque, the latter would have not have required a specific building for it.’<sup>26</sup>

The same author continues – though the information might be dated as it was written in 2006 – “in Afghan cities, Friday prayer attendance is not as obligatory as it is in the rural areas of Afghanistan. Educated people in the cities receive country’s socio-political information and analysis from different media sources. However, in the rural communities it is the Friday prayer that provides the information and broader analysis. In rural areas Imam is the only one who gets and interprets fresh news from the capital through Amer Bar and Tabligh officers from the Ministry of Hajj, Ershad and Awqaf. People just listen to his analysis and follow his conclusions.”<sup>27</sup> A national perception survey confirms such centrality of the mosque as 47% of respondents in 2016 received their news and information from mosques, which is the third, after radio and television.<sup>28</sup>

A study conducted in Wardak and Kunduz during the same period, assigns a reduced role to mosques as traditional centres of communal life due to changing power structures and an increased wealth among people. The same study also downplays the role of RLs’ influence where still stressing their centrality on certain issues,

including women’s rights and issues related to honour.<sup>29</sup>

A brief from the United States Institute of Peace assigns a diminished prestige to the ulema because their authority has been often forcibly linked to political rather than purely religious considerations as Afghanistan began to incorporate the ulema into the state’s bureaucracy, and the state began to take control of private religious proprietary endowments, or *awqaf*, which had for centuries financially supported the ulema and helped ensure their independence.<sup>30</sup> Similarly to the former study, the RLs’ centrality in family matters, along making rulings on land and water use, witnessing agreements or serving to persuade individuals to forgive specific grievances was also highlighted.<sup>31</sup>

The study conducted in Kunduz and Wardak also highlights how especially poor mullahs economically depend on the community.<sup>32</sup> Another study also stressed how such dependence on the community determines the content of the pre- and post - prayer speeches of the mullah.<sup>33</sup> Taken together, the latter raise some questions on what factors constrain religious leaders’ ability to preach in favour or against a determined topic, especially one addressing sensitive issues such as women’s rights. A study also added that some religious scholars might privately agree that sharia principles are required for protection of women’s rights but they might not be always prepared to publicly defend either these principles as these scholars, especially if they are elected into local or national bodies, cite the conservative nature of their constituencies as the main reason for their inability to accept women’s rights arguments’ aside threats from more conservative forces that might force them into silence.<sup>34</sup>

Nonetheless, an author suggests that in a traditional society like Afghanistan where Islam shapes culture, traditions, and customs, there is no better way to raise a sensitive topic such as women’s rights than through com-

23 Sam Robinson, “The Ancient and Modern Power of Sermons in Contemporary Pakistan,” *Journal of The Royal Asiatic Society*, Volume 27, Issue 3, July 2017, pp. 461-475

24 The Asia Foundation, “Survey of the Afghan People,” TAF, 2016, [http://asiafoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/2016\\_Survey-of-the-Afghan-People\\_full-survey-Apr2017.pdf](http://asiafoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/2016_Survey-of-the-Afghan-People_full-survey-Apr2017.pdf)

25 Ahmad Idrees Rahmani, “The Role of Religious Leaders in the Provision of Local Services in Afghanistan,” Open Society Institute, 2006, [www.policy.hu](http://www.policy.hu)

26 Ibid.

27 Ibid.

28 The Asia Foundation, “A Survey of the Afghan People,” 2016.

29 Ali Wardak et al, “The Role and Functions of Religious Civil Society in Afghanistan: Case Studies from Sayedabad and Kunduz.”

30 Hamid Khan, “Islamic Law, Customary Law, and Afghan Informal Justice,” USIP, 2015, <https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/SR363-Islamic-Law-CustomaryLaw-and-Afghan-Informal-Justice.pdf>

31 Ibid.

32 Ali Wardak et al, “The Role and Functions of Religious Civil Society in Afghanistan: Case Studies from Sayedabad and Kunduz.”

33 Ahmad Idrees Rahmani, “The Role of Religious Leaders in the Provision of Local Services in Afghanistan.”

34 A. Hozyainova, “Sharia and Women’s Rights in Afghanistan,” USIP, 2014, [https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/SR347-Sharia\\_and\\_Women’s\\_Rights\\_in\\_Afghanistan.pdf](https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/SR347-Sharia_and_Women’s_Rights_in_Afghanistan.pdf)



munity-level RLs themselves.<sup>35</sup> Another study suggested that Islamic law offers avenues for interpretations of women's rights, but it enjoys much greater legitimacy and buy-in among communities than Western rights-based arguments with some successes recorded specifically in engaging RLs in the promotion of women's rights.<sup>36</sup> A policy brief reported that an analysis of trends in the survey data and community baseline surveys of some local NGOs, including the Afghanistan Youth and Cultural Foundation, the Shuhada Organization and the Research and Cultural Center of Imam Shaibani, has also shown that among traditional leaders, religious figures possess the strongest moral authority in shaping attitudes and behaviours on questions like women's rights.<sup>37</sup> A recent study suggests religious leaders' ability to positively influence community's perception on corruption issues,<sup>38</sup> a conclusion that could be extended to other subjects such as women's rights.

The same authors also provided some lessons learned from engaging RLs, including the importance of engaging them with a spirit of ownership of the project – as a practitioner also suggested these should be invited for consultations rather than as passive recipients of a training –<sup>39</sup> and these need to be better informed about women's rights in an authentically Islamic moral framework that speaks to their understanding.<sup>40</sup> The same author also suggested focusing on building trust with religious leaders already showing involvement in women's rights. The Asia Foundation research documents demonstrated that when NGOs adopted a more patient approach that placed importance on building trust, traditional male leaders have often ruled in favour of women as a party to a dispute on such matters as inheritance, choice of spouse, child custody, and divorce. More than 500 documented cases were resolved in favour of women's rights over two years in nine provinces where these impact studies of various projects showed that rates for resolving cases

in favour of women disputants improved three-fold.<sup>41</sup> An impact study on training religious leaders on corruption issues conducted by Integrity Watch Afghanistan warned against a short training (2 days) as less effective in influencing behavioural change.<sup>42</sup> Oxfam – that tried to involve religious leaders on gender justice issues, even in dangerous provinces such as Kunduz – reported that some members of the ulema they worked with thought they were not valued by the international organizations and felt their potential was overlooked or underestimated. They told Oxfam that being involved in the project had helped give them back a feeling of value and has increased their sense of reputation and importance in the community. This recognition of their work lifted their self esteem and provided an important reported motivation to be involved in the work.<sup>43</sup>

35 Kakar and Thapa, "Women and Religious Leaders in Afghanistan," 2012, The Asia foundation, <http://asiafoundation.org/2012/06/06/religious-leaders-and-womens-rights-in-afghanistan/>

36 Ibid.

37 Palwasha Kakar, "Women's Rights and Islam," USIP, 2014, [https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/PB175\\_Engaging\\_Afghan\\_Religious\\_Leaders\\_for\\_Women%27s\\_Rights.pdf](https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/PB175_Engaging_Afghan_Religious_Leaders_for_Women%27s_Rights.pdf)

38 Integrity Watch Afghanistan, "Religious Leaders' Fight Against Corruption: an Impact Evaluation," IWA, 2017, <https://iwaweb.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Ulama-Report-English-6.pdf>. The study suggested the approach was an RCT where in fact lacked the two levels of randomization required by an actual RCT.

39 Hajer Naili, "In Afghanistan, danger stalks gender imam training," *We News*, June 12, <http://womensenews.org/2015/06/in-afghanistan-danger-stalks-gender-imam-training/>

40 Palwasha Kakar, "Women's Rights and Islam."

41 Ibid.

42 Integrity Watch Afghanistan, "Religious Leaders' Fight Against Corruption: An Impact Evaluation."

43 T. Donnelly, "Working with Religious Leaders in Afghanistan," Oxfam Brief Paper, January 2016.

The role of the well respected ulema members was considered important by the project in terms of convincing community leaders to accept the participation of women in community shuras during the discussions.

# METHODOLOGY



The present study took a mixed methods approach where a survey was administered to RLs, who were trained and those, who were not trained by UNDP in the selected provinces that provided some trends on knowledge, attitudes, and practices where the FGDs discussions (FGDs) provided information on causation and in-depth explanations on the trends established by the survey. FGDs with male and female community members explored in depth on how Friday sermons influence gender equality in the communities. For more information on the methodology, See Annex A.

## Survey Religious Leaders

A survey was conducted with RLs registered with the DoHRA, trained/not trained by UNDP holding a variety of religious titles, including those, who hold sermons on Fridays and employees from the DoHRAs. The survey was conducted digitally, mostly over the phone.

Although individuals' attitudes can differ from prevailing norms, attitude data give insights into how common certain views are among a given group. Examples of attitude indicators include questions on attitudes regarding the ideal age for a girl's marriage and whether education is more important for boys than girls. The present study also adopted the Gender-Equitable Men (GEM) Scale to directly measure attitudes toward "gender-equitable" norms. The scale was designed to provide information about the prevailing norms in a community as well as the effectiveness of any programme that hopes to influence them (Pulerwitz and Barker 2008). The original GEM scale consisted of 24 items across various domains such as gender norms, violence, sexuality, masculinities, reproductive health and showed high internal validity in different contexts. The latter was highly modified and adapted to the Afghan context and more specifically for surveying RLs as many items included the word 'sex' that could not be even replaced with a synonym as the latter could have still potentially offended the sensibilities of RLs. Therefore, an additional scale was adopted, The Gender Norm Attitude Scale, which was pre-tested with Egyptian women with good internal validity.<sup>1</sup> The latter measures

egalitarian beliefs about male and female gender norms and could be used in the Afghan context without adaptations. The latter includes items that explore beliefs in and promotion of equity for girls and women and beliefs in maintaining the rights and privileges of men.

In terms of knowledge on women's rights the study explored some examples of knowledge on women's rights taken directly from the Civil Code and the Elimination of Violence Against Women (EVAW) Law – though without specifying the law - and then other aspects of the training specifically related to women's education, inheritance, and political participation in an Islamic framework. In order to explore practices, the respondents were confronted with two scenarios involving a woman whose rights were violated with a multiple response answer selection along questions on marriage and the level of education of his spouse/s. RLs were also asked questions regarding the quality, length, feeling of involvement, and some other aspects of the training delivered by UNDP/MoHRA. Additionally, the survey explored sermon schedules, topics and dates when the sermons have been given, and case records that have been solved using knowledge acquired during the trainings. The estimated number of attendees for the Friday prayers provided an average estimate on the number of people reaching the sermons. The survey also collected a variety of background information on education, areas of activity, and income to better explore some differences among the religious leaders and whether the latter represent a factor in their support for women's rights.

## Focus Groups and Interviews

FGD is the preferred mode of inquiry when the researched topic requires an in-depth exploration. The latter requires to select information – rich cases, who can provide a variety of views. In terms of gender knowledge, attitudes, and practices as specifically influenced by the preaching and influence of RLs, required to discuss the issue with female leaders and community women, who are knowledgeable on women's issues affecting the community and can speak on behalf of other women also. Additionally, women from the female madrassas, were considered as even more sensible to women's issues as reflected in Islam and as a source of information on the modes that sermons have gender transformative powers. Also conducting discussions with active men in the communities, including community leaders, shura members, teachers, and male madrasa students provided in-depth knowledge on

1 Waszak, C, JL Severy, L Kafa , and I Badawi, "Fertility behavior and psychological stress: The mediating influence of gender norm beliefs among Egyptian women," *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 2000, 25:197–208.



how the information reaches male community members, whether the latter is discussed after the sermons, and how it eventually trickles down to their female counterparts. FGDs included from 6 to 10 participants.

The FGDs with community members dug deep into issues of gender equality. The latter were explored through story – telling techniques as these are the preferred mode for exploring issues that are prone to respondent’s desirability bias such as women’s rights. FGDs with religious leaders explored the challenges and successes in terms of achieving gender equality in their respective areas of influence, especially through Friday sermons.

The officials from the DoHRA were interviewed as these were an important source of information on the successes and challenges of Friday sermons as influencing more equitable gender relations and the ways ahead along current policies tackling women’s rights along some contextual information on sermons, including topic selection, delivery, and monitoring. The Department of Women Affairs was also interviewed regarding the involvement of RLs on women’s rights issues in order to explore their ideas, opinions, and potential experiences in this regard.

## Sampling

FGDs participants were selected adopting the purposeful sampling technique. The logic and power of purposeful sampling derive from the emphasis on in-depth understanding. This leads to selecting information-rich cases for study in-depth. Information - rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research, thus the term purposeful sampling.<sup>2</sup> There is no rule for sample size in qualitative inquiry – depends on what one wants to know, the purpose, what is at stake, what will be useful, what will have credibility, and what can be done with available time and resources. Therefore, it was determined that for each type of FGD capturing views from different districts along the centre of the provinces should provide a variety of views, which should suffice for an informative analysis. The locations were determined ad hoc, after conducting FGDs with RLs, who represented the entry point into their respective communities. A total of 41 FGDs and interviews were conducted. For details on all qualitative data collected see Table 1.

