

2016

# The Notion of Progress of an Afghan Woman in Society: Moving Beyond Foreign Aid

Hilda Grigorian  
*Walden University*

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# Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

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2016

Abstract

The Notion of Progress of an Afghan Woman in Society:

Moving Beyond Foreign Aid

by

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MBA, University of La Verne, 2000

BS, University of La Verne, 1995

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Management

Walden University

June 2016

## Abstract

Since 2002, foreign aid has been invested to create social change in Afghanistan, but little is known about the impact on women in rural areas. This case study focused on a single Afghan woman in a rural province who received a foreign aid grant for building baking skills and broader economic development of 20 rural women. The theoretical framework was based on Haq and Sen's development theory. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with the key participant, her husband who was identified as the main source of support, and four female beneficiaries. These data were inductively coded and then subjected to thematic analysis. The primary findings of this study was that this foreign aid project succeeded in building skills for involved individuals; though wider spread of foreign aid benefits were limited by what is perceived as an inequitable distribution of assistance to rural areas, as well as Afghanistan's political, cultural, economic, and security environment. Findings from all participants in this case study ( $n=6$ ) supported Haq and Sen's theoretical prediction that given the proper technical resources, an individual is capable of being self-reliant and avoiding poverty. The respondents concluded that short term change is attainable and beneficial, but will not be sustained without long-term cultural change regarding the roles of women and allocation of foreign aid. The social implications of this research may provide opportunities for Afghan community and women councils to conduct training for women with an objective to bring awareness of the importance of their participation in the economy. The findings will be compiled into a concept paper to be submitted to relevant ministries amid formulation of national capacity building policy for women in the rural areas.

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## Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my Afghan sisters. Your courage, bravery, and patience to overcome daily challenges are immeasurable. You have touched my life and soul, and I will always remember your heartfelt smiles and kindness.

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This research study has come to life through the efforts of many people. First of all, my sincere gratitude and appreciation to the participants who willingly shared their stories. This has been a tough journey with many obstacles and it would not have been possible without the guidance of my dissertation committee. My deepest appreciation and heartfelt gratitude is extended to Dr. Kathleen Schulin, the committee chair, for her patience, understanding, and mentorship throughout this journey. She made it all easy.

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To all the aid workers in the world for risking their lives to make a difference in the world. To all my USAID and UNDP colleagues in Afghanistan for their selfless dedication in making a dent in development. To all my military colleagues for watching my back for 2 years, thank you for saving my life.

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## Table of Contents

List of Tables .....	vi
List of Figures .....	vii
Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study.....	1
Background of the Study .....	2
Problem Statement .....	5
Purpose of the Study .....	6
Research Questions .....	8
Nature of the Study .....	9
Definitions.....	10
Assumptions.....	11
Scope and Delimitations .....	12
Limitations .....	13
Significance of the Study .....	13
Significance to Practice.....	14
Significance to Theory .....	15
Significance to Social Change .....	16
Summary .....	17
Chapter 2: Literature Review .....	19
Literature Search Strategy.....	19
Theoretical Foundation .....	20
Literature Review.....	21



Overview of Afghanistan .....	22
History of Afghan Women (1880–Present) .....	25
Afghan Women Under the Taliban (1994–2001) .....	29
Afghan Women and International Intervention .....	36
Afghan Women and Postconflict Reconstruction .....	42
Afghanistan National Development Strategy .....	45
Afghan Women and Postconflict Reconstruction .....	48
The Current Status of Women in Afghanistan .....	53
Summary and Conclusion .....	58
Chapter 3: Research Method .....	60
Research Design and Rationale .....	60
Role of the Researcher .....	62
Methodology .....	63
Participant Selection Logic: The Population .....	64
Instrumentation .....	65
Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection .....	65
Data Analysis Plan .....	67
Issues of Trustworthiness .....	68
Credibility .....	68
Transferability .....	68
Dependability .....	68
Confirmability .....	69

Ethical Procedures .....	69
Summary .....	70
Chapter 4: Results .....	73
Research Setting.....	74
Demographics .....	75
Data Collection .....	75
Recommended Data Collection Technique in Afghanistan.....	76
Interviews.....	77
Data Analysis .....	80
Main Theme: Social Status Change .....	82
Main Theme: Challenges .....	85
Main Theme: Capacity Development .....	89
Main Theme: Importance of Foreign Aid in Building a Strong Capacity .....	95
Evidence of Trustworthiness.....	97
Credibility .....	97
Transferability.....	97
Dependability .....	97
Confirmability.....	97
Study Results .....	98
Background .....	100
Key Participant (SY).....	100
Key Participant’s Husband (SN).....	103

Active Female Beneficiary Participant (SK) .....	105
Active Female Beneficiary Participant (HA).....	107
Nonactive Female Beneficiary Participant (MA) .....	108
Nonactive Female Beneficiary Participant (MAH) .....	110
Summary .....	111
Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations .....	113
Interpretation of Findings .....	113
Limitations of the Study.....	120
Recommendations.....	121
Implications.....	122
Conclusions.....	123
References.....	126
Appendix A: Glossary.....	141
Appendix B: Acronyms .....	143
Appendix C: Stake (2005) Checklist .....	144
Appendix D: Key Participant Selection Criteria.....	145
Appendix E: Interview Questions—Key Participant (SY).....	146
Appendix F: Interview Questions—Key Participant’s Husband (SN) .....	150
Appendix G: Interview Questions for Active Female Beneficiary Participant (SK).....	152
Appendix H: Interview Questions for Active Female Beneficiary Participant (HA).....	155
Appendix I: Interview Questions from Nonactive Female Beneficiary Participant (MA) .....	158

Appendix J: Interview Questions from Nonactive Female Beneficiary Participant (MAH).....	161
Appendix K: Key Participant (SY) Verbal Consent Form via Skype .....	164
Appendix L: Key Participant’s Husband (SN) Verbal Consent Form via Skype.....	169
Appendix M: Active Female Beneficiary Participant (SK) Verbal Consent Form via Skype.....	174
Appendix N: Active Female Beneficiary Participant (HA) Verbal Consent Form via Skype.....	179
Appendix O: Nonactive Female Beneficiary Participant (MA) Verbal Consent Form via Skype .....	184
Appendix P: Nonactive Female Beneficiary Participant (MAH) Verbal Consent Form via Skype .....	189
Appendix Q: Interview Matrix.....	194
Appendix R: Main Themes and Subthemes.....	196
Appendix S: Project Photos .....	197
Appendix T: Afghanistan Travel Warning .....	197
Appendix U: IRB Approval .....	201

List of Tables

Table Q1. Interview Matrix .....188

## List of Figures

Figure 1. Administrative division and languages of Afghanistan.....	23
Figure 2. The research cycle .....	61
Figure R1. Main themes and subthemes .....	190
Figure S1. Women prepare a tray of cookies for baking. ....	191
Figure S2. Women learn to operate the new baking equipment .....	191
Figure S3. The new bakery has become a popular place to buy bread, cakes, and sweets. ....	191

## Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

The unstable situation for women in Afghanistan presents a challenge to human development in the country, in particular for women in the rural areas. The National Action Plan for Women of Afghanistan (NAPWA) governed equal rights for women in all spheres of life (Ministry of Women's Affairs [MOWA], 2007, p. 7); however, there has been no evidence of social and human development of Afghan women living in the rural areas. While women in urban areas had access to information and education, rural women remained secluded and out of sight with limited resources to build their capacity and to secure a sustainable livelihood (Schulz & Schulz, 1999).

This research study was focused on the progress of one Afghan woman who, against all odds, changed her social status by learning new skills and transforming herself from an ordinary housewife to an active member of her community. Although there have been several research studies on women in Afghanistan, none of them have been focused on the progress of women in rural areas. The social impact of the study will be twofold. A pamphlet outlining this success story will be created and disseminated to the Community Development Council (CDC) to use as a part of their training for both men and women at the community level. Women will understand their potential for making a difference in the community, and men will have better understanding of the value that a woman brings to betterment of the community. On a ministerial level, a concept note will be submitted to the MOWA and Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development (MRRD) for formulation of capacity building for women in rural areas. This chapter

outlines the topic of the study, the need for the study, and the potential social implications of the study.

### **Background of the Study**

For the past 4 decades, Afghan women have gone through turmoil, falling from power to poverty. Women experienced many eras of cultural change, from holding high-ranking positions and experiencing freedom of movement during the presidency of Mahmood Daoud Khan (1973–1978), when women were treated as equals to their male counterparts, to the era of the Taliban regime. This research study focused on a rural Afghan woman who managed to overcome challenges and gain her social status in a rural province where women were not encouraged to venture beyond the veil. As Schulz and Schulz (1999) mentioned, in order to understand the status of Afghan women today, an individual should closely examine what these women have experienced during the past several eras. Afghan women have fallen from once being active members of society who held high-ranking positions to being noncitizens and outcasts from society under the Taliban. From 1973 to 1978, women enjoyed freedom of movement, adopted Western lifestyles and attire, socialized and worked outside the home, held high-ranking positions in the public sector, and became active members of society. Women gained access to education and advanced in the private and public sectors in large provinces such as Kabul, Herat, and Balk (Qazi, 2011).

During the Soviet invasion in 1979 and the decade-long Soviet regime, Afghan women continued to be empowered with equality and held high-ranking positions in both the public and private sectors. Over 40% of medical doctors were women, and women



made up 60% of all teachers and public sector employees (Schulz & Schulz 1999). This freedom came to a halt when the Soviet troops departed in 1989; the resulting civil war took a toll on Afghan women, and their freedom declined. They were excluded and removed from positions in the public sector, remained confined to their home surroundings, resumed wearing the traditional burka, and were seldom allowed to be seen in public (Ahmed-Ghosh, 2003).

The Taliban (“students of Islam”) emerged in Afghanistan in 1996, bringing with them strict rules of conduct and discrimination that were in violation of the first Afghan Constitution and the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which Afghanistan ratified in 1948. Taliban leaders follow Wahhabism, an extremist branch of Sunni Islam whose codes justify their crimes and violations of human rights. According to rulings of the Islamic Supreme Council of America (n.d.), Wahhabism does not acknowledge or recognize women as human beings and does not extend human rights to women (author, year). The religion prohibits any sort of entertainment and laughter and punishes men whose beards are too short.

Afghan women suffered under the Taliban regime, as the Taliban perceived women as a threat and liability due to their activism to seek freedom and a better life. After taking control of Kabul on September 26, 1996, the Taliban issued rules forbidding women to work outside of the home, attend school, or even leave their homes unless accompanied by a male chaperone (Schulz & Schulz, 1999). The women were obliged to be covered from head to toe by the traditional burka, which covers the entire body with only a mesh opening to see and breathe through. Women were not allowed to wear white

(the color of the Taliban flag) socks or shoes or add any white color to their burka, as it would be perceived as retaliation against the Taliban (Schulz & Schulz, 1999). Also, windows of houses and buildings with female presence had to be painted black to prevent the public from viewing women (Schulz & Schulz, 1999). To suppress the civic movement of the women, the Taliban placed women under strict curfew and house arrest from 7:00 p.m. until 8:00 a.m. They could not participate in any public events, their school attendance ceased, they were forbidden to be seen by a male physician (female physicians were all but nonexistent) or to enter a mosque. Many educated women were excluded from public positions and ended up on the streets begging for money to feed their children (Schulz & Schulz, 1999).

The events of September 11, 2001, led the United States and the United Kingdom to launch Operation Enduring Freedom on October 7, 2001, later joined by other North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) forces, which succeeded in dismantling the Taliban regime. Shortly after the fall of the Taliban and under the presidency of Hamid Karzai, MOWA was established in 2001 to ensure compliance with Article 22 of the Afghan Constitution, which affords equal rights to women in the country (MOWA, n.d.).

From the Bonn Agreement of 2001 to the Bonn Conference of 2011, followed by the Japan Conference in 2012, more than 60 governments and 20 international organizations pledged a total of \$16 billion to assist Afghanistan with security, governance, and social development, with an emphasis on women's development (United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, 2012). Afghanistan entered into a transition due to the withdrawal of international armed forces in December 2014 and drawdown of

foreign aid. As stated by Hogg, Nassif, Gomez Osorio, Byrd, and Beath (2013), the World Bank encouraged international donors to restructure their foreign aid assistance policies to ensure that foreign aid would reach the grassroots and that women in the rural areas would be given equal opportunity to advance in society (Hogg et al., 2013). This study illustrated the impact of foreign aid assistance in building a female workforce in rural areas of Afghanistan, with an objective of achieving a sustainable livelihood.

### **Problem Statement**

Forty years of conflict and war have impacted the social status of Afghan women. Their social status changed from once being active members of the society to becoming nonclass citizens (Schulz & Schulz, 1999). The Asia Foundation (2015) conducted a public opinion survey across 34 Afghanistan provinces, polling 9,586 Afghan citizens from 14 ethnic groups and revealed that some progress had been made in the areas of health and education to empower women in urban areas. However, rural women continued to suffer in many areas, mainly due to a lack of access to education and information about building their capacity to secure a stable income. According to the UN Development Programme (UNDP; 2014a), the Human Development Report (HDR), and the NAPWA (MOWA, 2008), rural women have had limited access to skill development, which has hindered their progress and pushed them into poverty. Meanwhile, the UNDP HDR ranked the country as one of the world's poorest nations and the worst country for a woman to live in. The HDR measures human development based on criteria set by the UNDP (2014a).

Numerous scholars have described the disparity of progress between urban and rural areas, due to limited access to foreign aid. However, there have been no confirmed findings that an Afghan woman in a rural area has equal access to foreign aid to build her capacity and to become self-reliant (Beath, Christia, & Enikolopov, 2013). In a study of women's community councils in districts neighboring Kabul, Echavez (2012) determined that female council members received training in many areas from the National Solidarity Program (NSP) and were able to make judgements in implementing community-based projects. The development theory of Haq (1999) and Sen (2000), which provided the theoretical framework for this study, suggested that given the tools and resources, an individual can build a capacity to lead a sustainable life. The focus of my research was on one Afghan woman in a rural province who made progress in raising her capacity. She, in turn, made a social impact by teaching 20 other women to become self-sustained in a remote province of the country. This research study is both meaningful and unique because there has been a lack of descriptive research linking the impact of capacity building to the sustainability of Afghan women in rural areas.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the study was to determine whether an Afghan woman in a rural province, through building capacity supported by a foreign aid grant, made a social impact on her life as well as the lives of other women in her province. The single case study engaged the key participant and five other rural Afghan women whose lives were affected by her efforts. The intent of the research study was to understand whether an Afghan woman in a rural province changed her social status from a housewife to an

active member of the community and, in return, made a positive social impact by building a female workforce of 20 vulnerable women.

The same phenomenon that linked capacity building to alleviating poverty has been observed in several underdeveloped countries, such as India, Nepal, and Vietnam. For example, Purushothaman (1997) conducted a study in several rural areas of India and showed that building a strong capacity of women in rural areas contributed to building a healthy community, enabling communities and local government to work effectively together for a common goal. Building a strong capacity of rural Indian women at the grassroots was instrumental in preventing poverty (Purushothaman, 1997). The findings of the study revealed that once vulnerable women in rural areas were given tools and resources, they willingly acquired new skills that ultimately led to social status change and economic freedom. In a similar study of women's empowerment in rural areas of Nepal using Sen's (2000) theory of "capacity approach to avoid poverty" (p. 15), Savneet (2013) showed that women in rural Nepal were eager to learn new skills to contribute to family finances, as well as build a prosperous environment in their community. The findings of the study showed that women's empowerment occurred due to several factors: (a) as a result of cultural imposition, financial hardship, and other social changes that motivated women to seek a better life; (b) a willingness to make a difference in society and transform not only on an individual level, but collectively as well, by becoming more engaged in their community and society (Savneet, 2013). The findings of the study showed that once women understood their potential in learning new skills, they pursued

their own business by borrowing money through a microfinance project, which led to a stable income.

### **Research Questions**

An overarching central question was asked of all participants. Subquestions were derived from the answers received from the key participant. Several subquestions were relevant to capacity building as the main reason driving change in social status. The key participant identified her husband and four female beneficiaries whose lives were affected by her efforts. The interview questionnaires for the key participant, her husband, and female participants are presented in Appendices F, G, and H, respectively.

The central question posed to the key participant was the following:

Q: what factors determined the willingness of an Afghan woman in a rural area to advance in society.

This study was built on the development theory of Haq (1999) and Sen (2000), which provided its theoretical foundation. The development theory identified sustainable development through capacity building as the instrument to avoid poverty. This theory provided a basis from which to measure human development by the impact of international financial donors. Sen (as cited in Fukuda-Parr, 2003) emphasized that lives would be improved by expanding an individual's capacity. Sen's theory (as cited in Fukuda-Parr, 2003) relied on social progress through access to knowledge, economic growth through resource availability to women and marginalized populations, equity, and providing a sustainable livelihood to vulnerable people. Haq and Sen developed the criteria and indicators for measuring human development for each country through

producing an annual progress report—the UN HDR (UNHDR) and UN Human Development Index (UNHDI) for the UNDP, which provided baseline information to measure the progress of human development in underdeveloped countries. The development theory of Haq and Sen was the basis for creating UNHDR and UNHDI; both reports played a key role in measuring human development progress. Both philosophers believed that an individual was capable of building a secure livelihood, given proper tools and resources; a stable and secure livelihood was the way out of poverty.

This theory was selected because of its application in several underdeveloped countries (India, Nepal, Bangladesh, Afghanistan, and Pakistan). The other rationale was the validation received from the UNDP's decision to use the development theory as the basis for formulating the HDR and the Human Development Index (HDI; Sumner, 2008). These were the reasons for choosing the development theory that provided the best explanation for social change and poverty alleviation through building a strong capacity.

### **Nature of the Study**

This research study used a single case study design and followed Yin's (2005) framework. Yin emphasized the importance of the researcher's involvement and the need to be personally in contact with the participants, spending time with the participants, informants, and stakeholders to understand their situation and issues.

The study focused on one Afghan woman in a rural province who made a social impact on her life through learning new skills and building a female work force of 20 vulnerable women to implement a baking project. While Yin (2005) noted the value of

first-hand observation, security issues precluded my travel to Afghanistan (see Appendix T, which contains the travel notification issued by the U.S. Department of State [DOS]). Therefore, I collected data from the key participant ( $n = 1$ ) and other participants ( $n = 5$ ) via phone and Skype.

### **Definitions**

*Beneficiaries:* People whose lives have been directly affected. They were the ones who received assistance as direct benefits.

*Capacity development:* Strengthening people's capacity to determine their own values and priorities, and to organize themselves to act on these, has been the basis of development (Eade & Williams, 1995, p. 9). According to Sen (2000), building a strong capacity enhances the ability of an individual to expand possibilities and move beyond boundaries.

*Community:* As defined by the NSP (2013), a community consists of 25 families or more.

*Community Development Council (CDC):* As defined by the NSP (2013), a CDC is a group of community members elected by the people, including both men and women, to take responsibility in identifying community-based projects, implementing and supervising the projects, and making decisions. This model was designed and implemented by the NSP in Afghanistan.

*Extreme poverty:* As defined by the World Bank (2010), extreme poverty is an average daily consumption of \$1.25 or less and means living on the edge of subsistence.



*Gender mainstreaming:* The UN Economic and Social Council (1997) defined gender mainstreaming as the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies, or programs, in all areas and at all levels.

*Poverty:* The World Bank defined poverty as “the lack of what is necessary for material well-being—especially food but also housing, land, and other assets. Poverty is the lack of multiple resources leading to physical deprivation” (as cited in Narayan, 2000, p.12).

*Poverty line:* As defined by the World Bank Institute (2005), the poverty line varies from one country to another. The poverty line measures the minimum expenditure required to fulfill basic needs.

*Shura/religious leaders:* A traditional community of elders and religious leaders, which does not include women (NSP, 2013).

*Sustainability and sustainable development:* Kuhlman and Farrington (2010) defined sustainable development as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (p. 52). Certain indicators must be in place to ensure sustainability is developed and reaches fruition.

### **Assumptions**

I assumed that all participants operated under a few key assumptions. Yin (2005) mentioned the importance of the participant’s trustworthiness as the key to successful data collection. It was also important to ensure that the key participant was truthful,

candid, and forthright in relating her personal experiences of the change she made in her life. In addition, I ensured that the key participant was self-motivated (i.e., the participant was willing to tell her story as it occurred, rather than dramatizing and exaggerating for self-gratification or other reasons). For this reason, I selected a key participant with a sterling reputation in the community and among donor agencies. In addition, I selected her because of the social impact she had made by building a female workforce of 20 vulnerable women in a province where women have been rarely visible.

### **Scope and Delimitations**

A male-driven, conservative rural province in a western region of Afghanistan was chosen as the location to align with the purpose of the study. The boundaries and population of this research study focused on a female key participant who received support from multiple donor agencies, which resulted in building a strong capacity and advancing in her community and society. Her efforts in implementing a unique baking project in a remote province resulted in building the capacity of 20 other women. To attest to her efforts, the key participant identified four female participants who directly benefited from the skill development and income generation of the baking project, supported by a small grant from the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). The results of this study could be transferred by assembling a pamphlet of the findings and working with CDC to disseminate it to rural women within the same province to empower women to move beyond their boundaries.

### **Limitations**

A qualitative research study may face many limitations (Patton 2002). The quality of the research relies on the expertise of the researcher and his/her ability to present an unbiased outlook and to avoid any influence from other parties. Patton further elaborated that direct observation adds value to the research. In this research study, it was not possible to conduct direct observation and collect data at the field level, due to deterioration in the security of the province. Patton also emphasized the importance of maintaining a positive dialogue with the gatekeeper to ensure access to a female participant. In a male-driven, conservative Moslem setting, the gatekeepers were male members of the family, community elders, and religious leaders. Afghan culture defines men as assertive, tough, and in control—a masculine culture, in terms of Hofstede's (1980) theory. In this research study, I did not encounter any problems, as I had established a good relationship with the key participant and her family since 2009.

### **Significance of the Study**

This study is significant because it documents the change in social status that one Afghan woman in a rural province achieved through learning new skills as supported by multiple foreign aid assistance groups and in turn made a significant social impact in the lives of 20 other women in her province. Through receipt of a small grant from USAID and the successful implementation of a baking project, she built a skillful female workforce in a rural province, where 20 other women learned new skills to secure a sustainable income and avoid poverty. The province of the study is remotely located in western Afghanistan in a mountainous area with limited access to basic living conditions.

The province is populated by the Hazara people (called *Hazarajat*), who had never before experienced any women-led businesses. In this province, women have been rarely visible in public and have had limited freedom of movement. To implement this project successfully without facing challenges by the community leaders, the key participant, with the support of her husband, convinced the community leaders and the male family members to allow women to participate in the project. She held town hall meetings to demonstrate the importance of the project in stimulating the local economy.

This is a unique example of the persistence of rural women to make a positive social change. Wakefield and Bauer (2005) concluded that while Afghan women in urban areas regained some status in the public sector during 2003–2005, rural women continued to struggle in making progress in the western and northern provinces of the country, mainly due to a lack of learning new skills. This trend was more severe in the most conservative Pashtunwali provinces in the south, southeast, and eastern parts of the country, where women were not given freedom to venture beyond the veil. There is a gap in the literature and in reporting by donor agencies, as there have been no reports or relevant studies to show whether women in rural areas have made human development progress since the arrival of international armed forces in 2002. As long as the community elders oppose women's rights and equality, women in the rural areas will remain secluded due to the cultural constraints imposed on them.

### **Significance to Practice**

I have several years of working and living experience in Afghanistan. As an international gender consultant, I worked with the MOWA in Kabul. It is anticipated that

the findings and recommendations of this research study will be transcribed into a concept note and submitted to the MOWA for consideration in formulating an action plan for capacity building for women in rural Afghanistan.

The MRRD is the main ministry working in the rural areas. I intend to develop a concept paper and submit it to the MRRD for inclusion of capacity building of CDCs in their rural development projects. While this may be a challenging task, I intend to submit the findings and recommendations to the international donor community (e.g., USAID, UNDP, Japan International Cooperation Agency [JICA]), thereby enabling them to consider changes to their gender policies for Afghanistan and encouraging them to make necessary changes in foreign aid policy to ensure that capacity building of rural women has been included in their relevant policies.

### **Significance to Theory**

In the development theory, Haq (1999) and Sen (2000) suggested that once an individual had been given the proper tools and resources, he/she is able to earn a sustainable income. In the case of an Afghan woman, a sustainable livelihood led to confidence as she had purchasing power and became an active member of the community, which ultimately created trust and respect with the community elders. The potential contribution of this research study from the theory standpoint will be to direct the attention of MOWA and MRRD to ensuring equal distribution of resources to women in rural provinces of the country.

As the Asia Foundation (2015) survey of the Afghan people revealed, 64.0% of Afghans surveyed in the northern and western provinces of the country supported the

idea of women working outside the home. A majority of Afghans said they disagreed with certain traditional practices that violated the rights of women and girls and cast them out as *baad* (bad) and *baddal* (fake). A majority of Afghans said it was acceptable for women to work in a number of public settings, and 93.6% supported women's equal access to education in Islamic madrasas (Asia Foundation, 2015, p. 129). The survey concluded that the vast majority of the male populace was not aware of the value that a woman brought to the family and the community. This is very common in rural areas, since women are always perceived as homemakers and not as decision makers.

### **Significance to Social Change**

Several outcomes of this research study may have a social impact on the lives of Afghan women in rural areas, even if it is on a smaller scale and on a short-term basis. The long-term impact will be based on the formulation of a new capacity-building policy as supported by the national government. The main social impact will be to bring awareness of the social change resulting from this one women's story—the impact for her, her family, her associates, and her community—to other women in rural areas. Afghan women are motivated and have a sense of competitiveness to strive to rise above their peers; this case study, through word of mouth or being discussed by the CDC at the community level, will allow women in rural areas to see how they may expand their role in society and venture beyond the veil. Afghan women look up to the women CDC members to gain access to information. This success story will be disseminated to vulnerable women at the community level via CDC members and/or a local nongovernmental organization (NGO). It will demonstrate the success of an Afghan

woman in a rural area and inspire other women to explore their potential and better comprehend the notion that a change in social status will benefit all parties; it should not be perceived as a negative impact on their lives, but has the potential to redefine their identity and place them as equal members of society.

Hofstede (2011) suggested that any social change in a male-driven society may be interpreted as a negative change. Social status change for an Afghan woman will raise concern and threat among the male populace due to cultural norms and traditions; however, these findings may demonstrate the positive side of the change for the men as well. Given the proper education and awareness of gender mainstreaming for better life, the Afghan male populace will understand the added value of their female counterparts to the betterment of their community and society.