While the number of RLs trained by UNDP was not known before starting the fieldwork, after discovering that in Bamyan and Herat their numbers was very small, it was later determined that these – in order to be surveyed - would be sampled based on the lists of RLs registered with the respective DoHRAs, which would provide a general overview of the status of knowledge that RLs have. In total, 183 RLs were surveyed. The survey with RLs is therefore representative of the knowledge, attitudes, and practices of RLs registered with provincial DoHRAs (68 in Bamyan, 120 in Balkh, and 127 in Herat), at 95% confidence level and 5% margin of error. For details on sampling, quality control, and implementation arrangements see Annex B.

Table 1: Sample Breakdown

Type	Balkh	Bamyan	Herat	Total
<b>Surveys</b>				
Survey religious leaders	70	51	62	183
<b>FGDs</b>				
FGD men	3 (Kamargande Baba Yadgar, Mazar-e-Sharif centre, Dihdadi)	4 (Bamyan centre, Rig Shad (Bamyan district), Yakawlang, and Shaiabar	4 (Injil, Guzara, and 2 in Herat center)	11
FGD women	3 (Kamargande Baba Yadgar, Mazar-e-Sharif centre, Dihdadi)	4 (Bamyan centre, Rig Shad (Bamyan district), Yakawlang, and Shaiabar	4 (Injil, Guzara, and 2 in Herat center)	11
FGD madrasa students women	Faruqiya Madrasa	Imam Sadegh drassa	Jafare Ma-Qiyasiya Madrasa	3
FGD madrasa students men	Darullhefaz Mahmoodiyya Madrasa	Mahdiya drass, Fuladi	Ma-Dare Ghyasiya Madrasa	3
FGD religious leaders	2 (centre)	2 (centre)	2 (centre and Injil)	6
Ministry of Hajj official and DoWA	2	2	2	6
MoHRA Religious Studies Department, Kabul	/	/	/	1
<b>Total</b>				<b>41</b>

<sup>2</sup> Michael Quinn Patton, “Qualitative Inquiry and Evaluation,” 2002, Sage Publications.

## Study Limitations

The present study lacked population information on RLs trained by UNDP. The latter was only discovered once the fieldwork started where it was revealed that despite the regional trainings, RLs from Bamyan and Balkh attended a training in Kabul, which meant that only a small number of participants from these provinces attended the training from UNDP. Balkh province also held a regional training where 35 RLs among those surveyed participated (some emigrated abroad or their telephone number could not be retrieved anymore). It was then decided that the survey, which was initially conceived as focusing on RLs trained by UNDP, would expand its scope and become a survey representative of RLs registered with the respective DoHRAs.

Additionally, the study explored the experiences of RLs and community members in secure areas. Insecure areas pose a different set of challenges for RLs for discussing issues such as women's rights, especially in light of a permanent and/or intermittent presence of insurgent groups. Additionally, MoHRA registered only RLs from safer areas as their coverage, as it was explained above, is limited to district/provincial centres.

Additionally, as FGD participants were selected through RLs, the latter likely includes overly positive views on RLs as these likely come from their circle of supporters. Nonetheless, FGDs were informative on how effective RLS can be to spread any idea, regardless of whether these support women's rights or not. Still, as the findings revealed, not all participants had a positive experience with RLs.

# FINDINGS





# Background and Training

Thirty-eight percent of RLs come from Balkh, 34% from Herat, and 27% from Bamyan. RL from Bamyan come from the center (45%), Kahmard (6%), Panjab (6%), Saighan (6%); Shaibar (10%), Waras (12%), and Yakwlang (14%) districts. Respondents from Balkh come from the following districts: Balkh (2.9%), Chimtal (1.4%), Dihdadi (4.3%), Khishindih (2.9%), Khulm (4.3%), Mazar-e-Sharif (71%), Nari Shahi (7%) and Sholgora (4.3%). Respondents from Herat come from Chishti Sarif (1.6%), Gulran (1.6%), Guzara (1.6%), Herat center (18%), Injil (44%), Karukh (18%), Kohsan (10%), Kushk (3.2%), Pashtun Zarghun (1.6%), and Zinda Jan (1.6%). 11% are Pashtun, 41% Tajik, 3.8% Uzbek, 26% Hazara, 4.9% Sadat, 3.8% Arab, and the rest belong to other ethnicities. Ninety-six percent are married, 1.1% are not (and the remaining small percentage did not provide an answer). Sixty-eight percent are Sunni and 32% are Shia.

Sixty-four percent of surveyed RLs identified as imams, 8% as mullahs, 4.3% as ulema, and 23% as other. Among the 23% identified as other, 17% identified as imam khatib, 1.1% as w'aez, with smaller percentages as employees of the DoHRA (where 2 also as imams in a mosque). However, when asked whether these perform Friday prayers, 81% said yes, which raises the number of preachers, or imam khatib (or w'aez) at much higher levels, at around 80%. When RLs is used in this report, it refers to all types of RLs irrespective whether they preach on Fridays or not.

When asked about their level of education, RLs leaders mentioned having higher education and above in the vast majority of cases (51%). Thirty-seven percent completed high school, with smaller percentages mentioning having completed secondary education, some secondary education, and some primary school. Six percent have madrasa education only.

When asked on their main occupation, RLs mentioned being unemployed (3.2%); salaried worker in the private sector (22%); salaried worker in the public sector (63%), which likely means that these are imams on the government payroll; self-employed (4.3%), other (4.9%); and the remaining data is missing. Two percent of RLs are under 25 years, 16% between 25 and 35 years, 35% are 36 to 45 years old, 23% are 46 to 55 years old, and 22% are aged 56 and more. More than half are under 45 years of age, which makes the RLs a relatively young population.

When asked on the average household income, these

mentioned: between 2000 and 3000 Afs (1.6%); 3000 to 5000 (8%); 5001 and 10,000 (53%); 10,001 to 15,000 (23%), 15,001 to 20,000 (8.1%) with small percentages reporting over 20,000 Afs.

## Trainings

Among those participants, who actually attended the training delivered by UNDP – about 35% of survey participants - either in Kabul or in the provinces (these mostly are from Balkh province only as Bamyan and Herat did not have a training at provincial level delivered by UNDP) reported that in terms of quality of the training, all were satisfied with the vast majority reporting being very satisfied. The teaching methods were also satisfactory with only 8% reporting being neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with the teaching methods. The vast majority were also satisfied with the clarity of the contents with 4.5% reporting not being satisfied nor dissatisfied. The majority was also satisfied with the length of the training with less than 10% being dissatisfied or unsure on how to rate the latter. Distance to the location of the training was also rated very positively among the participants of the training provided by UNDP. Participants also rated these trainings as useful for changing knowledge of RLs with only one participant doubting its usefulness. The trainings also received the same high approval for changing the attitudes on women's rights among RLs. Changing practices among RLs training also received over a 90% approval of its usefulness with a slight less than 10% casting some doubts on it. A small percentage also reported that some topics were missing from the training, including forced labour of women and causes of VAW. FGDs with RLs also discussed how these were recruited for the trainings and among the main reasons mentioned was already showing positive attitudes towards women's rights, as being reputable, influential, and knowledgeable, and in some cases with a completed high school as minimum requirement in terms of education.

However, RLs participated in a variety of trainings delivered by other organizations also (over 50% of respondents). Heads of the respective DoHRAs also mentioned discussing women's rights on a regular basis during meetings with RLs in their respective provinces admitting that they lack resources for delivering an actual training. Whatever the training or awareness received, the RLs leaders not trained by UNDP reported the need to be trained in the following topics: women's freedom of movement, forced labour of women, right to choose one's spouse, position of women inside the family, men's rights, self-immolation, respect of women, child marriage, causes of violence, property rights, and harmful traditional practices such as baad. These raised the

importance of having knowledgeable trainers delivering the training, preferably from the lines of ulema or RLs, which ensures legitimacy, and who are able to answer to questions raised by the participants or provide clarifications. As a RL reported: “*I myself don’t participate in most of the trainings because some of these trainers have limited knowledge about these issues.*”<sup>3</sup> Another RL also mentioned: “*When I am convinced, I can convince others.*”<sup>4</sup> Expansion to districts and refresher trainings were also considered important along a handbook that could be consulted at any time after the training, including a translation into Pashto.

While most RLs participating in the FGDs felt involved in the training, they mostly had the ability to ask questions and discuss issues. One participant raised feeling as a vehicle for advancing the women’s rights agenda rather than a partner:

We were not feeling involved in the training because we were invited there as religious scholars. We felt that we were invited to the seminars to get some information regarding women’s rights so that we could then prevent violence against them and they could get justice and receive their social rights.<sup>5</sup>

Delving further into the FGDs, despite RLS feeling involved, these revealed that none mentioned having contributed to the actual training contents, which, as the desk review explored, works as an incentive for ensuring the cooperation of RLs.

An important point raised by a DoHRA official was the reduced effectiveness of the training when the actual RLs are not monitored afterwards:

Only trainings cannot be effective, the impact of the training needs to be monitored to make sure issues about women’s rights are actually discussed and the latter should be done by the organizations themselves. Because when the number of participants is high, then the DoHRA does not have enough budget and personnel to monitor them all.<sup>6</sup>

## Knowledge, Attitudes, and Practices on Gender Equality Among Religious Leaders

### Knowledge State and Islamic Laws Among Religious Leaders

When asked regarding daughters’ share in the parent’s property according to Islam, 84% of RLs answered one half and 14% one third of the brother’s share (with the remaining missing or not knowing). Ninety-eight percent correctly answered that women are allowed to pray in mosques and the same percentage regarding the rights of education for women in Islam. Ninety-eight percent also correctly identified the wife as the person, who should receive mehr in Afghanistan. However, when asked about less obvious teachings derived from religious texts, less clarity is found among RLs. A question explained the following: ‘According to Islamic teachings, everyone is responsible for their own actions. However, some believe that they are responsible and will be punished for actions and behaviour of others, namely, their wife, especially if she behaves in a ‘sinful’ way.’ Ten percent of RLs believe that one will be punished for the actions of their wives and 38% believed in it, but only under certain conditions. Only 43% correctly answered that they will not be punished because of others’ actions.<sup>7</sup> Despite the question already included the correct answer in its formulation, a high number answered wrongly.

Some questions in the survey were based on articles from the EVAW Law (without specifying the law). Ninety-one percent were correct on guessing whether according to laws in Afghanistan, it is illegal to get engaged or marry a woman, who reached the legal age for marriage and did not agree to get married; 3.8% did not guess correctly; 2.7% refused to answer; and 2.7% of answers are missing. Eighty-eight percent correctly believe that *baad* is illegal in Afghanistan where 4.3% do not believe it is illegal, 1.6% do not know, 4.3% refused to answer, and 1.6% of data are missing. Eighty-two percent correctly guessed that

3 Bamyán, FGD religious leaders, n. 1

4 Ibid.

5 Bamyán, FGD religious leaders, n. 2

6 Bamyán, Interview with DoHRA official

7 5% refused to answer and 1.1% did not know with the remaining missing. There are some exceptions, for example, sin has also been applied to a group or community’s collective behavior. See the entry for “Repentance” at Oxford Encyclopaedia of the Islamic World. [http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/article/opr/t236/e0677?\\_hi=0&\\_pos=1](http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/article/opr/t236/e0677?_hi=0&_pos=1)

according to Afghan laws, it is a crime to shove or slap a woman or girl, even if no injury occurs. Nine percent believe this to be false, 5% do not know, and 1.6% refused to answer (with the remaining data missing). Fifty-two percent wrongly believe that cursing, intimidating, or degrading a woman is not regulated by law with only 26% correctly guessing it is regulated by law. Twenty-one percent did not know or refused to answer and the remaining small percentage is missing. Ninety-one percent correctly guessed that it is illegal for any girl under the age of 15 to get married, even if her parents consent. Seven percent did not answer correctly, with the remaining small percentage of data missing.

### Attitudes Among RLs

As interviews with the respective DoHRA departments and FGDs revealed, RLs with tendencies towards egalitarianism were chosen for the trainings, which is also confirmed by the results of the survey with RLs. Based on the Rights and Privileges of Men subscale of the Gender Norms Attitudes Scale, the average recorded is 1.82 (on scale from 1 to 2) - where less agreement with men having more rights and privileges than women reflects a more egalitarian perspective - is telling on RLs tendencies towards egalitarianism. Based on the Equity for Girls Subscale - that was reverse coded - with an average of 1.58 - which should be read as somewhere in the middle between traditional and egalitarian but tending towards egalitarianism. Nonetheless, the tendency towards egalitarianism is in the case lower if compared to to the Rights and Privileges of Men Subscale.

Table 2: Gender Norms Attitudes Scales<sup>a</sup>

Item	Agree	Disagree	Don't know, refused to answer, missing
<b>Rights and Privileges of Men Subscale</b>			
It is important that sons have more education than daughters.	8%	91%	1%
Daughters should be sent to school only if they are not needed to help at home.	7%	90%	3%

The most important reason that sons should be more educated than daughters is so they can better look after their parents when they are older.	18%	80%	2%
If there is limited amount of money to pay for tutoring, it should be spent on sons first.	9%	87%	4%
A woman should take good care of her children and not worry about other people's affairs.	34%	61%	5%
Women should leave politics to men.	16%	80%	4%
A woman has to have a husband or sons or some other make kinsman to protect her.	50%	46%	4%
The only thing a woman can really rely on in her old age is her sons.	20%	74%	6%
A good woman never questions her husband's opinions, even if she is not sure she agrees with them.	26%	69%	5%
When is a question of children's health, it is best to do whatever the father wants.	4.3%	93%	2.7%
<b>Equity for Girls Subscale</b>			
Daughters should be able to work outside the home after they have children if they want to. (-)	46%	50%	4%
Daughters should have just the same chance to work outside the home as sons. (-)	68%	29%	3%

8 Rights and Privileges of Men Subscale: Cronbach's Alpha .693, items positively coded; 1=Agree, 2=Disagree; Equity for Girls Subscale: Cronbach's Alpha=.545, N=167, reverse coded, 1=Disagree, 2=Agree.