### **Summary**

The Taliban suppressed the voices and identity of women in Afghanistan for many years. This research study, although focused on one Afghan woman, is a testimony to the potential for other Afghan women to understand their capacity and participate actively in their society. The study showed the ability of an Afghan woman in a rural province to make a social impact. She not only increased her own capacity to move ahead in society but also, through her efforts and with the support of foreign aid, made a social impact on 20 other women in a province where women were prohibited from exploring beyond the veil. This chapter introduced the study as a whole; presented an overview of the background and problem statement; outlined the purpose of the study; stated the research question, study significance, and social impact; and presented the theoretical

perspective used during the course of the research. Chapter 2 reviews the literature to illustrate the status of Afghan women in several eras from 1880 on and discusses the impact of foreign aid in building a sustainable workforce for Afghan women. The literature review also outlines the probable future of Afghan women beyond the withdrawal of international armed forces in December 2014. Chapter 3 defines the epistemological structure used in this qualitative case study as well as the philosophical foundations, research design and site, participant information, data collection methods and analysis, researcher position and limitations, and how limitations have been overcome. Chapter 4 outlines the results of the research study. The interpretation of findings, discussion, conclusion, and recommendations for further research are presented in Chapter 5.



## Chapter 2: Literature Review

The problem investigated in this study was to understand how an Afghan woman in a rural area could regain her social status to become a self-reliant, active member of the community and society. The purpose of the study was to determine whether an Afghan woman in a rural province, through building capacity supported by a foreign aid grant, made a social impact on her life as well as the lives of other women in her province. Ahmed-Ghosh (2003) emphasized that in order to understand the current status of Afghan women, a person should examine the changes they experienced between the 1970s and 2003 and managed to survive during and after the conflict. With this concept in mind, the literature review chapter was divided into three sections. The first section presents an overview of Afghanistan, its culture, and contextual background information, with an emphasis on the roles and status of women in society from 1880 onward. The second section discusses the theoretical construct derived for this study, and the last section demonstrates the impact of foreign aid on building a strong capacity to lead to social status change for Afghan women in rural areas.

### **Literature Search Strategy**

All relevant literature was collected over the past 3 years from reliable international donor sources. A set of keywords to identify the gap was used to search the literature: *Afghan women status, Taliban, pre-Taliban, post-Taliban, foreign aid, women and decision-making, social status change, women in development, human rights, gender equality, gender equity, gender mainstreaming, capacity building, sustainable development, stability, and development theory*. A wide range of search parameters were

established in Google Scholar linked to Walden University, which became the main source of information, as the Walden University database did not have resources related to the nature of study. The Afghan Fusion Centre, the Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU), and the Asia Foundation were excellent resources. To locate additional resources, such as similar dissertations, I used the Walden University Library as well as searching EBSCO eBook, ProQuest Central, and SAGE Premier. The majority of research studies conducted in Afghanistan do not reveal participants' information, location, and other details that might cause a security threat to the key participants. Several outside library databases were searched to locate relevant documents, including the Library of Congress, George Washington University, American University, Thunderbird University, USAID, and UNDP; *Journal of Transnational Women's & Gender Studies*, *Gender & Development* and the *International Journal of Diversity in Organizations, Communities & Nations*; and United Nations documents. Zoetero software was used to organize the literature based on the keywords and dates.

### **Theoretical Foundation**

The theoretical foundation upon which this study was built is the development theory of Haq (1999) and Sen (2000). Their development theory concentrated on sustainable development through capacity building as the instrument to avoid falling into poverty. Haq and Sen suggested that capacity building leads to a prosperous living and avoids poverty by helping people to help themselves. Sen argued that the "true purpose of development is to enhance people's quality of life which is best achieved by giving them

tools and resources to expand beyond boundaries” (p. 42). Eade (1997) emphasized the importance of building a strong capacity to create sustainability (p. 17).

Poverty is a growing phenomenon and an issue of concern within underdeveloped, conflict, and postconflict countries. Sachs (2005) examined many underdeveloped countries such as India, Bangladesh, and sub-Saharan Africa to determine if an individual can avoid poverty through learning new skills and secure financial prosperity. Sachs found that in Bangladesh, women working in garment factories were happy with a small surplus from their meager income and still managed to save, go to school, and enhance their literacy and job market skills (p. 12). Sachs compared the life of rural Bangladeshi women in 1960, when a woman would have had six to seven children, to 2005, when she could choose to learn new skills and earn a stable income to prevent poverty. His findings from several countries in South and Southeast Asia revealed that to avoid poverty, people should explore beyond their boundaries and expand their potential to learn innovative skills to earn a sustainable living. The importance of capacity building to avoid poverty has been underlined by Purushothaman (1997), who revealed that women in rural India, Nepal, and Pakistan built a sustainable livelihood through learning new skills. With new skills and funding from a microfinance project, women in rural India and Nepal managed to start a microbusiness and build a sustainable livelihood.

### **Literature Review**

Afghan culture, with all its rich tradition, has been known as a male-driven culture. The men have dominated families, faith, and nation. Women have been generally

perceived as having insufficient general knowledge and being relatively worthless to society (Rostami-Povey, 2007). Afghan culture has placed little importance on the practical knowledge gained by the woman (or the man) from working within the household. This perception has fed a strategy used by those with power to exclude women from participating in various decision-making processes. Age, marriage, and ethnicity have also been factors influencing the type and level of participation allowed within households (Rostami-Povey, 2007).

### **Overview of Afghanistan**

Afghanistan is a rugged mountainous country with a population of 36 million people and a wide range of 14 ethnicities spread throughout 34 provinces (Central Intelligence Agency [CIA], 2014). The country borders China, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Iran. The religion is 99% Muslim, divided into 84% Sunni and 10% Shia, with 6% following other religions (CIA, 2014). The official language of the country is Dari, which is widely spoken in the western, northern, and central provinces (50%; CIA, 2014). Pashtun is the second official language, which is spoken in the east, southeast, and south (35%; CIA, 2014). Turkic languages are spoken within provinces neighboring Tajikistan (CIA, 2014; see Figure 1).

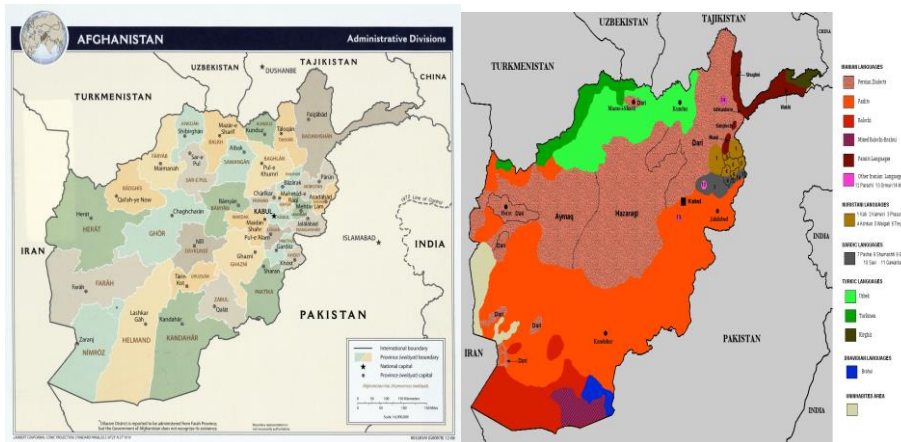


Figure 1. Administrative divisions and languages of Afghanistan (CIA, 2014).

Afghans live in a collectivist society; the family is the fundamental unit of the society (Karlsson & Mansory, 2007). The man is the head of household and is responsible for being the main source of income and breadwinner, whereas the woman's duty is to stay home, cook, clean, and raise the children. Karlsson and Mansory (2007) found that rural Afghan women experience a grueling life, burdened by multiple tasks. In addition to household chores, the women they studied were involved in farming and animal husbandry; at times, they were forced into generating an income through carpet weaving, handicrafts, tailoring, cooking, or other means (Karlsson & Mansory, 2007). An Afghan woman's status in the community mainly depends on obeying the rules set by her husband and his family members, as well as her dialogue with the local elders and influential community leaders known as *ullamahs* (Karlsson & Mansory, 2007). In addition, Karlsson and Mansory mentioned that among women in a community, some have more status than the others. In Afghan rural areas, wives of *shura* members (affluent

community elders) draw upon the status of their men (Karlsson & Mansory, 2007, p. 150).

With regard to the concept of *namus*, which refers to the honor of women, the Pashtuns (Afghanistan's main ethnic group who occupy the south, southeast, and eastern parts of the country) have imposed restrictions on women and defended these constraints by declaring them to be in compliance with Islam and the traditions of Afghan culture. In the most conservative provinces bordering Pakistan, women have been fully controlled by their male family members in all aspects of their life (Karlsson & Mansory, 2007). The male family figures, such as husband, son, brother, father, uncle, cousins, and so on, decide if female family members should have access to health care and education; even their attire is dictated (Karlsson & Mansory, 2007). Marriages have been mainly arranged and often forced upon girls at a young age (Karlsson & Mansory, 2007).

Pashtuns are defined as the backbone of Afghanistan and the most extremist and restrictive tribe in the country. All Pashtuns follow a strict code of conduct called *Pashtunwali*, which has prevented women from living with self-determination (Wahab and Youngerman, 2007). The Pashtuns are known for their strict rules, regulations, and limitations imposed on women (Wahab & Youngerman, 2007). These women have had limited movement outside the house and have been kept isolated within their living quarters. Pashtun elders are influential in all areas of the country, be it religion or politics. In contrast, among the Hazara tribes, which mainly live in the northern, western, and central provinces, women have had more freedom and in some cases may work in the field and outside the home (Wahab & Youngerman, 2007). The Hazara tribes are

neighbors with Tajikistan and Iran, which influences their treatment of women (Wahab & Youngerman, 2007).

An unequal treatment of women in Afghanistan contradicts the protections article outlined in the first and second Constitutions of Afghanistan (1923, 1962). Chapter 2, Article 22 of the 1923 Constitution gave all Afghan citizens personal freedom and immunity from all forms of violation or encroachment, followed by several other articles which gave full freedom and liberty to all citizens of Afghanistan (Constitution of Afghanistan, 1962). These articles provided a clear understanding of women's rights in Afghanistan.

### **History of Afghan Women (1880–Present)**

The myth that Afghan women and girls form an uneducated, ignorant subclass of society has captured the minds of millions of people around the world. However, few know that throughout the centuries, Afghan women have gone through suffering; yet, they have still managed to rise to top positions and obtain higher education, starting with the reign of King Abdul Ahmad Rahman Khan (1880–1901; Nemat, 2011). The first gender equality reform took place during his reign, when he challenged the tradition and the cultural status quo by giving equal rights to women in all aspects of life (Nemat, 2011). Nemat (2011) wrote about the king's efforts to abolish the tribal custom that forced widows to marry their deceased husband's brother, raise the age of marriage, give women the right to divorce, and allow women to own land. Nemat further elaborated on the efforts of the king's wife, Bobo Jan, to advocate women's liberation by promoting

Western attire and putting aside the veil. These were landmark events, the first steps toward modernization and improving the status of women in Afghanistan.

The state reformation process continued under the king's son, Habibullah Khan, who was assassinated in 1919. Habibullah Khan was followed by his son, Amanullah Khan. The entire family recognized and supported gender equality and provided equal opportunity for women to advance; they saw women as valuable members of society who could equally contribute to building a bright future in Afghanistan (Nemat, 2011). During the reign of Amanullah Khan, Afghans returned home from all over the world, mainly from Pakistan and Iran, to rebuild the country. Among the returnees was Alama Mahmood Beg Tarzi, a Western scholar who took over as foreign minister and launched a transformation initiative across various economic, political, and sociocultural spheres (Nemat, 2011). These reforms posed a threat to radical Muslims residing in the southern part of the country (Nemat, 2011). Tarzi also discouraged the veiling and seclusion of women and encouraged women to participate actively in the public sector (Nemat, 2011). Many of the returnees from Iran and Pakistan were educated women who were willing to rebuild the country and create a strong female work force.

Afghan women continued to advance in society during the reign of Amanullah Khan (1926–1929). During this time, they gained access to higher education, strengthened their capacity, and became active key players in the government and public sectors (Nemat, 2011). While women's empowerment continued, their advancement caused a backlash among Pashtunwali conservatives and tribal elders, who had viewed



women as a commodity and not as valuable members of the society; this was a common treatment of women in Pashtunwali (Nemat, 2011).

Muhammad Nadir Shah came to power in 1929. His priority was to maintain rapport and dialogue with the conservative tribes of Pashtunwali to keep the peace; he contributed little to women's empowerment, opening a few girls' schools in selected provinces (Nemat, 2011). His rule was short lived, as he was killed by a teenager during a military ceremony in 1933. His son, Zahir Shah, took his place as the last king of Afghanistan. He reigned for 40 years (1933–1973), a period remembered as the “golden era of peace and prosperity” (Nemat, 2011, p. 8). Zahir Shah promoted women's empowerment by encouraging higher education and including women in key official positions, as well as banning the traditional Afghan attire for women, the burka.