Daughters should be told that an important reason not to have too many children is so they can work outside the home and earn money. (-)	28%	69%	3%
I would like my daughter to be able to work outside the home so she can support herself if necessary. (-)	81%	15%	4%

If someone insults me, I would defend my reputation, with force if I have to.*	42%	17%	36%	5%
A man using violence against his wife is a private matter that shouldn't be discussed outside the couple.	3%	19%	74%	4%
Only when a woman has a child she is a real woman.	10%	8%	79%	3%

\*Removed from the scale to improve reliability

### GEM Scale<sup>a</sup>

Item	Strongly agree	Somewhat agree	Disagree	Don't know, refused to answer, missing
Changing diapers, giving kids a bath, and feeding children are a responsibility of a mother.	18%	56%	24%	2%
A woman should tolerate violence in order to keep her family together.	2%	14%	82%	2%
It is the responsibility of the wife to avoid getting pregnant.	1%	13%	80%	6%
There is a time when a woman deserves to be physically punished by her husband or family member (for example when the woman is rebellious or disobedient)	2%	11%	80%	7%
A man should be embarrassed if unable to have babies.	4%	6%	86%	4%

Also on the GEM scale, adapted to the Afghan context, with an average of 2.73 on a scale from 1 to 3 (with higher numbers representing high support for gender equitable norms), was high among RLs. The GEM scale was also implemented in India where – taking into comparison each item of the GEM scale – RLs in general show considerably more equitable tendencies than men in the Indian context. The scale was also coded into different categories, low equity, moderate – low equity, moderate – high equity, and the highest equity (which includes disagreement with all questions from the GEM scale). See the chart below. Taken together, both scales are telling on high level of egalitarianism and support for gender equitable norms among RLs.

EQUITY AMONG RELIGIOUS LEADERS

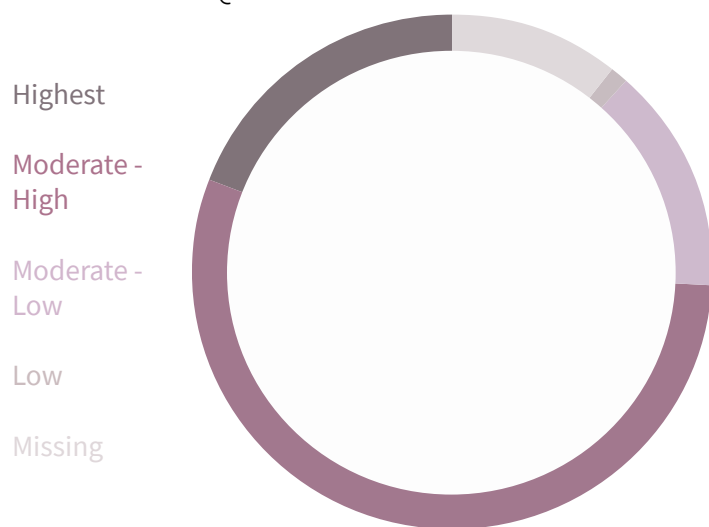


Chart 1: Equity gender norms among RLs based on answers from the GEM Scale

The overwhelming majority of respondents of a national perception survey implemented in 2016 (81%) said they agree that women should have the same opportunities as men in education. However, when asked about equal

9 Cronbach's Alpha=.618, 1=Agree, 2=Somewhat agree, 3=Disagree.

access to education at specific levels, support tapers off.<sup>10</sup> Most Afghans support women receiving basic education, such as in an Islamic madrasa (93.6%), but far fewer say women should receive higher levels of education, such as at a university (72.1%). Ninety-eight percent of RLs from this study support women's madrasa education, 88% support primary, 96% high school, and 90% university, which is considerably higher than the national average established by the previously mentioned survey at national level. In the national perception survey, support drops further when there is an expectation of travel between the home and school for women.<sup>11</sup> Only 47.1% of respondents across Afghanistan support women studying outside of their home province with 71% of RLs surveyed for the present study supporting it. Over 50% of RLs support women studying in another country, which is higher than the average established by the national perception survey specifically in Herat, Bamyan, and Balkh (with the exception of Bamyan).

Victim blaming for violence is to some extent present among RLs, still at moderate levels though. When confronted with the statement that if a woman experiences violence, she must have done something to provoke it, 10% strongly agreed, 20% somewhat agreed, 67% disagreed with the remaining missing and/or not known or refused to answer. When asked on whether a woman should work if the financial situation of her husband and/or male household member is adequate, 22% strongly agreed, 26% somewhat agreed, and 50% disagreed.<sup>12</sup>

When asked about the ideal age for girls to get married, the mean reported was 17,7 with 14 the lowest and 20 the highest ages reported. One respondent reported 14, which is illegal in Afghanistan. The legal age of marriage is 16 years for women and 18 years for men under the Afghan Civil Code. However, the father of a girl or competent court can 'consent' to the marriage of a girl, who is 15 years in extenuating circumstances. Five percent of RLs reported 15 years; 40% reported 16 years, 2.7% reported 17, 42% reported 18 years, and the rest older ages as ideal for girls to get married. Therefore, almost 50% reported an age under 18, which could not be considered a positive finding, considering the negative impact that marriage has on a girl's health due to the risks related to pregnancy, her education, and future prospects in general, irrespective of laws prevailing in Afghanistan. The mean reported for boys to get married is considerably higher than

for girls. On average, respondents reported 19,4 years as the ideal age for boys to get married with minimum age reported at 15 and maximum at 28. For boys only 3.3% of RLs reported under 18 years as being ideal, which is considerably lower than the 50% reported for girls.

FGDs also exposed some examples where RLs were in direct violation of women's rights. A RL explained how physical violence is in some instances permitted (excluding certain body parts):

Issues related to violence against women need to be discussed, as Prophet PBUH has said women should not be beaten on their face. But if a woman is provided with accommodation, meals and clothes and still she doesn't obey her husband and does inappropriate things, she must face disciplinary actions from her husband.<sup>13</sup>

The latter also likely refers to a verse that many scholars dwelled on or to the so called 'beating sura' or verse 4:34.<sup>14</sup> Summarizing all the non - patriarchal interpretations of the verse would be beyond the scope of this report where all have in common that interpreting the verse as violence being allowed in some circumstances would completely contradict other verses where gender equality is emphasised in the Qur'an aside the general uneasiness of past commentators with the specified verse.<sup>15</sup>

The quote above also exposes another problematic issue, notions on how women should obey and serve their husbands that was also found among other RLs: "*One of the important things is that wives should obey their husbands. It is said that if a woman obeys her husband and prays 5 times a day, every door she enters is a door to heaven.*"<sup>16</sup> The latter is a misinterpretation of religious texts – more specifically, the beginning of the same sura 4:34 men-

13 Herat, FGD with RL

14 While there are many translations of the sura, for illustrative purposes only one is reported, more specifically by Yusuf Ali: Men are the protectors and maintainers of women, because Allah has given the one more (strength) than the other, and because they support them from their means. Therefore, the righteous women are devoutly obedient, and guard in (the husband's) absence what Allah would have them guard. As to those women on whose part ye fear disloyalty and ill-conduct, admonish them (first), (Next), refuse to share their beds, (And last) beat them (lightly); but if they return to obedience, seek not against them Means (of annoyance): For Allah is Most High, great (above you all). <http://corpus.quran.com/translation.jsp?chapter=4&verse=34>

15 For example, see Ziuaddin Sardar, "Reading the Qur'an: The Contemporary Relevance of the Sacred Text of Islam," 2011 or Asma Barlas, *Believing Women in Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Qur'an*, 2002, The University of Texas Press.

16 Herat, FGD with RL, n. 2

10 The Asia Foundation, "A survey of the Afghan People," 2016.

11 Ibid.

12 The remaining don't know, refused to answer, or the answer is missing.



tioned above and the word *qawwam* that has been variously interpreted as men being protectors, maintainers, and even managers of women - and as an author pointed out “*to posit that women should be obedient servants of their men is to perform immense violence to the spirit of the Qur’an.*”<sup>17</sup>

Some stereotypes of women as ‘morally weak’ also arose: “*A woman should have one husband but it happens that some women have a husband and also a boyfriend. I have seen a case like that, a woman, who had 3 children escaped from home. Her husband was a good man. We need to control our sisters and wives if they go outside the house or to work.*”<sup>18</sup> In the same FGD another participant continued in the same tone:

I have seen a case myself. There was an old man at a court, his wife wanted to divorce him. They had 10 children and 13 grandchildren. The woman wanted to divorce and marry someone else. Women need to be advised to be good with their husbands. And when we talk about rights of women, women should not become happy when they can divorce and marry someone else now.”<sup>19</sup>

## Practices Among Religious Leaders - Scenarios

When confronted with a scenario of a woman approaching them for being physically abused by her husband, RLs mentioned they would: refer her to the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (14%); refer her to DoWA (18%); provide her with information on all the options available to her (1.1%); refer her to a formal justice institution, such as the police and judiciary (18%); other (1.1%); talk directly to another elder/RLs (14%); talk

to her husband’s or her own family directly (29%); refer her to another organization that could provide shelter and physical protection (6%); refer her to another organization that could provide mediation (10%); talk to her husband directly (64%). RLs also reported telling her to talk to her husband (23%); telling her to talk to her own family (17%); telling her to talk to her husband’s family (17%); and telling her to consult a community leader and/or religious leader (23%). Telling the woman to talk to her husband is not a positive finding, considering that he is the perpetrator in this case. Nonetheless, RLs would also act in a proactive way with a 64% showing willingness to confront the actual perpetrator.

When asked what would they do/who would you refer to if a woman, survivor of violence, who also suffered a serious injury, came to them and asked for help RLs mentioned: assist her with mediation (43%); refer her to an NGO (4%); refer her to the police and/or judiciary (69%); would do nothing because it is a private family matter (3%); would refer her to traditional/RLs (32%); and other (2.2%). While 70% approaching the police and/or judiciary is laudable, 43% assisting with mediation is less, considering the problems related to criminal cases being solved informally in the Afghan context.

## Community Perceptions Religious Leaders’ Changes in Attitudes, Knowledge, and Practices

A number of FGD participants with both RLs, who discussed about other RLs, and community members mentioned how RLs already knew about women’s rights but they were not talking about them and the trainings ‘reminded’ them: “*The knowledge of religious leaders has not changed but this training was like a reminder for them because some of them ‘forgot’ to preach about women’s rights. Women, girls were prevented from getting education but ulema didn’t focus on it. But now they preach about it.*”<sup>20</sup>

A rising sense of responsibility was noticed as a change

17 Ziauddin Sardar, “Reading the Qur’an: The Contemporary Relevance of the Sacred Text of Islam,” 2011.

The particular understanding of men ‘in charge of women, men as ‘protectors of women’, and ‘man should take care of women’ of the verse has led to the justification of numerous patriarchal traits. Men, many classical scholars argued, were the mediators of the word of God. It was their job to discipline and educate women in the ways of God. As long as Islamic law was not being violated, it was the duty of a wife to be obedient to her husband. Indeed, this obedience was given a sacred dimension by classical scholars like al-Tabari and is emphasised by modern commentators like Mawdudi. By obeying their men, the inheritors of the mantle of the Prophet, women were in fact obeying God. This twisted logic was not limited to obedience within the household. It was extended to the society at large for women attending any activity outside the home. For more on *qawwam* or men as ‘supporters’ of women in sura 4: 34, see page 309.

18 Herat, FGD with RLs, n. 1

19 Ibid.

20 Balkh, FGD with RLs, n. 1



among RLs: *“The change is that responsible people (religious leaders) feel more responsible now. We are told to talk about rights of children and women at least once a month.”*<sup>21</sup>

The majority of FGDs also raised how RLs are now more educated, ‘more liberal’, or more ‘open minded’. A discussion from a female madrassa provided some reasons for such change:

R1: Islam is a perfect religion. If we see more liberal religious leaders nowadays, it is because they didn’t know much about Islam in the past. For example, in the past the mullah was the person who used to go to the mosque and learn something about Islam, then they became mullahs and started to preach. But now, for becoming a mullah they need to get a proper education.

R2: Unfortunately, some of the religious leaders used to be extremists and now they are moderate. In the past, the number of religious leaders and media was lower, religious leaders didn’t have enough knowledge and their knowledge was based on traditions and customs. But they have changed now and they have a real understanding of Islam.

R3: Mullahs are more liberal now. For example, the fathers who didn’t allow their daughters to go to school and used to think of it as shameful, allow their daughters to go to school now.<sup>22</sup>

## Friday Sermons

All the 81% RLs, who perform Friday prayers also include messaging related to women’s rights (with the exception of 2 RLs). RLs mentioned delivering Friday sermons with messaging on women’s rights: once a week (9%), twice a month (28%); once a month (47%); once every 2 months (12%); and very small percentages less often. Regarding the topics addressed during the sermons, 67% mentioned inheritance, 61% VAW, 54% women’s education, 14% political rights, 51% alimony, and 33% civic and political rights. 16% mentioned ‘other,’ including, child marriage and forced marriage; forced labour, mehr, wedding expenses reduction, freedom of expression, the

right to choose a spouse, women’s property rights, rights of ‘wives compared to those of husbands,’ and ‘based on needs.’

FREQUENCY WOMEN’S RIGHTS MESSAGING

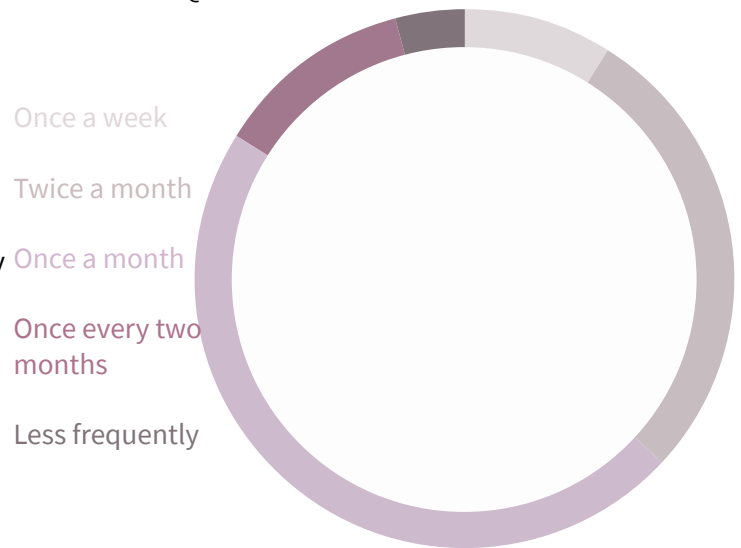


Chart 2: Frequency sermons that include messaging related to women’s rights based on survey data

Interviews with officials from the DoHRA explained that a circular with the topics to be included in the sermon is sent to RLs, in some instances specifying that is shared on a weekly basis. Additionally, RLs also explained that they include messaging on women’s rights – as it was also found in the survey - based on needs: *“For example, if we see that there is family conflicts or a running away case, then we preach about it that week”*<sup>23</sup> or *“In the beginning of the year when schools open the focus is on education. Or during winter, when due to cold weather diseases increase, people are told that women should have more access to health centres.”*<sup>24</sup>

Another FGD explained on how topics are also selected depending on the area, especially whether it is more urban or rural: *“In villages where most of the women live like in a prison in their homes, religious leaders mostly preach about forced and under aged marriages. But in the city where life is better and some issues have already improved, they preach about political, social, and civil rights of women.”*<sup>25</sup>

Some other RLs reported selecting the topics based on their own initiative: *“Mostly we select the subjects ourselves. We try to select the subjects that are also needed*

21 Herat, FGD with RLs, n. 1

22 Herat, FGD with female madrassa

23 Balkh, FGD with RLs

24 Herat, Interview with DoHRA official

25 Herat, FGD with female madrassa students

*in our society. For example, one week I talk about God and the next about prayer. The following I talk about the rights of husband and wife. I have not received anything from the government regarding the subject of my speeches.”<sup>26</sup>*

The officials from the DoHRA mentioned that sermons are monitored but only to some extent (occasionally or in the centre only) due to lack of resources. The official in Balkh mentioned that RLs bring the recordings of their sermons to the DoHRA office. However, it remains unclear how the latter are assessed considering that unlikely there is time and resources dedicated for listening to the recordings, or at least, these were not mentioned.

## Factors Influencing Sermon Effectiveness

Interviews and FGDs revealed different factors on when sermons can be more or less effective. FGDs and interviews also leave little doubt on how effective sermons are for spreading messages and how men attentively listen to them. An official from DoWA clearly explained:

The religious leaders are divided into two categories: 1) Those religious leaders, who defend women’s rights and have an important role in spreading those rights because people trust them a lot and accept what they say. For example, one word said by a mullah is 100 times more effective as if it was said by a normal person. 2) Those mullahs and religious leaders that have an influential role in ruining and weakening the rights of women. So, overall mullahs have two sides; positive and negative.<sup>27</sup>

Among the most important factors that emerged was the basis and foundation of sermons in religious texts with respondents often specifically mentioning the Qur’an and Hadiths. RLs are also overwhelmingly perceived as having authority, influence, and as being highly regarded and respected members of their communities. An important aspect that arose is also that the RLs ‘speak the truth’ and as an author pointed out: *“By sandwiching a message between Arabic book ends and using frequent quotations from the Qur’an and Hadith throughout, the spoken word is given a stamp of approval essential to its legitimacy.”<sup>28</sup>* Or as a madrassa student wittingly commented: *“If religious leaders don’t provide proves (from religious texts)*

*then people think that they have made them up.”<sup>29</sup>*

While RLs acting as role models was also raised as an important aspect of sermon effectiveness in the desk review, many FGD participants also highlighted the importance of the consistency between what is said and what is done by the RLs, even without being specifically asked about it. Based on the survey findings, 6% of RLs have two wives, which is classified as type of VAW. These are evenly distributed among the different age groups with the highest numbers recorded among those, who are 56 and older though the latter could be due to chance and we cannot conclude whether an age group of RLs is more likely to engage in polygamy. RLs with 2 wives come mostly from Herat province. RLs also are not fervent supporters of their wives’ education: 57% have a wife, who is illiterate, 15% have a wife with a madrassa education, 3.8% have a wife, who is semi-literate (can read and write), 8% of wives have completed some primary schooling, 2.7% have some secondary education, 1.6% completed secondary education, 5% completed high school, and 1.6% higher education (with the remaining data missing). Five FGDs, all with women, raised discontent with some hypocrisy they encountered among RLs:

There was an imam in our area that used to talk about women’s right in Islam. He said that he doesn’t allow his daughters to go to university because he doesn’t like them committing any ‘mistake’ (referring to immoral actions) while outside. Although he knew about women’s rights and used to say that getting education is an obligation for both men and women, he didn’t implement it himself.<sup>30</sup>

Nonetheless, 10 FGDs discussed on how the RLs are consistent, how they ensure the women of their household receive education, work, they are kind to them, and even some undertake small but brave steps to change the perception of women in the community: *“I know a religious leader in our area who was the first person, who mentioned the name of his daughter in her wedding invitation card. People said that he was shameless. Then people gradually accepted that writing the name of their daughter on their wedding invitation card is not a sin.”<sup>31</sup>*

The importance of discussions and deliberations for changing gender norms is also important, as the desk

26 Herat, FGD with RLs, n. 1

27 Herat, Interview with DoWA official

28 Sam Robinson, “The Ancient and Modern Power of Sermons in Contemporary Pakistan.”

29 Herat, FGD female madrassa

30 Balkh, FGDs with female madrassa students

31 Herat, FGD with female madrassa students

review pointed out. In fact, when asked about whether men discuss women's rights after the sermon 88% of RLs believe so, 2.2% do not believe so, and the remaining data are missing. A similar finding emerged in the FGDs where participants said that women's rights are discussed after the sermons and also at home with family members, and listened to through loudspeakers so also women can listen to sermons by "sitting on a roof,"<sup>32</sup> as an FGD discussed, which all have a multiplying effect on spreading ideas communicated through the sermon. Some FGDs with RLs raised the need to discuss women's rights in other types of gatherings where RLs are present such as Eid, Eid prayers, and weddings. While less discussed by the participants, sermons are also broadcasted on different radio stations. However, less remains known on the frequency of the latter. FGD and interview participants also raised the importance of involving schools, elders, and madrasa students for spreading knowledge on women's rights. Some female madrasa students described how on their own initiative discussed some issues during the month of Muharram and on some other occasions:

R1: Me and two other madrasa students went to an area to talk to women during Muharram. We made some connections between Muharram and role/position of women in Islam, for example, by telling them their daughters have the right to get education. And they became so happy and asked us to go there every year. The number of participants was around 200 women.

R2: I am the first girl who has come to study to a madrasa. There are some small ceremonies (prayers) among women on Tuesday and Thursdays. I participated in those and I talked about the rights of parents and some other issues. Women were encouraged and said to me to talk to them when I come to the district. From the time I am attending the madrasa, some women come to me and ask questions related to women on topics such as praying.<sup>33</sup>

As the desk review pointed out, the mosque is where people get information and learn on a variety of issues, which is especially the case in rural areas. A female FGD participant commented: "Men are illiterate and even don't have information about Islam. Religious leaders are the only people, who can give them information about women's rights because men don't have time for getting

education."<sup>34</sup> In fact, the majority of FGD participants also see sermons as effective due to the high level of illiteracy among people and therefore the mosque is seen as a venue where one receives information and gains new knowledge.

The number of sermon participants was also raised as an important factor determining the effectiveness of sermons for delivering messages on women's rights. When asked on the number of people attending sermons, the numbers are higher than initially estimated: 10% mentioned up to 100 people; 26% mentioned from 100 to 200 people; 16% between 200 and 300 with the same percentage mentioned also between 300 and 400 people; 14% mentioned between 400 and 500; and 18% mentioned over 500 participants attending the sermons. Considering the number of participants in sermons and the multiplying effects that other venues described earlier have, it is reasonable to conclude on the high number of people reached by messaging of women's rights.

Seven FGDs and an interview pointed out the importance of rhetorical skills and knowledge required by RLs: "Imams can influence people and the level of influence depends on their method of preaching and how they make people to understand."<sup>35</sup> Their ability to argument and ensure clarity of explanations so that people could understand them were seen as important points where few pointed out specifically on the importance of RLs as being 'logical'.

Sermons can be effective because violation of women's rights can be framed as a sin or the obverse, less effective when supporting women's rights is framed as a sin. In fact, some respondents mentioned 'sins' or being 'sinful' or 'avoiding beating women because it is a sin' in the discussions. A respondent mentioned "religious leaders give an example like it is a sin or it is not good based on our culture."<sup>36</sup> Framed as a sin, which represents a breach of religious norms and laws, has the potential of increasing adherence to women's rights as sins are "punishable by a penalty in this world and the world to come."<sup>37</sup> A RL explained: "We tell the people that God says that anyone who slaps his wife in this world will receive a hundred times harsher punishment in the other world."<sup>38</sup> However, the latter is a theme that would require further investigation,

32 Bamyán, FGD with community women

33 Bamyán, FGD with female madrasa students

34 Balkh, FGD with female community members, n.3

35 Herat, FGD with community women, n. 3

36 Herat, FGD with community women

37 Izutsu, Toshihiko, "Ethico-Religious Concepts in the Qur'an," McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002.

38 Bamyán, FGD with RL, n. 1

especially in terms of determining the type of sins that women's rights violations could/are associated with in the sermons and the implications the latter has on the believer and her/his behaviour.

Some FGDs with women believe sermons are effective because it is a man talking to other men: *"When all men are sitting together and a man (imam) talks to them about the rights of women based on Islam, they accept it easily, but if women say the same thing to their men at home, they may not accept it."*<sup>39</sup>

The area is also important where women's rights messaging in conservative areas is seen as less effective, which was raised by interviews with DoWA officials where one explained how Tajik areas are more conservative in Bamyan:

For example, we went to Saighan and asked them to gather 150 people, 60 women and 90 men. But when we were there, we were only 3 women all from MoWA without any female participant. And the DoHRA selected a religious leader from Saighan. The religious leader said that for men and women sitting in the same room is not allowed in Islam. And then when people asked him about the verse or Hadith that proves that, he said that he couldn't remember it at that time. And then again people said that Afghanistan is an Islamic country but women are in meetings with men and what does he think about that. The religious leader replied that Afghanistan is an Islamic country but as foreign countries interfere in its affairs, there are some problems. And after the meeting, I myself was feeling in danger. Then the district governor gave us 3 police to provide our security.<sup>40</sup>

As the study conducted in Khyber Pakhtunkwa concluded, sermons are effective because of their tripartite structure (*khutba*, sermon, and closing prayer), a trusted format that even politicians adopt.<sup>41</sup> An FGD with religious leaders also mentioned how *"sermons can be effective when there is a high number of prayers."*<sup>42</sup> The latter could be referring to the structure of the sermon with an element of the tripartite structure even more accentuated as making the sermons more effective for spreading a

message.