By 1959, women were allowed to appear unveiled, and they strengthened their social status through advancement in education and health. They pursued careers in the business world. The wife and sisters of Zahir Shah held key positions in the government and promoted women's advancement through the establishment of small businesses (Skaine, 2002). In 1964 an amendment to the Constitution of Afghanistan gave a boost to women's equal rights and allowed them to enter the political arena. In parallel with the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA), a Communist-oriented party, the Democratic Organization of Afghan Women was established in 1965 to promote women's rights under the communist regime (Skaine, 2002).

During the presidency of Mohammad Daoud Khan (1973–1978), many Afghan women enjoyed freedom and were encouraged to advance in careers and education.

However, this freedom was limited to women in major cities like Kabul and Herat; most of the rural areas still remained socially conservative. President Daoud Khan supported the establishment of the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan (RAWA), which was founded in 1977 by Meena Keshwar Kamal, a young lawyer whose assertive voice cost her life; she was assassinated in 1987 for her political views. The organization continued her legacy through political and social activities empowering women in all spheres of life. In his report on the RAWA, Giorgi (2009) mentioned that while the organization and its members opposed Taliban leaders, they had to change their strategy and tactics in order to gain their trust and build a strong dialogue with the Taliban regime to ensure that women's rights would be protected. While RAWA maintained a dialogue with Taliban leaders, they ensured women were aware of their rights and continued to educate women in both urban and rural areas under Taliban rule (Giorgi, 2009).

The presidency of Daoud Khan and his legacy came to an end with the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1978. Nemat (2011) highlighted a new era for women's advancement through the establishment of the PDPA, supported by the Soviet Union. The establishment of the PDPA led to several decrees promoting girls' schooling; bride wealth was abolished, and the minimum legal age of marriage for girls was set at 16 years.

As Nemat (2011) indicated, Afghan women were eager to seek higher education and hold key decision-making positions in the public sector. These sentiments were not aligned with Soviet views. With the assistance of affluent, influential, and educated

women, several demonstrations against the Soviet government took place in Kabul, which led to the arrest and confinement of thousands of girls from high schools and universities (Nemat, 2011). Influential and educated women outside of the country joined with the Afghan refugee women in Iran and Pakistan to respond to the Soviet doctrine of gender equality and demanded fair treatment of women to gain access to and serve in high positions in the public sector.

The growth of women in the workforce was well known during the early 1990s. As reported by Iacopino and Rasekh (1998), in this era and before the Taliban regime, Afghan women held 70% of teaching positions, 50% of government posts, and 40% of the jobs in the medical field throughout the country. However, due to the ensuing civil war (1992–1996) and subsequent takeover by the Mujahedeen, the status of women deteriorated. Millions of Afghan women were living uncertain and fearful lives, which forced them to flee the country and seek refugee status in Pakistan and Iran (Iacopino & Rasekh, 1998). A large population of women ended up in internal displaced person camps throughout the country. The ongoing civil war, chaos, instability, and high levels of corruption left the door open for the Taliban to take over Afghanistan in 1994.

### **Afghan Women Under the Taliban (1994–2001)**

In 1994, an Islamic fundamentalist group known as the Taliban emerged in Afghanistan. After 2 years of behind-the-scenes terrorist activity throughout the country, the extremist group captured the city of Kandahar in 1994, followed by Kabul and Herat in 1996. Human rights violations peaked during this time, and women suffered (Schulz & Schulz, 1999) The Taliban justified its treatment of women by the teachings of the most

extremist branch of Islam, Wahhabism, which has deprived people of basic rights, including access to health and education (Schulz & Schulz, 1999).

Schulz and Schulz (1999) compared the Taliban to Stalinist Russia and Nazi Germany; they controlled people and brainwashed Afghans with fear of violation of their religion. Hofstede (as cited by Triandis, 2004), a Dutch social psychologist, described the Taliban regime as the most extreme case of a tight society. They executed people right and left for the smallest of offenses, such as listening to music, laughing, or (for women) wearing any accessories in white, which is the color of the Taliban flag (Schulz & Schulz, 1999). A Human Rights Watch (2001) report mentioned that women suffered the worst under the Taliban regime. The terror that the Taliban planted in the minds of the Afghan people, particularly women, was designed to paralyze them and deprive them of their simplest human rights.

The Taliban regime perpetrated acts of abduction, forced marriages, rape, torture, and inhuman treatment of women, all in the name of Allah, while assuring the world that Afghan women lived an honorable, dignified, and secure life in Afghanistan (Schulz & Schulz, 1999). The Afghan people were prohibited from listening to the radio; playing or listening to music; watching television; using any electronic devices, audio/video equipment, or electric razors; reading; and engaging in most social activities, including the national sports of *buz keshi* and kite flying (Schulz & Schulz, 1999). The Taliban justified these restrictions and limitations as a way to ensure that people were not distracted by any external diversions and focused on religion and prayers only (Schulz & Schulz, 1999). The main source of entertainment during this period was the opportunity

for 30,000 people to gather every Friday at the only stadium in Kabul, where sporting events once took place, to witness beheadings, floggings, amputations, and other forms of punishment, mainly imposed on women (Schulz & Schulz, 1999).

To make matters worse for women, in September 1996 the Taliban leaders issued an announcement in the Kabul and Herat provinces forbidding women from employment in all sectors; even worse, a ruling denied women the back salaries owed to them for work performed during the Soviet period. All this caused extreme financial hardship, especially for the 40,000 affected war widows whose livelihood and support of family depended on employment outside their living compounds (Schulz & Schulz, 1999).

In addition, the regime formed local religious police, which published a new set of restrictions on women, including women's confinement to their living quarters. Women were not allowed to leave their homes after 7:00 p.m. for 12 hours. In addition to this curfew, women's movements during the day were severely limited and allowed only if accompanied by a male chaperone. These strict rules caused major problems for the increasing numbers of women who were forced into street begging (Schulz & Schulz, 1999).

Amnesty International (1996) reported the ongoing public beating of women by Taliban and religious leaders for refusing to wear the burka or simply having an ankle visible. The organization expressed its deep concern about the treatment of women by the Taliban regime. During this time, over 3,000 women lost their jobs in Herat; with the closure of Kabul University and other academic institutions, over 8,000 women were expelled from their academic positions (Amnesty International, 1996). In the hope of

regaining their jobs and social status, thousands of previously working women protested against the Taliban regime and demanded to have their jobs restored and be paid what they were owed. When the Taliban promised to pay out their back salaries, the women returned home, only to be placed under house arrest. Many were not seen publicly for several months (Amnesty International, 1996).

A subsequent report by Amnesty International (1999) illustrated many examples of women being increasingly deprived of basic human rights under the Taliban regime. Women were being punished for no apparent reason, or simply for having been born female. The Taliban enforced their version of Islamic sharia law. Under this interpretation, women and girls were banned from going to school, working outside the home, leaving the house without a male chaperone, showing their skin in public, accessing healthcare delivered by men (which made healthcare virtually inaccessible to women), and working or being involved in politics or public speaking.

In 1999, the Taliban regime established the Ministry for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice, which was given the task of enforcing the Taliban Code of Conduct. Many women were publicly beaten for unintentionally showing skin and/or refusing to wear a burka. Amnesty International (1999) spoke out publicly against the harsh treatment of women and stated the following in their report on women in Afghanistan:

It is an irony that although the Taliban purport their policy on women is in place to ensure the physical protection and dignity of women, many women now cite fear of being beaten by the Taliban as their main security concern. (p. 8)

Akbar (2010) condemned the Taliban's barbarous treatment of women and emphasized the total violation of women's rights under the UN Declaration of Human Rights. As a native Afghan woman, Akbar attempted several times to hold discussions with Taliban leaders in pursuit of human rights for women. However, it was obvious that Taliban leaders viewed women as dangerous members of society; in the Taliban's eyes, women possessed seductive "powers" that caused disturbances among men and "should therefore be confined and kept in submission for as long as possible" (Akbar, 2010, p. 52). To further build fear among the Afghan people, the Taliban continually gathered groups of women from Pashtunwali regions, forced them to commit the most horrible sexual acts, and then, before killing them publicly, accused them of committing adultery and prostitution (Akbar, 2010).

While the world watched the inhumane treatment of women under the Taliban, the U.S. DOS (1998) condemned the Taliban regime for human rights violations against women in the Kabul and Herat provinces. The report rigorously criticized the widespread discrimination against women and girls and denounced the deteriorating conditions for women in both provinces, especially in rural areas. Once active, valued members of society who held high-ranking positions during the Soviet era (1979–1989), Afghan women were abruptly eliminated from the public consciousness and became invisible.

Female physicians were not allowed to be seen in public, due to a rule set by the Taliban regime; therefore, many women and girls did not receive any medical assistance or care, particularly those with no male chaperone (Skaine, 2008). This was a major issue

for women, as a large number of men had been killed during the war with the Soviets and the Civil War (Skaine, 2008).

This rule caused deteriorating health conditions of Afghan women and girls, as Emadi (2002) discussed. Afghan women were forbidden to see a male doctor except in emergency cases. Even then, a woman's male chaperone would have to act as an intermediary between the patient and the doctor; often the doctor would diagnose the patient's condition and recommend treatment without ever examining or meeting the woman face to face (Emadi, 2002). The Constitution of Afghanistan (1962), Chapter 1, article 6, states that

The state is obliged to create a prosperous and progressive society based on social justice, protection of human dignity, protection of human rights, realization of democracy, and to ensure national unity and equality among all ethnic groups and tribes and to provide for balanced development in all areas of the country. (p. 4)

In 1998, the UN Security Council issued Resolution 1214, which expressed "its deep concern for the continuing discrimination against girls and women and for other violations of human rights and of international humanitarian law in Afghanistan" (p. 2) and demanded the Taliban regime take measures to improve the health of women and girls.

The Taliban regime continued to violate the Constitution of Afghanistan (1962) and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UN General Assembly, 1948).

Women's health conditions were dire, and they continued to struggle and suffer with limited access to medical attention or healthcare facilities. The treatment of women and



girls and their poor health raised deep concern among the United Nations and its member countries (UN Security Council, 1998). To investigate the health conditions of Afghan women, the Physicians for Human Rights (PHR; 1998) deployed a group of physicians to Afghanistan in 1998 to conduct a thorough investigation of the health and well-being of women and girls, specifically in the Taliban stronghold provinces of Kabul and Herat. The PHR assessment report exposed the harsh living conditions of girls and women, and how the discrimination and oppression of the Taliban had reduced many former professional women to street beggars in order to feed their children. The PHR report revealed that despite the Taliban's claim of restoring peace, women's health was worse than it had ever been. PHR interviews and surveys of 170 women indicated that the women suffered a great deal from depression, poor health, and malnutrition, all of which were the result of the Taliban's rule, which had closed down the women's wards at the hospitals and punished male doctors for seeing female patients. The terror and atmosphere of fear created by Taliban leaders and the religious police exacerbated the multiple traumas that women had to endure. Every day, religious police punished women for no wrongdoing, using them as examples to intimidate and teach others "lessons" (PHR, 1998). This fear and uncertainty created symptoms of manic depression among many women, and their psychological well-being drastically declined along with their physical health. Not only were the women victims of these harsh treatments, men were also exposed to public punishment, beheading, and killing for no apparent reason (PHR, 1998). Based on the findings and recommendations by PHR and the massive support of the donor communities, in October 2001 a group of female physicians with the support of

the World Health Organization and the UN were deployed to Afghanistan to provide health care to women in the country (Iacopino & Amowitz, 2001).

### **Afghan Women and International Intervention**

The events of September 11, 2001, which claimed over 3,000 civilian lives in the U.S., marked the beginning of the ensuing international intervention in Afghanistan. To oust the Taliban and Al-Qaeda, the United States and United Kingdom, followed by Canada, Australia, Germany, and France, launched Operation Enduring Freedom and invaded Afghanistan in October 2001. Rostami-Povey (2007) explored the catastrophic events of the aerial strikes by the international armed forces at the beginning of the operation; in the cities of Kabul, Kunduz, Herat, and Jalalabad, they claimed an estimated 4,000 lives and displaced over 2.2 million people within 3 months. In early December 2001, the Taliban rolled out of most of the provinces in Afghanistan (Rostami-Povey, 2007).

Rostami-Povey (2007) argued that the U.S.-led intervention in Afghanistan was not about building peace and bringing back liberation and democracy for women but about removing the Taliban from Afghanistan and protecting the safety of the U.S. and other Western countries. Afghan women suffered health issues and their health continued to deteriorate in many areas; their demand for a secure environment and access to food, healthcare, and education had fallen on deaf ears (Rostami-Povey, 2007). The bombing of Afghanistan by NATO allies caused destruction and the death of Afghan people. It destroyed whatever remained for women in Afghanistan; however, Afghans, in particular Afghan women, embraced the invasion (Rostami-Povey, 2007). While the war caused

devastation, it also offered a slim sign of hope for women. Hirshking and Mahmood (2002) stated in their study that Afghan people felt safer under the international invasion, just a few weeks after the Taliban fled the Kabul and Herat provinces, as they regained their freedom of movement and ability to conduct their daily lives.

In her radio address on November 17, 2001, First Lady Laura Bush delivered a heartfelt message to Afghan women. She condemned the brutal degradation of women and children and denounced the severe repression and brutality against women in Afghanistan not as a matter of religion, but a terrorist act imposed by the Taliban regime (Bush, 2001). During the same radio address, Senator Hillary Clinton joined Mrs. Bush to voice her concerns. Clinton expressed her support and willingness to work with Mrs. Bush to pass legislation that would provide educational and healthcare assistance to Afghan women and children; promote improvements to their livelihood through capacity building, training, and skill development; and aid women in the development of a strong and healthy democracy in Afghanistan (Bush, 2001).