Conversely, the study participants also highlighted when sermons can be less effective for spreading women's rights. Religious texts are open to interpretations, to less patriarchal as much as to more patriarchal ones. An FGD participant mentioned: *"Imams can convince people through Hadiths and verses from the Qur'an but they analyse them in a way that is in their favour and disadvantage women."*

RLs contradicting themselves could be another point making sermons less effective and in general RLs less credible: *"The first and the most important challenge that mullahs face is the contradictions between their previous attitudes and behaviours and their current stance; previously, the mullah was saying that girls and women must be imprisoned at home and now the same mullah is saying that women have the right to education, work and other rights."*<sup>43</sup> In fact, a RLs, while not expressing any fear arising out of contradictions, pointed to the problem of excessively focusing on women's rights: *"One of the challenges is that if we preach about women's rights this week and do the same next week, people would think that we work for private organizations or human rights and we are paid to talk about women. Therefore, we talk about women with some breaks between the sessions."*<sup>44</sup>

A 'gradual approach' on delivering women's rights as some described it, is also a factor determining the effectiveness of sermons: *"I do not restrict myself during preaching but as I said before, changes come gradually. We try to make sure that once people accept that women have the right to get education, then we can talk about political rights of women for example."*<sup>45</sup>

RLs used as a 'political mean,' highlighted by an official from the DoHRA from Herat, does not require further introductions. The controversies surrounding The Ulema Council's statement from 2 March 2012, which gave directives for women including the need *"to refrain from interacting with stranger men in various public places such as offices, schools and universities and shopping centres and asked women "not to travel without a close male relative, and asked to respect the right of men to polygamy"* were by many seen as serving political reconciliation with the Taliban at the expense of women's rights.<sup>46</sup> However, the

39 Bamyan, FGD with community women, n. 4

40 Bamyan, Interview with DoWA official

41 Sam Robinson, "The Ancient and Modern Power of Sermons in Contemporary Pakistan."

42 Herat, FGD with RLs, n. 1

43 Herat, Interview with DoWA official

44 Bamyan, Interview with RLs, n. 2

45 Bamyan, Interview with RLs, n. 1

46 UNAMA, "Points of View on Ulema Council Statement on Women," UNAMA, March 12, 2012, <https://unama.unmissions.org/>



study participants did not provide any examples on how RLs were used for legitimizing political objectives.

While some discussions pointed to illiteracy as making sermons more effective, others pointed on how it actually reduces the effectiveness of sermons. As a RL mentioned: *“People are different but most of them don’t have any problems with women’s rights. Those who don’t accept them are the illiterate ones”*<sup>47</sup> or *“the challenge is the awareness of people and the time and effort it takes to raise their awareness about women.”*<sup>48</sup>

An interview participant raised the issue of RLs referring to the past without providing any guidance for the present as having limited effect on what sermons could actually achieve: *“The next challenge is the awareness level of the people, first, mullahs are not aware of civil rights, legal issues, and even social issues and in their sermons they talk about issues that are related to many years ago.”*<sup>49</sup> In fact, also a RL pointed out that one of the main benefits of the training on women’s rights were not women’s rights in Islam but actually rights in the Afghan statutory laws that RLs in general lack.<sup>50</sup>

While obvious, sermons that spread dubious ideas on women and women’s rights or RL that have questionable notions on women have seemingly quite devastating effects on gender equality in the community. It seems that one ‘bad’ RL can potentially compromise women’s rights for a while:

There should be more awareness raising. People should be informed. The situation is better now. Before this imam, we had an imam, who was saying that we should not leave the house without the permission of our husbands. That imam made the situation very hard for us. He was saying that if we are praying and our husbands ask us something, we should stop praying and do whatever he says.<sup>51</sup>

And also: *“Religious leaders are extremists and don’t allow women to be active as they should be. They give the example that it is a sin or something is not good based on examples from our culture, they weaken all the motivations*

*that our families might have for improving women’s lives.”*<sup>52</sup> Other examples provided could be even more worrisome, in direct support of child marriage: *“Our neighbour married two of his daughters (one 13 years old and another one 15 years old) because the imam has told the men that the more time girls spend at their father’s house and do not get married, the more their father will be committing a sin.”*<sup>53</sup> A woman also reported: *“My son prevented me from going to the mosque because he has heard in the sermon that if a woman commits a sin, 4 people will go to hell with her: her father, brother, husband, and son. He believed that if I go to the mosque, men will see me and that is a sin.”*<sup>54</sup>

### OBSTACLES RELIGIOUS LEADERS

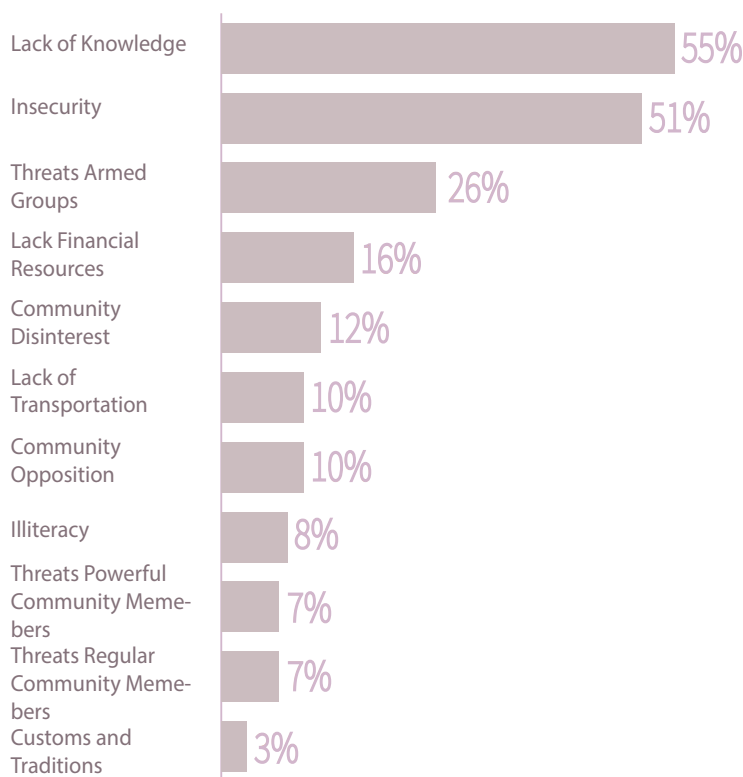


Chart 3: Obstacles experienced by religious leaders for delivering sermons with women’s rights contents

Another problem for sermon effectiveness are the challenges that RLs might experience for delivering the sermons. Security is an important aspect to consider, especially in areas where the insurgency is present (or intermittently present), which is a major barrier for preaching on women’s rights. Powerful people in the areas could represent a threat if these feel ‘their benefits’ are being endangered as a DoHRA official in Balkh explained. Also if women’s rights are perceived as being imported from

[points-view-afghanistan-ulema-councils-statement-women](#)

47 Herat, FGD with RL, n. 2  
 48 Bamyán, FGD with RLs, n. 1  
 49 Herat, Interview with DoWA official  
 50 Bamyán, FGD with RL, n. 1  
 51 Bamyán, FGD with female community members, n. 1

52 Herat, FGD with female community members, n. 1  
 53 Herat, FGD with female community members, n. 4  
 54 Herat, FGD with community women, n. 4



the West can pose some challenges for the RLs: “Yes, we face many problems. For example, we are threatened by those, who oppose us because they believe what mullahs are saying about the status of women comes from the West and therefore mullahs are believed to be coordinating with the westerners.”<sup>55</sup> While the RLs interviewed overall felt safe and did not feel having many obstacles in the areas where they operate, survey results paint a quite different picture. In fact, when asked regarding the obstacles they experience for addressing women’s rights only 8% mentioned not experiencing any obstacles.

RLs as obstacles mentioned: lack of knowledge women’s rights (55%); insecurity (51%); threats from powerful community members (7%); threats from regular community members (7%); lack of financial resources (16%); threats from armed opposition groups (26%); community disinterest in the topic (12%); lack of transportation (10%); community opposition to the topic (10%). Respondents also mentioned other (12%), including ‘customs and traditions’ prevailing in Afghanistan (3.1%) and illiteracy of people (8%), which was often raised in the FGDs. Two respondents also mentioned a general lack of knowledge on Islam among people and one mentioned ‘foreign interference’ without further specifications.

RL might be also afraid to lose their conservative ‘constituency,’ which might prevent them from actively supporting women’s rights. “So some of the religious leaders think that if they give some rights to women and respect women, their position would be in danger and they will not have the same respect compared to the past so they behave conservatively.” In fact, considering that 10% experience community opposition to the topic, 7% threats from community members, and 51% insecurity, it is safe to conclude that appealing to the community by adopting a more conservative stance represents a possible solution for some RLs.

While still addressing women’s rights, RLs can add counterproductive conditions or exceptions that make the support of women’s rights illusory. For example: “When imams give people verses and Hadiths about some issues, they give them examples of themselves. Those imams who don’t allow their daughters to work, they provide a Hadith to people on how women should work at home and men outside the home.”<sup>56</sup> Or as a female participant explained, RLs can support women’s rights by at the same time highlighting the disadvantages compared to the advan-

tages: “Mostly traditional men like what religious leaders say. For example, women can work but if a woman works, it has some disadvantages, her child will not be brought up well or she will not fulfil her responsibilities towards her husband. So the imam focuses on the negative points mostly, which discourages men to allow their women to work.”<sup>57</sup> If the latter are not monitored, and as it was already explained above, the resources for monitoring are lacking, RLs could be easily addressing women’s rights as prescribed but by advocating for an actual status quo in gender relations.

And lastly, there are structural barriers over which RLs might have little sway. While the vast majority of people might agree with education, on how to get to school or what might happen on the way to school make people far less supportive of girl’s education. Distance to schools (especially above 6<sup>th</sup> grade), lack of transportation, and sexual harassment of girls, which is a major concern in Afghanistan, are all factors that preclude girls from attending school or favour their drop out. Poverty and general lawlessness are also major constraints. An official from the DoHRA also exposed the problems of law enforcement or lack of laws:

There are some challenges as well. For example, the government has not passed a law regarding wedding ceremonies or how many people could be invited to the wedding ceremonies. Lots of young people left the country and died because they wanted to find the money for the wedding expenses in the wedding halls. It is not the responsibility of the religious scholars to make the laws, it is the duty of the government.<sup>58</sup>

## Impact of Sermons on Knowledge, Attitudes, and Practices Related to Gender Equality Among Community Members

Respondents listed a variety of topics related to women’s rights that were addressed during the sermons, similar to those reported by the RLs. As the RLs already mentioned

55 Herat, Interview with official from DoHRA  
56 Herat, FGD with community women, n. 3

57 Herat, FGD with community women, n. 4  
58 Balkh, Interview with official from DoHRA

in the survey, these also confirm as RLs delivering them often, once, twice a month or even more often. Respondents are also unanimous on the persuasive power of RLs and the changes that sermons brought to their communities: *“Whatever ulema says is based on Islam, we feel good about it, and people agree with them.”*<sup>59</sup> Overall, participants have positive views on sermons where these mostly report that people agree with them and learn from them where some felt like stepping out of an ‘age of darkness and ignorance.’ Aside some examples of people ‘difficult to change’ such as elderly people, the ‘illiterate,’ and those who fear losing ‘their benefits,’ participants listed a variety of changes happening in the communities because of the sermons. More specifically, participants mentioned knowledge, attitudes and behavioural changes attributable to sermons.

Respondents from all provinces, both men and women, mentioned how VAW was reduced in their communities, including child marriage, forced marriage, and physical VAW. Respondents also mentioned how baad completely disappeared from their areas (including a DoWA official from Bamyan), which were all attributed to sermons:

R1: Relationships between men and women are better now. There is less violence against women and it is because religious leaders preach based on the Qur’an and Hadiths.

R2: Yes, the relationships are better now, violence has decreased. Women have achieved their social rights. For sure, religious leaders are the only people who have an effect on other people through awareness raising.<sup>60</sup>

And also:

Yes, men’s behaviour is better. There was a man among our relatives, who used to beat his wife a lot. He was beating her so much that she could not even walk properly at some point. Two weeks ago, she came to our house and said her husband was not beating her anymore. He even apologized to her. He said to her that his parents were farmers and how could he have known about women’s rights. He learned about women’s rights from the imam.<sup>61</sup>

Among the impacts mentioned, an improvement in girl’s access to education was also overwhelmingly shared by the participants: *“People allow their daughters to attend school and get education because of imam’s preaching. In the past, most of the people didn’t. It is very good that religious leaders inform people about women’s rights. It has had a good effect on people and women’s rights are now observed here.”*<sup>62</sup>

Respondents from 10 FGDs from all provinces noted an increase in the freedom of movement of women and strictly related to the latter is women’s ability to work: *“For example, my husband didn’t allow me to go outside in the past. Since he is going to the mosque and listens to sermons, he allows me to go outside and he has learned new things, for example, he says that women can work outside and are equal to men in all aspects of life.”*<sup>63</sup>

Respondents in 6 FGDs, both with men and women, also noted how health access for women improved: *“Yes, the relationships have improved comparing to the past. For example, if our wives get sick, we kindly get them to the hospitals.”*<sup>64</sup> Two FGDs also mentioned how RLs were discussing birth spacing in the sermons: *“There are some families that have a lot of children, the imam has told the men that they should not force their women to give birth to a child. There is a medicine now that women can use to make a break between children’s births. Now men allow women to choose whether they want more children or not.”*<sup>65</sup>

Women’s ability to inherit was raised in 18 FGDs in all provinces: *“We are happy and agree with religious leaders when they talk about harmful traditional practices and customs. Most of the people give inheritance to women now, but it was not like this in the past.”*<sup>66</sup> Respondents from Bamyan and Herat in 5 FGDs also discussed how mehr is now given to women: *“Men have learned new things about the rights of women. My husband is in favour of girls getting education. It is almost 25 years that I am married to him but I have not waived my mehr and he has not forced me to do so.”*<sup>67</sup>

Men helping women out in house chores was also mentioned in 6 FGDs in Bamyan and Herat: *“My husband doesn’t go to sermons but he listens to them on the radio. Two weeks ago, my husband said that working at home is*

59 Balkh, FGD with male madrassa  
60 Bamyan, FGD with male madrassa  
61 Balkh, FGD with community women, n. 3

62 Bamyan, FGD with community men, n. 2  
63 Balkh, FGD with community women, n. 1  
64 Bamyan, FGD with community men, n. 4  
65 Bamyan, FGD with community women, n. 1  
66 Bamyan, FGD with male madrassa  
67 Bamyan, FGD with community women, n. 2

*not the duty of women only. As women can work outside the home, men can help them with work at home. It has a great effect, children can see and learn to help each other based on this, women feel less tired and sad and it increases love among family members.”<sup>68</sup>*

In general, an increase in respect, kindness, and communication abilities among family members was noted by the FGD participants in all provinces: *“My father used to be very serious, we were all in bad mood when he came home after work. We were happy when he went to parties. But now that he cannot work and goes to the mosque, his behaviour with my mother and family members is better.”<sup>69</sup>* Or: *“Yes, the relationships have improved and now men behave better with women. Now they accept each other, they listen to each other, and respect each other’s opinion.”<sup>70</sup>*

Three FGDs also mentioned how wedding expenses were reduced in their communities: *“Mehr and wedding expenses used to be very high but with the sermons, religious leaders convinced people to lower them.”<sup>71</sup>*

Conversely, as it was already mentioned above, RLs can have detrimental effects on the lives of women when these spread questionable or less equitable ideas. The negative impacts mentioned were less education, less inheritance, mehr, and other rights for women. Participants in an FGD with women discussed:

R1: Women’s rights are discussed less in the sermons and are used mostly for limiting women, for example women should not go outside without asking for permission. If they get education, they ask their rights and don’t obey the men from their family.

R2: Our imam was happy that the leg of his daughter was broken and she couldn’t go to school because male community members were criticising him. He used to force his daughter to abandon learning English because it is the language of infidels and his daughter would risk going ‘outside of Islamic borders.’

R4: My father didn’t allow my sister to go to the doctor because he believed that no man should touch her, even a doctor, and it has caused my

sister to suffer from a treatable disease.<sup>72</sup>

## Dispute Resolution

Aside their religious duties, RL often play an important role in dispute resolution in Afghanistan. When asked on the number of cases solved on women’s rights RL mentioned solving: 1 to 5 disputes (65%), 6 to 10 disputes (5%) with very small percentages solving more than 10 disputes. 20% did not solve any disputes involving women where 7% did not provide an answer (as they were not involved in dispute solving in general).

When asked about disputes solved, RLs on average reported 6.2 cases with the average cases concerning women’s rights recorded on average at 2.7, which indicates that on average roughly about 40% of dispute solving was among women’s issues, which indicates their importance on this matter. 70% mentioned solving civil cases and 16% criminal cases (in a multiple response question).

While reporting percentages was considered unreliable as RLs often reported very generic types of disputes they were involved in, such as ‘problems between husband and wife’ or ‘family problems or conflicts’ certain disputes appeared to be central among RLs: violence against women, including child marriage, forced marriage and physical violence; inheritance; running away cases; *mehr*; and divorce. A smaller number of explicitly mentioned cases included alimony, *baad*, forced labour, denial of education, and land disputes.

Twenty percent established a connection with organisations for issues related to women’s rights, mostly DoWA and the AIHRC, less with civil society organizations. It seems the relationship with civil society is tainted with suspicion:

I can’t say they have a good nor a bad relationship. Because if we ask the civil activist about their relationships with the mullahs, they would say that mullahs condemn them all the time and consider them followers of western ideology. And if we ask mullahs the same question, they would say that they do not recognize and they do not accept civil activists. The civil activists would say that the mullahs are extremists and they only have inherited their religious believes. But

68 Herat, FGD with community women, n. 3

69 Herat, FGD with women, n. 2

70 Herat, FGD with community men, n. 1

71 Herat, FGD with women, n. 3

72 Herat, FGD with community women, n. 4

sometimes they try to keep their relations good; that would improve the sermons and also the civil activities.<sup>73</sup>

Another FGD discussed: *“No, I didn’t work with NGOs, but if they work based on Islam, we will connect our work with them. If not, we will not.”*<sup>74</sup>

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73 Herat, Interview with DoWA  
74 Herat, FGD with RLs, n. 1



# CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDA- TIONS



## In Conclusion

While RLs have some knowledge on women's rights in Islam, some misconceptions remain. While these knew some of the more 'obvious' violations of women's rights as being regulated by laws, less obvious ones, such as psychological violence, were not recognized as being reflected in state laws among RLs. RLs are also usually associated with the most conservative elements of society where findings of this survey, paradoxically, associate them with the relatively progressive ones. Based on the various scales administered to RLs, these show progressive views, more progressive than the average Afghan (as some comparison with findings at national level revealed). Additionally, the consultant administered a variety of similar scales in the Afghan context, including to human rights defenders, civil society members, and government officials involved in women's rights protection activities, and these showed considerably lower tendencies towards equality in comparison to RLs.

The present report also outlined the factors that influence the effectiveness of sermons, including reliance on religious texts, RLs acting as role models, the variety of venues when the latter are discussed outside the mosque, on the importance of knowledge and rhetorical skills among RLs, framing of women's rights as a sin, among the most important. The findings also outlined the challenges that RLs experience for advancing the women's rights agenda where only a small percentage do not experience any. Insecurity, lack of knowledge on women's rights, and threats from armed groups are among the most cited limitations.

Qualitative data provided a variety of impacts on changes in gender equality as experienced by women in the communities, including access to education, health, reduction of VAW, access to inheritance, mehr, among the most cited. Qualitative data were also very clear on how conditions for women can quickly deteriorate with the 'wrong mullah' in charge: reduced freedom of movement, restrictions on education, and curtailing of other fundamental rights.

## Recommendations

□ Have a complete record of all the religious leaders participating in the trainings. Record their district of work and telephone number when religious leaders attend trainings. The latter is important for sampling

at baseline, end-line, and for project evaluations.

- Over half of the religious leaders are relatively highly educated, which makes them demanding when it comes to trainings. Ensure trainers are knowledgeable and come from the line of ulema and religious leaders, especially to ensure these are able to provide the needed clarifications and are seen as legitimate. When religious leaders attend the training, they need to have their questions answered. Additionally, some were very clear on their need to be convinced and only then they could preach in favor and/or against a topic. A training that is convincing also ensures their cooperation.
- As findings indicated, religious leaders have a high impact on gender dynamics in the communities when they preach equality and when they preach against it. Expand the trainings to other, less reachable areas, or at least, to areas where the DoHRA does not have access. The coverage by the respective provincial departments is limited and these lack resources for training religious leaders, as interviews with officials explained.
- Ensure participants have the ability to provide input into the training contents as these need to feel as being partners and not vehicles for implementing an agenda, which is on top often seen as imported from the West.
- Ensure the trainings include the following topics, as these were raised in the survey as missing: women's freedom of movement, forced labour of women, right to choose the spouse, position of women inside the family, men's rights, self-immolation, respect of women, child marriage, causes of violence, property rights, and harmful traditional practices such as baad.
- While religious leaders are aware of the major women's rights, such as education, inheritance, and other rights in Islam, some seem to be imbued with stereotypes of women such as women's moral weakness, inferiority, and frivolity. Ensure that trainings dismantle such stereotypes.
- Ensure trainings address customs perceived as Islamic regulations, for example perception of women as servants of men or as morally weaker than men.
- As the findings revealed, also women in Islam issues are far from being completely grasped. For example, a recurring misconception was one's responsibility for other's actions, which mixed with customs and traditions, proved especially damaging for women. For example, a religious leaders explaining how women

- committing a sin can ‘bring the whole family to hell,’ was quickly used to prevent women from going outside where others could be seeing her, which is a sin, a focus group participant explained.
- Trainings should also clarify the misconceptions around the so called ‘beating sura’ or 4:34 as the latter is often the main reference supporting male domination of women.
  - While the handbook briefly explains how violence against women does not have an Islamic or legal justification, the latter is not enough. Considering the prevailing patriarchal readings of the so called ‘beating sura’ – that the handbook does not address - the latter would require further expansion.
  - Ensure continuous training and access to the training handbook.
  - The handbook should be also translated into Pashto.
  - Since religious leaders are also involved in dispute resolution, knowledge of state laws, including the Elimination of Violence Against Women Law, on issues that usually religious leaders focus on would be useful; religious leaders should also learn on when a case should be referred and not mediated (for example, criminal cases).
  - Ensure when women’s rights in state laws are addressed to point out when these are discriminatory.
  - Ensure religious leaders are aware of referrals to government bodies and civil society organizations, especially when dealing with criminal cases.
  - In order to ensure that training contents do not overlap, coordinate trainings with other organizations through the MoHRA and the respective line departments.
  - While the DoHRAs do not have sufficient resources to monitor religious leaders, ensure support is provided and mechanisms for monitoring are established. As in some areas UNICEF was involved in monitoring of religious leaders, the latter could be approached as possible partner. Recordings of sermons could be also an option, as long as a system for consistently assessing their adequacy and conformity to women’s rights is in place.
  - While establishing links with civil society and NGOs could be useful, especially for dispute resolution, the latter requires some caution. These should not be seen as spreading ideas coming from the West or ideas perceived as un-Islamic.
  - Involve female madrasa students in advocacy of women’s rights from an Islamic perspective as these have access to women.
  - Due to the importance of religious leaders acting as role models, customs such as polygamy among religious leaders should be perceived as being unacceptable and preference should be given to those, who do not engage in polygamy.
  - While it remains unclear on when violations of women’s rights are framed as a sin and for which types of violence, understanding the latter would provide useful information on further improving the effectiveness of sermons.
  - While sermons differ from one preacher to the other, ensure these refer to current problems and provide possible solutions for them.
  - Ensure the evaluation methodology is determined from the very beginning of the project, especially when the latter will include experimental and semi-experimental approaches to evaluation, as in the first case it influences on how participants are selected and in both cases, an appropriate budget should be devoted to it. A mosque exit survey with treatment and control groups could prove useful to understand the impact of sermons on men after religious leaders received trainings on women’s rights.



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# Annex: Methodology

Male and female community members were not surveyed for the present study. Initially, it was planned to survey male community members with a mosque ‘exit survey’ approach in the religious leaders’ respective catchment areas (while women were excluded from the outset as these could be accessed only through a household survey, which was considered overly ambitious for the present study). However, the latter would have required an exhaustive list of all the locations of the trained religious leaders and their respective mosques of activity, which was not available in advance of the fieldwork. From these lists, a cluster sampling approach would have been performed where a certain number of respondents (adjusted to the general daily influx of believers or approximated to a small or larger size in terms of daily visitors – an information that is also not available) would have been surveyed from a number of randomly selected mosques in each province. These uncertainties related to the lack of information on all the areas and mosques of interest made a survey difficult as the latter required some population information beforehand. As the latter required to sample a determined number of believers in a determined number of mosques (clusters) in all three provinces, the sample required for producing a representative survey for mosque goers exposed to messages from religious leaders trained by UNDP would have been probably considerably higher than initially envisioned, especially due to the fact that sampling would have needed to consider the fact that the study was implemented in 3 provinces, which in itself would have brought the number of men to survey up due to statistical power issues.

Additionally, as the desk review explained, messaging through religious leaders works. It was therefore more important to understand when the latter might be less effective, the challenges, and the possible solutions to it. Therefore, FGDs were deemed an appropriate method for exploring a variety of experiences on the effectiveness of such approach on changes in gender equality and the modes in which such change then in turn affected gender relations in the communities.

## Annex B: Sampling, Quality Control, and Implementation Arrangements

In Herat, the DoHRA officials shared a list of religious leaders registered with DoHRA that contained their title and telephone number (but not the district), these also attend regular meetings with DoHRA where women’s rights are also discussed. The list included 42 imams, 74 khatib imams, 7 waez, and 2 other (a khadim and a khari, who were not sampled), who were randomly selected from the list for the survey. The survey also included 4 officials from DoHRA. However, some RLs lacked a telephone number, some were unwilling to participate in the survey, and others’ phones were incorrect or turned off.

In Bamyan, a list of 68 RLs was shared. The latter also contained their location: 34 are from the provincial centre and 34 were from other districts (5 from Kohmad, 4 from Faiwan, 5 from Sheibar, 8 from Waras, 8 from Yakawlang, and 5 from Panjab district).

In Mazar a list of RLs trained by UNDP was shared in advance where a DoHRA official also included the respective telephone numbers of the RLs of whom DoHRA had telephone numbers, which yielded 35 RLs. Additionally, DoHRA shared a list of RLs, who are registered with DoHRA: 89 RLs from the centre and 36 from districts (6 from Balkh, 5 from Koshanda, 5 from Dihdadi, 3 from Sholgara, 4 from Kholm, 3 from Nahri Shahi, 2 from Chamtal, 1 from Marmol, 1 from Charbolak, 1 from Chargonbad, and 1 from Hairatan), inclusive of those, who attended the training delivered by UNDP.

The survey with the 320 RLs from all 3 provinces is therefore representative at 95% confidence interval and 6% margin of error.

Surveys with religious leaders recorded their telephone numbers and as data are automatically stored into the database an immediate 5% call back was performed to check on the surveys. Additionally, the DoHRA with the support of RLs represented the entry point to the communities where FGDs were held, including the male and female madrassas. The DoHRA was therefore involved in organizing FGDs from the outset, which also served as a quality control mechanism.