In his State of the Union address (The White House, 2002), President George Bush applauded Hamid Karzai and the then-minister of MOWA in his remarks:

America and Afghanistan are now allies against terror. We will be partners in rebuilding that country. . . . The mothers and daughters of Afghanistan were captives in their own homes, forbidden from working or going to school. Today women are free, and are part of Afghanistan's new government. (para. 4–5)

Once out of sight and out of mind, by early 2002 Afghan women and girls had become the center of attention, and the challenges they were facing became known to the

world. An overwhelming outpouring of support sprang from several local NGOs, international nongovernmental organizations (INGOs), and international human rights organizations. Alongside the international donors, they rallied to save Afghan women from years of brutality and inhumane treatment. Sakeena (2008), an independent researcher from Pakistan, examined Afghan women's status post-Taliban and researched whether women's new liberty and freedom gave them the opportunity to make proper choices in their lives or created more conflict within their cultural context. The research findings did not indicate whether the international intervention had made a social impact in women's lives during the early years. Innocent (2011) examined Afghan women's status in several eras and the seemingly endless attempts by the Western world to liberate Afghan women by imposing Western culture, such as not wearing the traditional veil or burka. He further mentioned that women were comfortable in wearing the veil; it gave them a sense of freedom of movement, as a woman without a veil was not perceived favorably in public (Innocent, 2011). Innocent was critical of the international donors' approach to implementing projects in Afghanistan, because most donors were not aware of Afghan culture. In a democratic and freedom context, a study conducted by the AREU revealed that several male respondents condemned the Western world for insisting on changing cultural protocols to give Afghan women freedom and liberation (Larson, 2009). A group of Afghan women respondents agreed that while democracy and freedom should be in place in Afghanistan, as given by the constitution and religion, they should be expressed within the Afghan cultural context and not imposed by Western society (Larson, 2009).

In the same study (Larson, 2009), an Afghan female scholar expressed her opinion of democracy in Afghanistan:

Afghanistan is an Islamic country. Democracy is good as a system of governance in Afghanistan. Democracy is not a value. If it is considered a value including the values practiced as democracy in the Western community, we don't accept it, because it is not applicable with our Islamic and traditional values. If we bring Western democracy to this community, it will be a paradox. But if we can combine and merge positive and applicable aspects of democracy with our Islamic and traditional values, we will be very successful people. (p. 12)

On November 17, 2005, a conference was held at the University of Ohio to discuss Afghan women, democracy, and freedom (Mills & Kitcha, 2006). A delegation of Afghan women expressed their frustration with the Western world's constant attempts to change their culture and transform it into a new culture that was not in accordance with Islamic religious protocols (Mills & Kitcha, 2006). Mills and Kitcha (2006) reported their findings that Afghan women did not wish to be liberated if it meant living in a democratic environment that did not correspond with their religion and exacerbated their relationships with male figures; however, they were eager to find ways to empower democracy that would benefit both genders. Moghadam (2007) agreed that building a democratic environment for women in Afghanistan would work only through respecting the culture and patriotism and women's willingness to work together with Afghan men to create a democratic environment in the country. Moghadam stated that building a sustainable democratic environment begins with having the capacity to do so. Mills and

Kitcha (2006) agreed with Moghadam that a democracy can only be established by working together and building a strong capacity for both genders. Mills and Kitcha further elaborated that Western influences in Afghanistan have created a culture of competition rather than collaboration; women were no longer willing to work together to reach a common goal and a successful end result. However, they predicted that with proper tools and knowledge, and an understanding of the importance of a common vision, women would have a paradigm shift in thinking and would work together to achieve a common goal (Mills & Kitcha, 2006). Mills and Kitcha also stressed the importance of capacity building and training.

War leaves a lifelong scar on the health of women and children. Several studies led by scholars and physicians have shown that women suffered the most during war and in the postwar period. Rehn and Sirleaf (2002) conducted an independent study of women and families in several countries, including Africa and Afghanistan, during and after conflict. They concluded that women were not only victims of general violence during and after conflict but also had no access to healthcare; they suffered severely in regard to issues specifically having to do with their biology and social status (Rehn & Sirleaf, 2002). Rehn and Sirleaf's study also demonstrated that a large number of Afghan women suffered from malnutrition, particularly in refugee camps, which led to fatality at a young age. Hirschking and Mahmood (2002) reported that 75% of the refugee population in Pakistan consisted of women and children with severe health issues that were never addressed, due to limited access to health care facilities.

In a report on the aftermath of war in Afghanistan, Skaine (2008) elaborated on the extensive efforts made by international donors as well as the Afghan diaspora to send disaster relief, basic healthcare, and resource development to all Afghan citizens inside the country, as well as those in the refugee camps in Pakistan. The psychological postwar impact had taken a toll on the physical and mental well-being of women throughout the country. Afghan women, especially in the rural areas, suffered from chronic depression and other mental illnesses that resulted in self-mutilation and suicide (Skaine, 2008). Akbar (2010) noted an increase in mental health issues and chronic depression among rural women, mainly due to a lack of access to medicine and health care facilities. Akbar added that the women's depression was mainly due not to war but to domestic violence and harsh treatment by the male figures in the household. As an Afghan woman, Akbar examined and discussed the depression experienced by her mother and herself as a result of stress imposed on them because of their gender.

The deterioration in the mental health of Afghan women caused a deep concern for the international donor community. It was evident that the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan did not have the human and technical resources to assist women in rural areas. The agencies did not have a framework to establish a mechanism to extend health care services to women, thus leaving them in a dire condition (Skaine, 2008). Once ignored by and invisible to the international community, Afghan women gained worldwide recognition after decades of severe hardship.

## **Afghan Women and Postconflict Reconstruction**

In November 2001, at the fall of the Taliban, international donors urgently worked together to implement a series of new initiatives to develop concrete institutions to help rebuild Afghanistan. In addition to providing humanitarian assistance, international organizations and international financial institutions administered donor conferences, trust funds, and reconstruction programs, all with one objective in mind: to rebuild a self-reliant Afghanistan.

Headed by the United Nations and 30 key donor leaders, the Bonn Agreement was signed on December 5, 2001. The agreement was endorsed by UN Security Council Resolution 1385 (UN Security Council, 2000). The main objective as agreed by international donors was to ensure interim stability and security for Afghanistan and its people, making the UN a coordinating body between the government and international donors (UN Security Council, 2000).

The Bonn Conference in October 2001 paved the way for development and established a framework for international donors with a heavy emphasis on women's well-being. A delegation of three Afghan women participated in the conference and demanded that immediate attention be given to women's human rights, health, and education. They also demanded an establishment of a ministry of women's affairs and an international human rights commission. During the Bonn Conference, the international community did not pledge any financial assistance, but it firmly committed and expressed determination to support a prosperous and peaceful Afghanistan through security, governance, and development efforts (UN Security Council, 2000). Following the Bonn



Conference, to reinforce their commitment to contribute to women's empowerment, the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan supported the establishment of the MOWA in Afghanistan (MOWA, n.d.). MOWA was established according to the agreements set during the Bonn Conference and became part of the executive branch of the interim administration; MOWA changed its strategy from being only a humanitarian charity organization to participating in policymaking (MOWA, n.d.). MOWA established headquarters in Kabul with departmental branches in 34 provinces in the country. The main objective of MOWA was to ensure women are treated equally in all aspects of life (MOWA, n.d.).

As a follow-up to the Bonn Conference, the Tokyo Conference of 2002 brought together the United States, the European Union, Saudi Arabia, and several other countries to discuss development efforts, which had by then resulted in a cumulative total of \$5.1 billion in assistance from NATO members. To renew commitments for reconstruction funds, the Berlin Conference in 2004 gathered over 65 representatives from different countries and international organizations. At the end of the Berlin Conference, multiyear pledges were made for reconstruction and development in Afghanistan, totaling \$8.2 billion for the 3 years from March 2004 to March 2007 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2015).

The objective of the Bonn Conference was to pave the way for development in Afghanistan, as donors demanded that the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan make all attempts to provide a safe environment for women. However, Coady and Solomon (2009) referred to the Bonn Conference as a missed opportunity to

inaugurate a realistic framework for development and peace in Afghanistan. Their report on the conference showed that in order to best contribute to stable security, good governance, and sustainable development and meet the needs of women, the international donors should have ensured an effective allocation of funds to build the capacity of Afghan women, including women in rural areas (Coady & Solomon, 2009).

The 2005 Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness marked the formal conclusion of the Bonn process (Roberts, 2010). The declaration served as the basis for the next phase of reconstruction, with commitments to rely more on the country's own institutions and to ensure the ongoing support of the Afghanistan National Development Strategy (ANDS) development process. The Afghan government and the international community further committed to improving the effectiveness of the aid being provided to Afghanistan in accordance with the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness (Roberts, 2010).

Recognizing the special needs of Afghanistan and its implications for donor support, by the end of the conference, the donor communities agreed to follow a mutual aid effectiveness framework, which was derived from the UNDP HDR as created based on the development theory of Haq (1999) and Sen (2000). A total of \$10.5 billion in foreign aid assistance was pledged for a period of 5 years through 2010; its main objective was to support the implementation of the ANDS (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2005).

Following these events, the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan signed the Afghanistan Compact in February 2006 (UN Meeting Coverage and Press

Releases, 2006). The compact provided a 5-year timeline (2006–2011) for addressing three main areas of activity, each with identified goals and outcomes: security, governance, and economic and social development. The UN Security Council unanimously endorsed the 5-year Afghanistan Compact (UN Meeting Coverage and Press Releases, 2006).

The Rome Conference was held on July 2, 2007, and had a main objective of strengthening the rule of law and justice sector in Afghanistan (European Commission, 2007). The framework for the rule of law and justice reform was provided by the Afghanistan Compact, based on the vision of “justice for all” within the context of the ANDS. The donors continued their commitment to ensure that a structured path toward rule of law and justice was put in place (European Commission, 2007). Based on the Afghanistan government’s proposed national justice program, a total of €200 million was pledged by the international donors (European Commission, 2007).

### **Afghanistan National Development Strategy**

To ensure that foreign aid was properly allocated to high priority programs, in April 2008 the government developed the ANDS (Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, 2008). It outlined a program of specific goals and benchmarks in 18 sectors, from security to poverty reduction, to be accomplished between 2008 and 2013. One of the key pillars of the ANDS was to ensure that Afghan women were given the proper tools and resources to understand the importance of the projects and ensure their active participation in the areas of security, governance, and social development (Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, 2008). The founders of the ANDS realized that gender equity

was a cross-cutting issue that must be addressed in order to reverse women's historical disadvantages in these and other areas (Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, 2008). The strategy was a road map for various sectors to bring pivotal changes in women's status in society, to advance their socioeconomic conditions, and to provide them with access to development opportunities. This strategy ensured that all ANDS sectors incorporated the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan's commitment to women's development and aligned with the frameworks of the millennium development goals (MDGs), the Afghanistan Compact, ANDS, and international treaties, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Beijing Platform for Action (Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, 2008). The strategy ensured that a capacity-building component was embedded across all sectors.

In early 2008, and with the assistance of the UNDP, MOWA (2008) launched the first NAPWA. The NAPWA was a 10-year plan of action by the government of Afghanistan to implement its commitments to its female constituents. These commitments were provided for under the Afghan Constitution (1963), as well as by international treaties, such as CEDAW. The NAPWA was a high-level benchmark for achieving women's equal integration into the government of Afghanistan under the Afghanistan Compact and the ANDS. The NAPWA was designed to ensure continuity and consistency in government efforts to protect women's citizenship rights in Afghan's society through equality and empowerment (MOWA, 2008). It envisioned a peaceful and progressive Afghanistan where both women and men enjoyed security, equal rights, and

opportunities in all aspects of life. NAPWA followed the ANDS framework and focused on six sectors that were critical in accelerating the improvement of women's status in the country, with a heavy emphasis on capacity building in all sectors (MOWA, 2008). The NAPWA and ANDS frameworks focused heavily on development theory as crafted by Haq (1999) and Sen (2000), the theory that has grounded this study. The six areas of concentration were security; legal protection and human rights; leadership and political participation; economy, work, and poverty; health; and education (MOWA, 2008).

A decade after the First International Tokyo Conference on Afghanistan, the second International Tokyo Conference took place in Tokyo, Japan, in July 2012 (Tokyo Conference on Afghanistan, 2012). Several heads of state participated to reiterate their commitment to Afghanistan beyond 2014 and through 2017. During the Tokyo Conference, the international donors highlighted the critical role of Afghan civil society in building a strong capacity to ensure a sustainable and peaceful country (Tokyo Conference on Afghanistan, 2012).

In her remarks at the conference, then-Secretary of State Clinton (2012) praised President Karzai for the progress he had made and encouraged him to work with Afghan civil society organizations and others to improve women's lives. By the end of 2012, it was evident that a sense of urgency prompted over 34 countries to jointly make a contribution toward meeting the needs of the Afghan population in the areas of security, governance, and social development. The Tokyo Conference resulted in pledges of an additional \$16 billion to build a strong civil society and increase the capacity of Afghan National Security Forces (Tokyo Conference on Afghanistan, 2012).