Facilitators were trained on the research tools in Kabul with the exception of Balkh where the field facilitator conducted a short training with the female facilitator, who was experienced in FGDs and digital data collection. For each province, a male and female facilitator were selected. One male facilitator also covered 2 provinces, Bamyan and Balkh. On the first day, these were involved in arrangements and planning of the survey with the DoHRA, in arranging FGDs with RLs, and interviewing DoHRA and DoWA officials.

The remaining days, these were visiting the respective districts of work of RL, the female and male community members, and the madrassas. The remaining time was spent on conducting the remaining telephone interviews with RLs as only those attending FGDs came to the the DoHRA office.

سروی برداشت در مورد حقوق زنان در میان رهبران مذهبی  
و مردم محل در افغانستان

مترجم: مریم دانش



## خلاصه

پروگرام توسعه ملل متحد (UNDP) و پروگرام ترویج و ارتقای برابری جنسیتی در افغانستان (EGEMA) – تطبیق شده از سال 2016 الی 2018 – با هدف بررسی دانش، طرز رفتار و عملکرد مرتبط با برابری جنسیتی در میان رهبران مذهبی مخصوصاً خطبه روزهای جمعه ایجاد گردید تا توانایی رهبران مذهبی در مشارکت مثبت برای گسترش حقوق زنان در افغانستان را تعیین نماید. به همین خاطر سروی با بیشتر از 180 رهبر مذهبی و بیشتر از 40 بحث گروهی با مردم محل در ولایات بامیان، بلخ و هرات توسط شرکت مشوره دهی Thousand Plateaus اجرا گردید.

## درباره ترویج و ارتقای برابری جنسیتی در افغانستان (EGEMA)

بر اساس تجربیات و آموخته های پروژه برابری جنسیتی II (سال 2013 – 2015)، فاز جدید پروژه برابری جنسیت به نام ترویج و ارتقای برابری جنسیتی که بین سال های 2016 تا 2018 تطبیق می گردد، دارای چهار اصل می باشد:

- 1) تقویت نهادهای وزارت امور زنان (MOWA)
- 2) ایجاد مجمع ملی متخصصین جنسیت (جندر)
- 3) تقویت معیشت زنان
- 4) روش های تحول جنسیت برای حمایت تغییرات اجتماعی و رفتاری در سطح ابتدایی

هدف این پروژه، تقویت دولت اسلامی افغانستان است تا بتواند وعده های ملی و بین المللی جهت حمایت برابری اجتماعی زنان، اطفال، اقلیت ها و مردم آسیب پذیر را اجرا نماید. پروژه تلاش دارد تا این اهداف را توسط ایجاد پروسه یی از پروژه های سابق برابری جنسیتی جهت تقویت وزارت امور زنان برای انجام مسوولیت هایش، ایجاد مجمع ملی متخصصین جنسیت قابل دسترس برای خدمات ملی و محلی و همچنین تقویت وزارت امور زنان برای دخیل ساختن آن با وزارت های مختلف جهت توانمندسازی اقتصادی زنان روستایی و همچنین تحولات اجتماعی – فرهنگی و رفتاری به دست آورد.

## آموزش رهبران مذهبی

تحت پروگرام برابری جنسیتی II، طرح سابق ترویج و ارتقای برابری جنسیتی در افغانستان، دفتر UNDP رهبران مذهبی را سالانه درباره موضوعات حقوق زن از دیدگاه اسلام و حقوق مدنی در افغانستان آموزش داده است. اشتراک کننده گان بر اساس مشخصات تعیین شده توسط کمیته رهبری حقوق زنان، و جمعی تشکیل یافته از دفتر UNDP، وزارت محترم حج و امور اوقاف، وزارت محترم امور زنان، پوهنتون کابل و دو عضو دیگر به شمول عضوی از نهاد خواهران اسلامی (Islamic Sisters' Association) انتخاب شدند. وزارت محترم حج و امور اوقاف و دفتر UNDP بیشتر آموزش ها و مواد درسی آموزش مربوط به حقوق زنان و برابری جنسیتی را پیشنهاد و توصیه نمودند. اشتراک کننده گان از 34 ولایات افغانستان و بیشتر توسط ریاست امور زنان و ریاست حج و امور اوقاف انتخاب شدند. مدیران ریاست امور زنان دیدگاه جنسیت و مدیران ریاست حج و امور اوقاف دیدگاه اسلامی را برای این پروگرام ارایه نمودند. دیگر اشتراک کننده گان شامل رهبران پرنفوذ بوده است. این آموزش ها در سطح ملی و منطقوی ارایه گردید.

در اولین سال پروژه ترویج و ارتقای برابری جنسیتی در افغانستان (2016)، 150 رهبر مذهبی از سراسر کشور درباره برابری جنسیتی و حقوق زنان در کابل (150 رهبر مذهبی دیگر در سال 2017 در نظر گرفته شده اند) آموزش دیدند. آموزش توسط دفتر UNDP طراحی شد و موضوعات آن شامل حق تحصیل، حق داشتن دارایی، ازدواج، مشارکت سیاسی، همه از دیدگاه اسلام می باشد. این موضوعات همچنین به صورت رسمی شامل لیست موضوعات سالانه مساجد ثبت شده می باشد که علما را مکلف می سازد درباره این موضوعات در جریان خطبه روزهای جمعه معلومات ارایه نمایند. مواد درسی دوره آموزشی – تهیه شده توسط وزارت محترم حج و امور اوقاف با حمایت دفتر UNDP برگرفته شده از آیات قرآن و احادیث درباره حقوق زنان – توسط رهبران مذهبی و همتایان آنها به عنوان ماخذ و منبع در جریان خطبه هایشان مورد استفاده قرار می گیرد. این کتاب راهنما چاپ شده و اخیراً توزیع گردیده است.

هدف این فعالیت ها بالا بردن ظرفیت رهبران مذهبی درباره حقوق زنان می باشد تا آنها بتوانند در روزهای جمعه درباره آن خطبه ایراد نموده، آگاهی مردم را بالا ببرند، که در نتیجه سبب تغییر رفتار فرهنگی می گردد. به طور اوسط، تعداد اشتراک کننده گان این چنین حساس سازی ها و آگاهی دهی در خطبه روزهای جمعه که تمرکز آن بالای مردان محل می باشد، به بیشتر از 100 نفر می رسد. اگرچه، نظر به اطلاعات بررسی نیمه – مدت تعداد اشتراک کننده گان نظر به نفوس و اندازه مساجد به 200 الی 1000 نفر می رسد.

در مجموع، تقریباً 2000 رهبر مذهبی در جریان فازهای مختلف پروگرام آموزش دیده اند. اگرچه، بر اساس یافته های ارزیابی نیمه – مدت فقط یک سوم رهبران مذهبی در روزهای جمعه خطبه ایراد می نمایند.

## یافته های کلیدی:

- بیشتر از 35% رهبران مذهبی در دوره آموزشی ارائه شده توسط دفتر UNDP (اکثرا از ولایت بلخ) و اکثرا از محتوا، مدت زمان، فاصله تا محل دوره آموزشی و مفیدیت دوره های آموزشی برای تغییر دانش، طرز رفتار و عملکرد مربوط به حقوق زنان در بین رهبران مذهبی رضایت نشان داده اند.
- در مناطق بررسی شده، سازمان های مختلف در مورد حقوق زنان دوره های آموزشی ارائه می نمایند. با این حال، رهبران مذهبی که توسط دفتر UNDP آموزش ندیده اند، نیاز به آموزش در مورد آزادی رفت و آمد زنان، کار اجباری، حق انتخاب همسر، موقعیت زنان در فامیل، حقوق مردان، خودکشی، احترام به زنان، ازدواج اطفال، دلایل خشونت، حق دارایی و رسم و رواج های مضر سنتی مانند بد دادن دارند.
- توانایی ریاست های حج و امور اوقاف برای نظارت از خطبه های رهبران مذهبی بخاطر کمبود منابع، محدود می باشد.
- زمانی که نظر به آموزه های اسلامی درباره سهم دختران از دارایی والدین سوال پرسیده شد، 84% رهبران مذهبی پاسخ دادند که سهم دختران 1/2 است، 14% پاسخ دادند که سهم دختران 1/3 سهم برادر است. 98% پاسخ درست دادند که زنان اجازه دارند در مسجد نماز بخوانند و همین فیصدی به حق تحصیل زنان در اسلام باور دارند. 98% همچنین پاسخ درست داده و زن را به عنوان دریافت کننده مهر در افغانستان شناسایی کردند. اگرچه زمانی که درباره آموزه های دینی که کمتر وضاحت دارد از رهبران مذهبی پرسیده شد، دانش و معلومات آنها کافی نبوده است.
- براساس حقوق و مزایای مردان از مقیاس نگرش هنجارهای جنسیتی، اوسط ثبت شده 1.82 (براساس مقیاس از 1 تا 2) می باشد که نشان دهنده موافقت کمتر با اینکه مردان حق و مزایای بیشتری از زنان دارند، دیدگاه تساوی گرایانه و تمایل رهبران مذهبی به مکتب مساوات بشر را نشان می دهد. براساس مقیاس برابری برای دختران - با اوسط 1.58 - که باید بین سنتی و تساوی گرایی خوانده شود اما بیشتر به طرف مکتب مساوات بشر تمایل دارد. همچنین مقیاس ارتقای برابری جنسیتی، تطابق یافته با وضعیت افغانستان، اوسط 2.73 بر اساس مقیاس 1 الی 3 (با نمبر بالاتر که نشان دهنده حمایت بیشتر از هنجارهای برابری جنسیتی می باشد) در بین رهبران مذهبی بالا بوده است.
- حمایت تحصیل زنان به شمول تحصیل در ولایت و کشور دیگر در بین رهبران مذهبی بالا است که از احصاییه نشر شده توسط سروی دیدگاه ها در سطح ملی به صورت قابل ملاحظه یی بالاتر می باشد.
- زمانی که درباره سن ایده ال ازدواج دختران سوال پرسیده شد، اوسط سروی 17.7 (در مقایسه با پسران که سن 19.4 است) را نشان می دهد. تقریباً 50% رهبران مذهبی سن کمتر از 18 سال را انتخاب کرده اند که نظر به تاثیرات منفی ازدواج بالای صحت دختران نظر به خطرات حاملگی، تحصیل و درکل چشم اندازهای آینده، بدون در نظر داشت قوانین حاکم بر افغانستان، نمی تواند یک یافته مثبت باشد.
- بعضی مراجع به متون دینی در بین رهبران مذهبی مانند اجازه خشونت علیه زنان در بعضی مواقع یا موجودیت زنان به عنوان خدمت گذاران مردان هنوز سوال برانگیز می باشد. معمولاً اساس این بحث سوره به اصطلاح "زین" یا 4:34 می باشد. خلاصه تمام تفسیرهای غیر پدرسالارانه آیه خارج از حوزه این گزارش می باشد در حالیکه تفسیر آیه خشونت را در بعضی شرایط مجاز می داند که کاملاً با آیه های دیگر قرآن که بالای برابری جنسیتی تاکید دارد، در تناقض می باشد.
- تعداد خطبه های رهبران مذهبی در مورد حقوق زنان در روزهای جمعه قرار ذیل می باشد: 9% یکبار در هفته، 28% دوبار در ماه، 47% یکبار در ماه، 12% یکبار در دو ماه و فیصدی بسیار کم کمتر.
- نظر به موضوعات مورد بحث در خطبه ها، 67% در مورد میراث، 61% در مورد خشونت علیه زنان، 54% در مورد تحصیل زنان، 14% در مورد حقوق سیاسی، 51% در مورد نفقه و 33% در مورد حقوق سیاسی و مدنی خطبه ایراد نموده اند. 16% از رهبران مذهبی موضوعات دیگر به شمول ازدواج زیرسن و اجباری، کار اجباری، مهر، کاهش مصارف ازدواج، آزادی بیان، حق انتخاب همسر، حق دارایی زنان، حق زنان در مقابل شوهرشان و موضوعات بر اساس نیاز مردم محل را یاد کردند.
- در میان مهم ترین فکتورهای تاثیرگذار بالای موثریت خطبه های جمعه، استفاده از متون مذهبی ذکر شده است. همچنین از رهبران مذهبی به عنوان افراد تاثیرگذار، پرنفوذ و محترم در محل یاد شده است.
- رهبران مذهبی به عنوان الگو نیز جنبه مهم دیگری برای موثریت خطبه ها مطرح شده است. اگرچه، براساس یافته ها، 6% از رهبران مذهبی دو زن دارند که بدون در نظر داشت قانون کشور که در بعضی حالات آن را مجاز می داند، خود نوعی خشونت علیه زنان می باشد. 57% از رهبران مذهبی یک زن دارند که بی سواد می باشند.
- مشکل دیگر برای موثریت خطبه ها عبارت از چالش هایی است که رهبران مذهبی بخاطر ارائه خطبه تجربه نموده اند. رهبران مذهبی موانع ذیل را یاد نموده اند: 55% عدم دانش درباره حقوق زنان، 51% عدم امنیت، 7% خطرات از جانب افراد پرنفوذ محل، 7% خطرات از جانب مردم محل، 16% عدم منابع مالی، 26% خطرات از جانب گروه های مسلح مخالف، 12% عدم علاقه مردم، 10% عدم علاقه مردم، 10% عدم حمل و نقل (ترانسپورت)، 10% مخالفت مردم با موضوع. همچنین 12% دیگر موضوعات، به شمول 3.1% "رسم و رواج" های حاکم در افغانستان، 8% بی سوادی مردم در بحث های گروهی ذکر نموده اند.
- مردم محل همچنین موافق قدرت متقاعد کننده رهبران مذهبی و تغییراتی که خطبه های حقوق زن در جامعه آنها ایجاد نموده است مانند: افزایش تحصیل دختران، کاهش خشونت علیه زنان مانند بد دادن، ازدواج زیرسن، ازدواج اجباری، افزایش آزادی رفت و آمد زنان، دسترسی به کار و صحت، افزایش دسترسی به میراث، مهر، حمایت مردان در کارهای خانه و به صورت عموم پیشرفت در ارتباطات بین زوج ها و فامیل می باشند.