From the Bonn Agreement of 2001 to the Tokyo Conference of 2012, a coalition of international donors reaffirmed their support and commitment to the people of Afghanistan for a decade beyond 2014. However, none addressed the challenges women would face upon the withdrawal of international armed forces in late 2014 and the drawdown of foreign aid assistance (Mills & Kitcha, 2006).

### **Afghan Women and Postconflict Reconstruction**

In their study of several war-torn countries, including Afghanistan, Rehn and Sirleaf (2002) noted that while Afghan women benefited a great deal from humanitarian assistance, many aspects of their lives were neglected by society and by those providing aid. Afghan women continued to struggle with no access to healthcare facilities, education, or jobs, and they were still victims of domestic violence, rape, honor killings as a result of rape, and underage forced marriages (Rehn & Sirleaf, 2002). The dramatic increase in the poverty rate, combined with these appalling conditions, forced women—even those with a higher education—to engage in street begging (Rehn & Sirleaf, 2002).

Women in Muslim settings faced monumental challenges during the postconflict reconstruction phase. Ismael, Ismael, and Langille (2011) illustrated the impact of war and its destruction on households, neighborhoods, and communities, which broke down the social fabric in Muslim societies. Ismael et al.'s reconstruction efforts in Iraq and Afghanistan revealed a trend of deficiencies by the donor agencies, which existed in both countries. The void left by this deficit was caused by the ignorance of the donor agencies and their inability to determine what exactly constituted women's needs (Ismael et al., 2011). Balchin's (2003) study of women and development in Muslim environments

indicated that religion had been a central, dominating factor and in many cases had hindered self-efficacy. However, Balchin also demonstrated that there were ways to overcome these obstacles by balancing religion and development through strategic solutions and working closely with religious leaders, who could have a profound impact on policy reform.

While the ongoing efforts intended to bring humanitarian relief to Afghans, and in particular women and children, very little focus was given to building a strong capacity for women to ensure sustainability and prevent them from falling into a poverty trap. The International Rescue Committee (IRC; 2014), a well-known INGO working in Afghanistan, noted that the challenges of building a sustainable environment in the postconflict phase could not be solely based on humanitarian assistance. All efforts should be made to restore social cohesion, trust, and confidence between people and their government, and collaborative efforts between men and women that would contribute to a stable and sustainable peace (IRC, 2014).

Finding a balance between building a stable development framework to ensure sustainable livelihoods for women and restoring peace was a difficult task for the international donors. In Afghanistan, household structures are made up of what would be defined in the West as a nuclear family, consisting of a husband, wife, and children. The head of the household is perceived as a dominant male figure, whereas the women are pulled in many directions. Women's roles have shifted to encompass not only household chores and child-bearing and -rearing responsibilities, but also agricultural work (in the western, northern, and central provinces). With all of the pressure imposed upon women,

they have suffered the most, worked the most, eaten the least, and have had minimal access to basic necessities and privileges, such as clothing, making it difficult to meet even their simplest personal needs.

In 2004, in testimony before the Congressional Human Rights Caucus, Isobel Coleman, senior fellow and director of U.S. foreign policy and women's initiatives at the Council on Foreign Relations, described her findings from a study tour through Afghanistan and the progress that had been made 3 years after the invasion (Coleman, 2004). Her findings demonstrated the importance of women's participation at the local level to build a peaceful community. She elaborated on the positive outcomes of the NSP and the formulation of CDCs, which have given women a chance to get involved in community affairs; the ongoing efforts made by major donors, such as USAID and UNDP; and several projects implemented by INGOs promoting women's economic development at the local level (Coleman, 2004). She emphasized that building a strong capacity, particularly in rural areas, would have a significant impact on women's empowerment (Coleman, 2004).

A report by Mills and Kitcha (2006) revealed that staff of Western-led projects did not consult with the women whom they intended to help; the women's needs were often overlooked and left unmet. On the other hand, the NSP, funded by the World Bank and led by the Afghan government, paved the way for international donors to understand the needs of the people at the grassroots and build a strong framework to rebuild the country in the rural areas. Although the programs implemented by Western contractors alone showed very limited results in improving women's empowerment, Mills and Kitcha



found that the NSP had a positive impact in building a strong coalition between both genders at the community level. Wakefield and Bauer (2005) examined the importance of women's involvement at the community level—for example, serving as members of the local *shura* to regain social status. They found that the *shura* was an important institution at the community level. It gave women an opportunity to experience upward mobility and participate in community decision making in a male-dominated environment. The NSP gave women an opportunity to raise their voices and share their opinions at these women's *shuras*, also known as CDCs. However, the measure of success of these CDCs was based on the level of participation in women's *shuras* (Wakefield and Bauer, 2005).

To further examine the importance of women's participation in decision-making roles at the community level, an independent researcher (Echavez, 2012) conducted research in a province near Kabul in 2012 to discover if women at the community level and through the NSP had raised their capacity to be active members of the community. Echavez (2012) used a case study approach, collecting data from multiple sources for triangulation. A series of in-depth interviews and focus group discussions took place at the field level. A total of 55 interviews were conducted with 39 informants. The informants were both male and female CDC members, the women's family members, and prominent community leaders. A total of five focus groups were conducted with a total of 23 participants. In her interviews with members of women's *shuras*, Echavez concluded that rural women have gained self-confidence and improved self-esteem through training and capacity building, which has led them to make sound decisions in bettering their living environment. Echavez concluded that women at the community level showed keen

interest in becoming part of the CDCs' development activities. The overall findings of the research revealed that women's involvement in community development through CDCs has resulted in a paradigm shift in thinking for the male figures in the community.

Vulnerable widows, usually perceived as *zane bi sarparast* ("unfortunate women"), have gained a new social status by participating in the community councils (Echavez, 2012).

To understand the lives of Afghan women at the grassroots, researchers should examine their lives in their natural setting. A field experiment carried out by Beath et al. (2013) included a survey of 500 villages throughout Afghanistan to examine the impact of the NSP in building a sustainable livelihood for Afghans, particularly women in rural areas. Due to cultural constraints imposed on women, Beath et al. were able to assess only 406 out of 500 villages. A baseline survey of female community council development through the program revealed that the NSP had made an impact on the security of women and girls, mainly through ensuring the safety of women participants (Beath et al., 2013). The overall findings of the research indicated that while mainstreaming women at the community level seemed to be extremely challenging, the male populace was open to working with women on community development projects, and women gained self-confidence when they were included in the decision-making process (Beath et al., 2013). Women in rural villages were inspired to make dramatic advancements in their social status, mainly because of their capacity and confidence (Beath et al., 2013). All these studies showed that the U.S. slogan of "winning hearts and minds" must start from the grassroots level.

### **The Current Status of Women in Afghanistan**

Afghan women were striving to excel in the public sector, but their presence in the parliament was not as visible. In early 2013, the MOWA requested that the government of Afghanistan and the international donors facilitate and encourage an increase in the number of women participating in the National Parliament to a minimum of 30% by 2015 (MOWA, n.d.). Athayi (2015) emphasized the importance of women's participation in the National Parliament as well as at the subnational level. For this purpose, MOWA added a new article to the NAPWA to restore the 25% minimum quota for the number of women members of provincial councils, as well as at the district and village levels (MOWA, n.d.). The International Crisis Group (2014) reported that women's participation was up to 27% in the National Assembly during 2012–2013. On December 2015, the United Nations released an index that showed a slight increase in women's participation, to 28% (UN Statistics Division, 2015).

The Asia Foundation (2015) conducted a public opinion survey across 34 Afghanistan provinces, polling 9,586 Afghan citizens from 14 ethnic groups. It reported that despite progress in several areas, women across Afghanistan still faced several challenges. These challenges were mainly evident in the conservative southern, southeastern, and eastern provinces, where women were highly controlled by male family members and religious/community leaders. The overall findings showed that an overwhelming majority (90%) of Afghans, both men and women, agreed that there should be gender equality (Asia Foundation, 2015). According to the survey, the biggest problems facing Afghan women were lack of education/literacy (20%); lack of job

opportunities (11.0%); lack of women's rights (9%); forced marriages/dowry payments (8%); and domestic violence (11.3%). The main challenges facing Afghans, particularly women, were poor security and instability in remote areas (Asia Foundation, 2015).

To measure the success of countries in the areas of poverty, education, and gender equality, the UNDP established the UN MDGs in 2000, solely based on the development theory of Haq (1999) and Sen (2000). The latest MDG report for Afghanistan, published in 2013 (UNDP, 2013), indicated slow progress in some areas to achieve the overall goals. To review the progress of MDGs post-2015, the United Nations held its 70th session of the General Assembly on September 2015 with the participation of over 193 member countries (UN Statistics Division, 2015) and created a new set of 15 development goals with heavy emphasis on sustainability. Again, the goals were linked to the development theory of Haq (1999) and Sen (2000), which was the basis of UNDP HDR.

The first publication of the World Bank (2005) on the country's gender assessment focused on health and education. Eight years later, the second publication reported on the progress of Afghan women across the areas of health, education, economy, and gender equality. *Women's Role in Afghanistan's Future: Taking Stock of Achievements and Continued Challenges* (World Bank, 2014b) presented data collected from various programs, in particular from the MOWA and other relevant government agencies. A series of roundtable discussions and focus groups with numerous NGOs and other advocacy groups took place in Kabul and other provinces. The aim of these meetings was to assess the progress and improvements made to enhance the status of

Afghan women in the relevant areas (World Bank, 2014b). The findings of the report showed that there had been some progress made in the education and governance sectors; however, there was still a large gap when it came to mainstreaming gender equality across all spheres of life, as mandated by the NAPWA, mainly due to lack of capacity (World Bank, 2014b). The report mentioned that women in rural areas were largely confined to agriculture, which did not include them in any decision-making processes; in fact, their labor did not count as employment (World Bank, 2014b). The same report indicated that the gender gap in the economy had widened between urban and rural areas, mainly due to the restrictions imposed on women (World Bank, 2014b).

Hogg et al. (2013) predicted that with the drawdown of donors beyond 2014, Afghanistan would face increasingly difficult budgetary constraints over the coming years. The overall reduction in financial aid and assistance would have a profound impact on women's livelihoods and would be a detriment to the overall economic landscape of the country, according to Hogg et al. (2013). The World Bank (2014a) snapshot of Afghanistan reported a swift shift of women's roles from child bearer to head of household. The report emphasized the challenges faced by over 700,000 widows (making up 2.5%–3.3% of the entire population) to support their family members on a daily basis. It might have been easier in urban areas for widows to make a living, but rural women struggled to earn a decent livelihood, mainly due to their tradition-induced lack of mobility due to gender (World Bank, 2014a).

The Japanese Aid Agency, JICA carried out a study to develop Afghanistan's gender profile in 2013. The study assessed Afghan women's status in health, education,

economy, employment, and policy within several provinces and a few selected rural areas. The findings of the final report from across all sectors showed that women in rural areas were experiencing dire conditions due to a lack of mobility, lack of knowledge of basic human rights, lack of access to financial credit, and restricted access to the outside world (JICA, 2013). The report was not able to measure or monitor ongoing progress in these areas due to a lack of reliable information (JICA, 2013).

This research study was built on the development theory of Haq (1999) and Sen (2000). Both were the architects of the UNHCR and UNHDI, which measured human development in underdeveloped countries. Their development theory emphasized that building the capacity of the poor through teaching new skills leads to financial freedom and prevents poverty. In a study conducted in rural areas of Afghanistan, Mills and Kitcha (2006) argued that building the capacity of people in rural areas was crucial to economic growth. One of the major pillars of ANDS was capacity building for women. A few scholars, such as Echavez (2012), believed that foreign aid had a tremendous impact on building the capacity of rural women in provinces closer to Kabul and not in the rural areas. However, several donor agencies, including UNDP, mentioned that rural women were left out in acquiring basic education, due to the remote location of their province (UNDP, 2014b).

In 2013, the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR), a coordinating body responsible for ensuring the proper allocation of U.S. government foreign aid in Afghanistan, conducted a thorough assessment of U.S. foreign aid assistance to Afghanistan. The assessment was to determine whether funds allocated by

U.S. agencies (USAID, U.S. DOS, Department of Defense [DOD]) had made a profound impact in improving the lives of Afghan women and girls from 2001 through 2013, particularly in the rural areas (SIGAR, 2014a). The audit revealed that while the U.S. government agencies reported spending at least \$64.8 million on 652 projects, programs, and initiatives to support Afghan women from 2011 through 2013, it was unclear whether the funding resulted in any improvement to the lives of the women in rural areas (SIGAR, 2014a). The report concluded that the U.S. DOS and USAID had spent additional aid funds of \$850.5 million on 17 projects but could not verify that Afghan women directly benefited from these projects. All the agencies indicated that the support to empower Afghan women would continue beyond the withdrawal of international forces in late 2014 (SIGAR, 2014a).

As the security deterioration remained an ongoing challenge for Afghans and a threatening issue for Afghan women, in particular in rural areas, the newly elected President Ashraf Ghani was determined to ensure full integration of women in peace negotiations (Rasmussen, 2014). Mohammad Ashraf Ghani, formerly the finance minister of Afghanistan, a Western scholar and the chancellor of Kabul University, was widely known and recognized as a peacemaker within the international donor community. During his inaugural speech, President Ashraf Ghani praised the work of his wife Rula in empowering Afghan women and how she had made a significant difference in the lives of 750,000 internally displaced people (Rasmussen, 2014).

To implement his vision, President Ashraf Ghani launched the National Action Plan on implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women and Peace

and Security on July 2015 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2015). The UN Security Council adopted Resolution 1325 on women and peace and security on October 31, 2000 (UN Security Council, 2000), to reaffirm the important role women have played in the prevention and resolution of conflicts, peace negotiations, and peace building (UN Office of the Special Advisor on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women, n.d.). With this objective in mind, President Ashraf Ghani called for all ministries to work together and ensure that women would play a vital role in bringing sustainability, stability, and peace back to Afghanistan; he stressed the importance of women's participation in building a peaceful Afghanistan (Office of the President, 2015).

First Lady of Afghanistan Rula Ghani has made a social impact on the notion of women's empowerment in Afghanistan. In February 2015, the U.S.-Afghan Women's Council (USAWC) at Georgetown University named Afghanistan's First Lady as their honorary co-chair, alongside former First Ladies Bush and Clinton (Georgetown University, 2015). In May 2015, Mrs. Ghani made a public announcement that she would do what she could to stop the barbaric actions against women in Afghanistan and made a firm commitment to improve literacy rates by promoting education at all levels (O'Donnell, 2015). On January 20, 2016, the First Lady of Afghanistan announced the opening of an all-women university in Kabul (Kruzman, 2016).

### **Summary and Conclusion**

This chapter reviewed the literature and reliable research studies to illustrate the status of Afghan women from 1880 onward. Nemat (2011) explained that Afghan women prospered in all aspects of life due to the efforts made by King Khan (1880–1901) and his



wife. From Zahir Shah Era through Daoud Khan, Afghan women enjoyed their freedom and were treated equally in all spheres of life. Giorgi (2009) and Nemat both agreed that Afghan women were fully integrated in all government agencies and actively engaged in the public sector. Iacopino and Rasekh (1998) mentioned that women held high-ranking positions during the Daoud Khan era. Four decades of freedom came to a halt under the rule of the Taliban in 1996, when women suffered the most under the horrifying acts of the regime. The international intervention in early December 2001 caused instability with massive food shortages and no access to health (Rostami-Povey, 2007; Sakeena, 2008). As the country has moved beyond the support of the international armed forces, the donor communities have restructured their funding mechanisms to allocate funds through the most effective and transparent channels, to ensure a smooth transition to national self-determination through to 2024.

There is a significant gap in the literature reviewed which suggests that no research has been conducted to demonstrate the progress of Afghan women in rural areas. What has been proven is that the international donor community has generously contributed to human development in Afghanistan; however, what is not known is if this foreign aid has followed the development theory of Haq (1999) and Sen (2000) and built a strong female workforce in the rural areas. Chapter 3 outlines the research design and rationale, methodology, instrumentation, data collection, and analysis of this study, as well as the role of the researcher.

### Chapter 3: Research Method

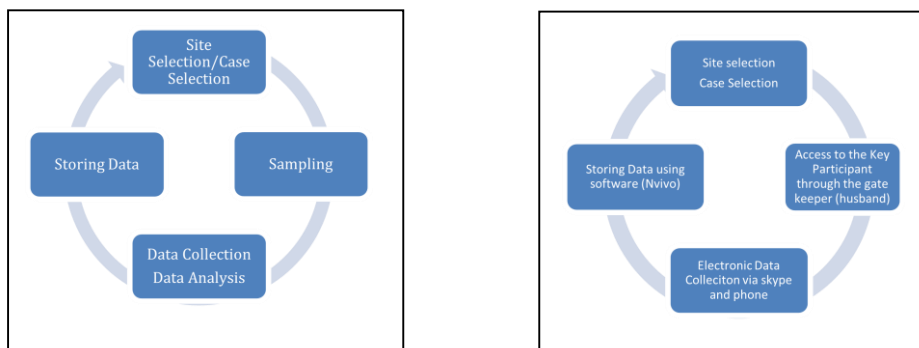
The purpose of this study was to discover whether an Afghan woman in a rural province, through receipt of foreign aid, built a strong capacity to secure a sustainable livelihood and made a social impact on the lives of other women. This research study used a single case study based on Yin's (2005, 2009) approach. To gain a better understanding of the social impact that the key participant made on others and to enhance the study and findings, I used a layered case study method and interviewed five other participants identified by the key participant. This method is suggested by Yin (2009) as a replication that may be claimed "if two or more cases are shown to support the same theory" (p. 38). The following sections include the research design and rationale, role of the researcher, methodology, participant selection logic, instrumentation, procedure for recruitment, participation and data collection, data analysis plan, issues of trustworthiness, and ethical procedure.

#### **Research Design and Rationale**

The design stage of a research study focuses on defining the study type, data collection method, data analysis and unit of analysis. Overall, it is a framework that is created to answer the research question. Yin (2009) emphasized the importance of the design stage, which focuses on defining the unit of analysis and the likely cases to be studied, developing theory/propositions and identifying issues underlying the anticipated study, identifying the case study design (single, multiple, holistic, embedded), and developing procedures to maintain case study quality. This research study employed a single case study, following Yin's (2005) framework. The central concept of this research

study was to understand whether a rural Afghan woman built a strong capacity to earn a sustainable income, which ultimately led to becoming an active member of the community and society (Sen, 2000). To ensure successful data collection, Yin (2009) suggested that the researcher must design a process that is fully adaptable to local protocols. Yin (2009) also concentrated on gaining access to key participant through a gatekeeper, which required building strong, trustworthy relationships with the male gatekeepers—in this case study, the key participant’s husband. Considering the foreseeable limitations and challenges that might be imposed by security threats and restrictions on women’s movements, I designed a data collection method that was undertaken in compliance with the current situation in Afghanistan; the cycle is illustrated in Figure 2. I chose a single case study due to the ties and trust I had already built with the key participant and her husband, which attests to the trustworthiness of the key participant. In this case study, I did not face any limitations or challenges, as I had already built a positive dialogue with the key participant and her husband when I was stationed in the province in 2009–2010.

Although I reviewed a large amount of literature written by scholars and researchers, the reports produced by the donor agencies that were aligned with the purpose and the nature of the study were not open to the public. This made a case study more desirable for this research study.



*Figure 2.* The research cycle: (a) case study research process cycle as described by Yin (2009) and (b) specific data collection model.

### **Role of the Researcher**

The researcher plays a key role in the research study; he/she is the instrument in bringing all the pieces together and making sense of it all. Yin (2009) outlined several desired skills for a researcher: (a) being a good listener and not being trapped in one's own preconceptions; (b) being adaptive and flexible; (c) having a good grasp of the issues under study; and (d) being unbiased. To follow Yin's (2009) approach to being adaptable and flexible, I designed a data collection method, as shown in Figure 2, which includes access through a gatekeeper and compatibility with Afghan cultural protocols. Yin (2010) noted that "although research does not demand that you take an oath," a researcher's demeanor, actions, trustworthiness, and lack of bias carries special importance in qualitative research (p. 41).

I am a U.S. citizen with over 30 years of professional experience in the private sector and 14 years of experience in international development, working in Armenia, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. I worked and lived in Afghanistan sporadically for 7 years. As a senior field program officer for USAID/Afghanistan, I worked in Nangarhar and Ghor provinces, serving with the U.S. and NATO armed forces as a development adviser.

In 2011, I was hired by UNDP to work with MOWA as an international consultant focusing on the Gender Equality Project as well as working with the MRRD. During this assignment, I traveled to designated provinces of the project and conducted research to determine the impact of UNDP funding in building a secure income for rural women in the northern, western, and central provinces. In 2012, I was hired by a USAID contractor as the director of the Gender and Capacity Building Unit to work on a multimillion-dollar stability program, supervising a large pool of Afghan nationals in Kabul and three highly kinetic provinces in the east and southeast of the country. I am a native speaker of Farsi and am fluent in Dari, with a good understanding of Pashtun, all of which are the national languages of Afghanistan; hence, language posed no constraints or limitations to conversing with the local nationals.

I hold an MBA from the University of La Verne and currently teach business courses at the American University of Armenia.

### **Methodology**

The methodology of this research study involved the collection of qualitative data from the purposefully selected key participant ( $n = 1$ ) in a rural province of the western region of Afghanistan. To strengthen the purpose of the study, the key participant

identified her husband ( $n = 1$ ) and four female participants ( $n = 4$ ). This approach is known as a layered or nested model, meaning that within a single study focusing on one individual, several participants contribute to the purpose of the study (Yin, 2009). Structured and semistructured interview protocols and questionnaires were used to conduct individual interviews with all participants. Because of the small number of participants ( $n = 6$ ), NVivo software was not used for analyses but for organizing and storing documents and data. A step-by-step data collection process is demonstrated in Chapter 3. The collected data were analyzed based on Yin's (2005) process, and the process is described in Chapter 4.

### **Participant Selection Logic: The Population**

In a qualitative research, the samples are likely to be chosen in a deliberate manner also known as purposeful sampling (Yin 2010). The goal of selecting this sampling method is to choose those who will yield the most relevant and plentiful data, given the purpose of the study. The key participant of this research study was selected based on purposeful sampling as proposed by Yin (2010) and the criteria I set (see Appendix D). The key participant was an Afghan woman who changed her social status from being a wife and a community-based teacher to being an active member of her community and acting as a development adviser to the mayor of her town and the governor of her province.

The key participant had a sterling record in implementing multidonor, agency-funded income-generation and skill development projects for vulnerable women in the grassroots. During the initial interview, she identified her husband as the main source of

support ( $n = 1$ ), two active female beneficiaries ( $n = 2$ ), and two nonactive female beneficiaries ( $n = 2$ ). In this research study, the key participant was one Afghan woman whose life had been affected by learning new skills supported by multiple forms of foreign aid assistance; in turn, she had built a female workforce through the implementation of a baking project in a conservative rural province. Her efforts resulted in a positive social impact on 20 other women, many of whom were earning a stable income.

My intent was to ensure the safety of the participants. Hence, no public announcements were made to recruit women in the province; the key participant identified the other participants ( $n = 5$ ).

### **Instrumentation**

The instruments used to collect data for this research study were distance interviews with a total of six participants. According to Yin (2005), the ideal approach to data collection for a case study is to be present at the field level; however, due to the deterioration of security in the country, I collected all data via phone and Skype. After securing permission for audio recording, the interviews were recorded and stored in an external hard drive and NVivo software.

### **Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection**

The key participant of this study was one Afghan woman in a rural province of the western region of Afghanistan. To protect the identity of the participants, no public announcement was made. The key participant is referred to as SY throughout this study. She identified the following participants: husband (SN), active female beneficiary (SK),

active female beneficiary (HA), nonactive female beneficiary (MA), and nonactive female beneficiary (MAH), a total of six participants ( $n = 6$ ).

After the initial interview to explain about the research study and receive consent, the key participant and her husband received a written questionnaire in English. For other participants ( $n = 4$ ), the questions were discussed verbally in Dari. Each participant was given ample opportunity to express his/her thoughts about the effect made by the key participant; their views are captured and presented in this research study.

Each participant was interviewed privately via Skype and phone at his/her home. At the beginning of the interview, I sought permission to use an audio recorder. Upon receipt of approval from each participant, the interview was recorded on an audio recorder and stored in a computer and external drive. There was no change or variation in the data collection from the proposed plan as presented in Chapter 3. With the exception of occasional poor telephone lines, I did not encounter any issues with data collection. An interview matrix (Table Q1) outlining the location, frequency, and duration of each data collection is presented in Appendix Q.

To ensure compliance with the Afghan protocols, I designed culturally sensitive interview questions for each participant. At the end of each interview, the content was summarized and sent to the participants for review to ensure all information was recorded properly. For illiterate female participants ( $n = 4$ ), I read the summary over the phone and received their consent.



## **Data Analysis Plan**

The most crucial component of a research study is data collection and analysis. Yin (2012) stated that data analysis must be (a) organized and prepared, (b) reviewed to determine the overall meaning of the data, (c) organized by word patterns, (d) used to generate themes and descriptions, (e) integrated into a narrative, and (f) interpreted. The data analysis process began after the collection of data. Audio recording was used to capture data from each interview. At the completion of each interview, data were transcribed into a Word document. I recorded data from a total of seven interviews. The process of transcribing allowed me to become better acquainted with the data. Upon analyzing interview transcripts, I hand-coded common words and then identified themes and subthemes to describe the segments of the data.

Although Yin (2004, 2009) supported the use of data analysis software, due to the small unit of analysis, I hand-coded the data and developed a code book for each participant. NVivo software was used to organize all data and information including audio recordings, documents, photos, interviews, and journal entries. All the files were password protected and backed up in an external hard drive and on Dropbox.

It is important to have a structured phase for storing and organizing data. Yin (2006) suggested developing some principles for data storage and handling throughout the data collection phase. In this study, I organized and stored the data in NVivo software, as well as in my personal password-protected laptop, as well as uploading the documents to an external hard drive and Dropbox.

## **Issues of Trustworthiness**

### **Credibility**

Qualitative research requires a researcher to take an active role in the collection and interpretation of data. To be free of any bias and ensure credibility, a qualitative researcher must be trustworthy. According to Yin (2009), three strategies for improving construct validity include using multiple sources of evidence, having key and other participants review the case study report for validation, and maintaining a chain of evidence. Yin (2009) emphasized that all steps should be taken to ensure credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability of a qualitative research study.