## مبانی و اهداف مطالعه

هدف دفتر UNDP عبارت از بررسی دانش، طرز دید و اعمال در مورد برابری جنسیتی مخصوصاً مربوط به خطبه روزهای جمعه و توانایی رهبران مذهبی برای مشارکت مثبت در توسعه حقوق زنان در افغانستان می باشد.

اهداف عمومی بررسی عبارت اند از:

- جمع آوری اطلاعات از مناطق انتخاب شده درباره موثریت خطبه روزهای جمعه مختص به حقوق زنان از دیدگاه اسلام برای ترویج تغییر رفتاری - اجتماعی مردم مثلاً آگاهی مردم، رفتار مردم، رضایت مردم
- مصاحبه با رهبران مذهبی و مردم محل برای ارزیابی درک آنها درباره حقوق زنان، جنسیت و همچنین تحلیل اینکه آیا درک/فهم آنها بخاطر خطبه روزهای جمعه تغییر نموده است یا نه
- بررسی دانش، طرز دید و اعمال رهبران مذهبی (کسانیکه در دوره آموزشی دفتر UNDP اشتراک نموده اند) در مورد حقوق زنان
- ارایه گزارش نهایی ارزیابی تأثیر پروگرام ظرفیت سازی رهبران مذهبی درباره حقوق زنان از دیدگاه اسلام بالای مردم مورد هدف
- ارزیابی اینکه آیا مکانیزم های همکاری و حمایت همکاران که می توانست باعث موثریت ارایه حقوق زنان در جامعه گردد، ایجاد شده است یا خیر

## نتیجه

درحالیکه رهبران مذهبی درباره حقوق زنان در اسلام دانش دارند، اما هنوز بعضی سو برداشت ها باقی مانده است. درحالیکه فهمیدن خشونت های آشکار علیه حقوق زنان توسط قوانین تنظیم شده است، در میان رهبران مذهبی خشونت های کمتر آشکار مانند خشونت روانی در قانون کشور منعکس نشده اند. معمولاً این طور به نظر می رسد که رهبران مذهبی محافظه کارترین عناصر جامعه می باشند درحالیکه یافته های این سروی معکوس این برداشت را ارایه می نماید زیرا آنها را افراد مترقی نشان می دهد. براساس مقیاس های مختلف استفاده شده برای رهبران مذهبی، دیدگاه های مترقی، حتی مترقی تر از یک شخص متوسط (طوریکه بعضی یافته ها در مقایسه با سطح ملی واضح می سازد) نشان داده شده است. علاوه بر این، مشاور مقیاس های مشابه با افغانستان به شمول مدافعین حقوق بشر، اعضای جامعه مدنی و مقامات دولتی دخیل در فعالیت های حفاظت حقوق زنان را استفاده نموده است که به صورت قابل ملاحظه بی گرایش کمتر به برابری جنسیتی را در مقایسه با رهبران مذهبی نشان می دهد. همچنین این گزارش فکتورهایی که بالای موثریت خطبه ها تأثیر می گذارند مانند وابستگی به متون مذهبی، نقش رهبران مذهبی به عنوان الگو، مکان های مختلف بیرون از مسجد که بعضی موضوعات مورد بحث قرار می گیرند، اهمیت دانش و مهارت های لفظی رهبران مذهبی، نشان دادن حقوق زنان به عنوان گناه را به عنوان مهم ترین فکتورها مشخص می نماید. یافته ها همچنین چالش هایی که رهبران مذهبی برای گسترش حقوق زنان تجربه کرده اند را نشان می دهد درحالیکه فیصدی کمی از رهبران مذهبی هیچ گونه چالشی را تجربه نکرده اند. عدم امنیت، عدم دانش مردم درباره حقوق زنان و خطرات از جانب گروه های مسلح از جمله محدودیت ها یاد شده اند.

اطلاعات کیفی، تأثیرات مختلف بالای تغییرات برابری جنسیتی تجربه شده توسط زنان جامعه به شمول دسترسی به تحصیل، صحت، کاهش خشونت علیه زنان، دسترسی به میراث، مهر را ارایه می نماید. اطلاعات کیفی همچنین معلومات درباره چگونگی شرایط زنان که می تواند توسط "ملاهای اشتباه" گسترش یابد مثلاً کاهش آزادی رفت و آمد زنان، محدودیت ها برای تحصیل و محدود کردن دیگر حقوق اساسی آنان را ارایه می نماید.

## پیشنهادات

- ثبت کامل رهبران مذهبی که در دوره های آموزش اشتراک می نمایند
- ثبت محل کار و شماره تلفن رهبران مذهبی زمانی که آنها در دوره های آموزشی اشتراک می نمایند. زیرا بعداً برای نمونه گیری برای بررسی شروع و ختم پروژه و ارزیابی های پروژه مفید می باشد
- بیشتر از نیم رهبران مذهبی دارای تحصیلات عالی می باشند و زمانیکه بحث دوره های آموزشی باشد، آنها دارای بعضی تقاضاها می باشند. اطمینان حاصل نمایید که آموزش دهنده (تربیت) دارای دانش کافی است و از جمله علما و رهبران مذهبی باشد. اطمینان حاصل نمایید که آنها می توانند وضاحت ضروری را ارایه نمایند. زمانیکه رهبران مذهبی در دوره آموزشی اشتراک می نمایند، ضرورت است تا آنها جواب سوالات خود را دریافت نمایند. برعلاوه، بعضی از آنها به صورت واضح بیان نمودند که نیاز است آموزش دهنده آنها را قانع نمایند و فقط در آن صورت آنها می توانند به نفع یا مخالف چیزی خطبه ایراد نمایند. آموزشی که قانع کننده باشد نشان دهنده ی مشارکت اشتراک کننده گان نیز می باشد.
- براساس یافته ها، رهبران مذهبی دارای تأثیر زیاد بالای مشخصه های جنسیت در محل می باشند، مخصوصاً زمانیکه آنها موافق یا مخالف برابری خطبه ایراد می نمایند. دوره های آموزشی باید به دیگر مناطق، مناطقی که کمتر قابل دسترس می باشند، یا حداقل در مناطقی که ریاست حج و امور اوقاف دسترسی ندارد، گسترش یابند. پوشش توسط ریاست های مربوطه محدود می باشد و آنها با کمبود منابع برای آموزش رهبران مذهبی مواجه هستند.

- اطمینان حاصل نمایید که اشتراک‌کننده‌گان توانایی ارایه‌داشته‌های خود به محتوای آموزش را داشته باشند زیرا ضروری است تا آنها خود را به عنوان شریک پروگرام احساس نمایند و فکر نکنند وسیله‌یی برای تطبیق اجندا هستند. طوریکه اکثر مردم فکر می‌کنند این موضوعات از غرب وارد شده است.
- اطمینان حاصل نمایید که موضوعات پیشنهاد شده توسط اشتراک‌کننده‌گان سروری در دوره‌های آموزشی شامل گردند. این موضوعات عبارتند از: آزادی رفت و آمد زنان، کار اجباری زنان، حق انتخاب همسر، مقام زن در فامیل، حقوق مردان، خودکشی، احترام زنان، ازدواج زیر سن، دلایل خشونت، حق دارایی، رسم و رواج‌های مضر مانند بد دادن.
- درحالیکه رهبران مذهبی درباره حقوق زنان مانند تحصیل، میراث و دیگر حقوق زنان در اسلام آگاهی دارند، در بعضی افراد کلیشه‌هایی مربوط به زنان مثلاً ضعف اخلاقی زنان و پایین بودن رتبه زنان، نامفید بودن آنها، مقصر دانستن زنان بخاطر ایجاد خشونت دیده شده است. اطمینان حاصل نمایید که دوره‌های آموزشی این چنین کلیشه‌ها را از بین ببرد.
- اطمینان حاصل نمایید که دوره‌های آموزشی سنت‌های پذیرفته شده به عنوان قوانین اسلامی مثلاً این برداشت که زنان خدمت‌گذاران مردان هستند یا اینکه از نظر اخلاقی از مردان ضعیف‌تر می‌باشند، تحت پوشش قرار دهد.
- براساس یافته‌ها، موضوعات زنان در اسلام به صورت کامل درک نشده است. به طور مثال، برداشت نادرست از اینکه دیگران مسئول اعمال زنان می‌باشند، که با رسم و رواج‌ها یکجا شده است و سبب ایجاد صدمه برای زنان می‌گردد. به طور مثال یکی از اشتراک‌کننده‌گان بحث گروهی گفته است رهبر مذهبی توضیح می‌دهد که چطور زمانیکه یک زن مرتکب گناه می‌شود تمام اعضای فامیل به جهنم می‌روند، پس بسیاری از افراد زنان را اجازه نمی‌دهند که بیرون از خانه بروند بخاطریکه دیگران آنها را خواهند دید که این خود گناه می‌باشد.
- آموزش‌ها باید برداشت‌های اشتباه مانند سوره به اصطلاح "زدن" یا 4:34 که به عنوان مرجع اصلی برای حمایت سلطه مردان بالای زنان استفاده می‌شود، را واضح سازند.
- درحالیکه کتاب راهنما به صورت خلاصه درباره اینکه خشونت علیه زنان توجیه اسلامی یا شرعی ندارد توضیح می‌دهد، اما هنوز کافی نمی‌باشد. با در نظر داشت غالب شدن نوشته‌های پدرسالانه‌ی سوره به اصطلاح "زدن" - که در کتاب راهنما به آن اشاره نشده است- نیاز به گسترش بیشتر دارد.
- از دوره‌های آموزشی دایمی و دسترسی به کتاب راهنمای آموزش اطمینان حاصل نمایید.
- کتاب راهنما باید به زبان پشتو ترجمه گردد.
- از آنجاییکه رهبران مذهبی در حل منازعات دخیل می‌باشند، دانش حقوقی به شمول قانون محو خشونت علیه زنان در موضوعاتی که رهبران مذهبی بالای آن تمرکز می‌نمایند، مفید خواهد بود. همچنین رهبران مذهبی باید بدانند چه زمانی یک قضیه باید راجع گردد و میانجیگری نباید صورت گیرد (به طور مثال قضیه‌های جنایی)
- اطمینان حاصل نمایید زمانیکه به حقوق زنان در قوانین کشور اشاره می‌نمایید، زمانیکه تبعیض وجود دارد آن را واضح سازید.
- اطمینان حاصل نمایید که رهبران مذهبی مخصوصاً برای حل قضیه‌های جنایی از راجع‌سازی به اداره‌های دولتی و سازمان‌های جامعه مدنی آگاهی داشته باشند.
- برای اینکه محتوای آموزش دارای اشتراکات نباشند، آموزش‌ها را با دیگر سازمان‌ها توسط وزارت حج و اوقاف هماهنگی نمایید.
- درحالیکه ریاست‌های حج و امور اوقاف برای نظارت رهبران مذهبی منابع کافی ندارند، اطمینان حاصل نمایید که آنها حمایت می‌شوند و مکانیزم‌هایی برای نظارت ایجاد شده باشد. طوریکه در بعضی مناطق، دفتر UNICEF در نظارت رهبران مذهبی دخیل می‌باشد، که در اخیر به عنوان شریک می‌توان از آنها یاد کرد. در صورتیکه یک سیستم برای ارزیابی مداوم کفایت و تطابق خطبه‌ها با حقوق زنان موجود باشد، ثبت خطبه‌ها می‌تواند گزینه‌یی برای نظارت باشد.
- درحالیکه ایجاد روابط با جامعه مدنی می‌تواند مفید باشد، احتیاط ضروری میباشد زیرا پروگرام نباید به گسترش نظریات وارد شده از غرب یا نظریاتی که مردم فکر می‌کنند غیراسلامی است، به نظر برسد.
- دخیل ساختن شاگردان مدرسه در دادخواهی حقوق زنان از دیدگاه اسلام ضروری می‌باشد زیرا آنها به زنان دسترسی دارند.
- به دلیل اهمیت رهبران مذهبی به عنوان مثال، رسم و رواج‌هایی مثل چند همسری در بین رهبران مذهبی باید به صورت آهسته‌رها گردد و اولویت به‌آنها داده شوند که در چند همسری دخیل نمی‌باشند.
- درحالیکه هنوز واضح نیست کدام خشونت‌ها علیه زن به عنوان گناه دیده می‌شوند و منظور از چه نوع خشونت‌ها می‌باشد، فهمیدن این موضوع می‌تواند اطلاعات مفید درباره توسعه بیشتر موثریت خطبه‌ها ارایه نماید.
- درحالیکه خطبه یک رهبر مذهبی با رهبر مذهبی دیگر متفاوت است، اطمینان حاصل نمایید که مشکلات فعلی توسط راه حل‌های ممکن حل گردند.