### **Transferability**

Transferability is the process of transferring the findings to the masses. Merriam (2002) expressed concern about transferability of a finding from a small unit of analysis to a larger unit of analysis. In this research study, the transferability was limited to the public sector, amid formulation of a national action plan of capacity building for rural women in Afghanistan. I intend to publish a pamphlet of the findings of this research study and include it as a part of the community training to encourage women to venture behind their boundaries.

### **Dependability**

The dependability is to avoid redundancy of future research that may be conducted within the same purpose, context, and participation. It was my intent to provide detailed information about the research and methodology and give the reader and future researcher a clear understanding of all to avoid duplication. As part of the

dependability process, an audit trail was established to prevent redundancy. For this purpose, I kept data and documents, meeting notes, interview questions, audio recordings, collected data, findings, code book, and other relevant documents in an external hard drive and NVivo software.

### **Confirmability**

This is the process of confirming that all findings are the result of an unbiased, transparent data collection. I addressed this issue by triangulation of information to reduce bias, as suggested by Yin (2009). In this research study, I confirmed all the information gathered with the participants to ensure their voices were heard and properly recorded.

### **Ethical Procedures**

The dissertation proposal was reviewed and approved by the Walden Institutional Review Board (IRB) and the dissertation committee. The written approval from the IRB is presented in Appendix U. Once all approvals from the IRB and the committee were secured, I proceeded with distance data collection via phone and Skype.

The province of the research study was a rural, male-driven province. To protect the identity of female participants, no public announcement was made to recruit participants. The other participants ( $n = 5$ ) were identified by the key participant.

During the initial interview with the key participant and other participants ( $n = 6$ ), I made it clear that participation was voluntary, and the participants were free to withdraw from the study at their discretion. A copy of the consent form in English was e-mailed to the key participant and her husband, and the consent was received in 72 hours.

Due to the illiteracy factor, I read the consent form in Dari to the other participants, ensured they all understood the process, and received their oral endorsement. In addition, I also followed research ethics guidelines as set by the American Psychological Association (2010; Smith, 2003), which mandates that the researcher must ensure each participant is fully aware and understands the nature of the research, answer any questions, and give participants the freedom to withdraw at any time.

Documents, as described by Yin (2009), are letters, memoranda, e-mail correspondence, diaries, calendars, and other personal documents of any sort that have traditional or historical value, such as family photos, birth certificates, or any sentimental objects that can inform and enrich families. To protect the identity of the participants, the only documents gathered for this study were meeting notes and photos of the baking project. These collected documents were kept in an external hard drive and uploaded to Dropbox, an external record-keeping storage facility. Yin (2009) mentioned that software was most effective in recording, sorting, and coding data; for this purpose, I used Google Docs for creating questionnaires and NVivo for data organization and storage. NVivo was not used for data analysis, due to the small number of units of analysis. All data were collected via Skype and phone, kept electronically on two laptops, and uploaded to a secure website.

### **Summary**

This chapter provided a summary of research setting, demographics, data collection, recommended data collection techniques in Afghanistan, data analysis, main and submain themes, evidence of trustworthiness, study results, background of

participants, and summary. This research study used a layered case study to enhance the single case study methodology based on Yin (2009). The rationale for case selection was based on Yin (2009), who emphasized that case selection should be based on the study's purpose, research question, and internal and external factors, mainly relating to accessibility to the key participant and other resources. Yin (2003a) also added that "the distinctive need for case studies arises out of the desire to understand complex social phenomena" because "the case study method allows investigators to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events," such as organizational and managerial processes (p. 2). In fact, case studies seem to be the preferred strategy when "how" or "why" questions are being posed, when the investigator has little control over events, and when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context (Yin, 2003a). In this study, a purposeful sampling based on Yin (2005, 2009) was used to identify the key participant.

Proposed electronic data collection techniques were used based on the process I designed. I also followed Yin's (2009) approach to be flexible and adaptable to ensure a successful data collection (see Figure 2). Telephone and Skype interviews took place during the electronic data collection phase. During the data analysis phase, I followed Yin's (2016) five phases of compiling (gathering and storing data in a secured area), disassembling (review collected data to identify matching patterns), reassembling (identifying patterns and themes and creation of code book), interpretation (interpreting the assembled data), and conclusion (based on the identified themes, open coding was used and a code book was created for each participant). Throughout the research process,

the ethical research considerations were in full compliance with the codes of ethics set by the American Psychological Association (2010) and Walden University. Chapter 4 provides the research setting, demographics, data collection, recommended data collection technique in Afghanistan, data analysis, main and submain themes, evidence of trustworthiness, study results, background of participants, and summary.

## Chapter 4: Results

This chapter provides a summary of the research setting, demographics, data collection, recommended data collection technique in Afghanistan, data analysis, main and submain themes, evidence of trustworthiness, study results, background of participants, and summary. The purpose of this study was to determine whether an Afghan woman in a rural province, through receipt of foreign aid assistance, built a strong capacity to secure a sustainable livelihood and made a social impact on the lives of 20 other women in a remote province. The key participant was selected based on her unique background and the contribution she had made in a male-driven, remote province by building a strong workforce of 20 other women. A purposeful sampling method was used for this study, based on Yin (2009) and in conjunction with criteria I set. Although this was a single case study, the key participant identified her husband and four other female beneficiaries, whose lives were affected by her efforts, thereby producing a layered case study as suggested by Yin (2009).

The central research question, “What factors determined the willingness of an Afghan woman to advance in the society?” was asked of all female participants ( $n = 5$ ); more subquestions were derived from the answers received from each participant. A customized questionnaire was produced for each participant based on level of involvement in the study. Data collection was generated in two sources of in-depth literature review and distance data collection, via phone and Skype.

Data analysis followed Yin’s (2016) five steps of compiling (compiling and organizing data in a secured area), disassembling (reviewing collected data to identify

common patterns), reassembling (reassembling data to find to identify themes and creation of code book), interpretation (interpreting findings), and conclusion (finalizing the findings). Open coding was used, and a code book was developed for each participant. The emerging themes, subthemes, and findings were aligned with the literature review from Chapter 2 and linked to the research question. The themes and subthemes are shared in this chapter. The results of data analysis are presented in four major themes: social status (Amnesty International, 1996, 1999; Asia Foundation, 2015; Beath et al., 2013; Echavez, 2012; Innocent, 2011; MOWA, 2008; Qazi, 2011; Rehn & Sirleaf, 2002; Schulz & Schulz, 1999; Skaine, 2002; Wakefield & Bauer, 2005), challenges (Asia Foundation, 2015; IRC, 2014; Ismael et al., 2011; World Bank, 2014a, 2014b), capacity development (Eade & Williams, 1995; Echavez, 2012; Haq 1999; Mills & Kitch, 2006; Sen, 2000), and importance of foreign aid in building a strong capacity (Beath et al., 2013; Hogg et al., 2013; Mills & Kitcha, 2006; SIGAR, 2014a; UNDP, 2014b). Each major theme resulted in subthemes, which are shown in a diagram in Appendix R (Figure R1).

### **Research Setting**

Data collection for each participant took place at her/his home without the interference and influence of a third party. I am a native Farsi speaker, which is the national language of the province under study; hence, there was no need for research assistance or an interpreter. Each participant was given ample time to examine the questions, and there was no pressure from me or any other third party to participate in this research study. Although I had worked in the province during 2009–2010, I neither



had any personal knowledge of the female participants ( $n = 4$ ) nor any interaction with the key participant and her husband since departing from the province in mid-2010.

### **Demographics**

This research study used a single case study based on Yin (2005). Yin (2005) defined a case study as an empirical inquiry that investigates a phenomenon within its real-life setting. For this research study, I used purposeful sampling as suggested by Yin (2009). The key participant was chosen due to her contribution in making a positive social change for herself and 20 women in a rural province in western Afghanistan. The key participant identified her husband as the main source of support ( $n = 1$ ), two female active beneficiaries ( $n = 2$ ), and two female nonactive beneficiaries ( $n = 2$ ). I intended to interview six other participants, but they all declined to participate in this research study.

### **Data Collection**

Yin (2005, 2009) defined data collection as a core component of qualitative research that involves several stages. Yin (2005, 2009) stressed the importance of thorough research conducted through data collection; researchers should always ensure that they have multiple evidence sources and resources to validate the study. While there is a structured technique in place, the phases of a data collection as explained by Yin (2005, 2009) may be altered and customized to suit the local tradition and protocols of the research setting.

In this research study, an Afghan woman in a rural province was identified as the key participant ( $n = 1$ ). To strengthen the research study and reinforce trustworthiness,

she identified her husband as the main source of support ( $n = 1$ ); she then identified two female active beneficiaries ( $n = 2$ ) and two female nonactive beneficiaries ( $n = 2$ ).

### **Recommended Data Collection Technique in Afghanistan**

This research study used Yin's (2005) case study framework to collect data, which comprises of many phases, but the most important component is data collection at the field level. The optimal situation was for data collection to take place at the field level in the country; however, due to security constraints, I altered the methodology to conduct data collection from a distance via phone and Skype. To ensure that this methodology fit the local protocol, I altered the process in the following phases.

**Phase 1: Document review.** Per Yin (2005), documents may be in the form of letters, memoranda, agendas, announcements, meeting notes, reports, studies, administrative documents, proposals, progress reports, internal records, evaluation reports, articles, newspaper clippings, and any other relevant communiqués. To protect the identity of the key participant and her husband, all e-mail exchanges were stored in an external hard drive, as well as securely kept in Dropbox. All other administrative documents were not accessible to me.

**Phase 2: Building a dialogue.** Yin (2009) noted the best entry into the field was through building a dialogue with the gatekeepers, in this case the key participant's husband. I had worked in the province for 2 years and had built a relationship with the key participant and her family.

**Phase 3: Collecting evidence.** Yin (2005, 2009) emphasized the importance of following six sources in collecting evidence, which includes documents, archival records,

direct observation, participant observation, and physical artifacts. The optimal approach to collect evidence and data was to follow all of the steps in the natural setting; however, due to security threats and travel restrictions issued by the U.S. DOS, I was not able to travel to the country for data collection. Per Yin (2005, 2009), archival records are defined as any form of computer files and records that may be relevant to the case. These documents may include service records, organizational records, organizational charts, budgets, maps and charts of geographical characteristics, lists of names of relevant items, survey data, census, personal records, diaries, calendars, and telephone listings. In the case of Afghanistan, it was difficult to collect such data, as the focused project was a donor-based project whose financial reports were kept confidential.

### **Interviews**

Per Yin (2009), the most important sources of case study information is the interview. The purpose of conducting interviews is to find out what is on the participant's mind; the interview allows for triangulation of information, thus contributing to the credibility of study findings. The following section outlines a detailed interview format. Yin (2009) emphasized that "interviewing" could rely on a fixed questionnaire with explicit interview protocols (p. 139)

**Direct observations.** Due to security deterioration in Afghanistan, I was not able to conduct a direct observation at the field level in the country.

**Participant observation.** Due to security issues in Afghanistan, I was not able to observe participants at the field level.

**Physical artifacts.** There were no physical artifacts for this research study, except photos of the project, which are presented in Appendix S.

**Questionnaire.** A questionnaire for the participants was developed based on their level of involvement. For example, the questionnaire for the key participant was much more comprehensive than that of the others. To ensure compliance with Afghan culture, I took all measures to ensure that the questionnaire met the Afghan protocols.

Subquestions were derived based on the answers received from the respondent. Interview questions for all participants ( $n = 6$ ) are presented in Appendices E–J.

**Interview phase.** Yin (2009) described the interview phase of a qualitative research study as the most crucial in order to obtain the other person's thoughts and input. Yin described interviews in many phases, one of which is a "focused interview" when a participant is interviewed for a short period of time and in a semi structured setting which allows for a much freer exchange of conversation between both parties during an interview. For this study, it was most desirable to have a face-to-face interview with the key participant and other participants; however, due to security deterioration, I conducted the interview from a distance via phone and Skype. The interview process was conducted in the following phases.

***Phase I: Key participant initial introductory interview.*** The initial introductory interview with the key participant took place at her home via Skype call. The duration was 1 hour and 45 minutes. During the interview, I discussed the following items:

1. The consent form was thoroughly explained.

2. The nature of the study, purpose, benefits, and proposed outcomes were explained.
3. Permission to record the interview was secured.

Upon completion of the interview, the key participant was given 72 hours to confirm her willingness to participate in the research study. It was mentioned several times that the key participant could withdraw at will at any time.

As part of the validation strategy, I forwarded the meeting notes to the key participant for member checking to review and confirm that all information had been captured properly. Upon receipt of the consent form, a questionnaire was forwarded via e-mail to the key participant for her review and response. The key participant was given 10 days to answer the questions.

***Phase II: Second interview with key participant.*** A second interview took place with the key participant at her home. The purpose of the second interview was to ensure that all of answers were properly recorded. More subquestions were derived from the answers given by the key participant. The second interview was interrupted by poor reception via Skype and then continued through phone interview; it lasted about 2 hours. As part of the validation strategy, I summarized answers and forwarded a summary to the key participant for member checking to review and confirm, in order to ensure all information and data were captured in its entirety.

***Phase III: Third interview with key participant.*** A third interview took place with the key participant to discuss the last portion of the questionnaire, which related to social impact and foreign aid. More subquestions were derived from the answers given by

the key participant. The interview duration was 1 hour and 45 minutes. As a part of the validation strategy, I summarized the answers and forwarded a summary to the key participant for member checking to review and confirm to ensure all information and data were captured in its entirety

***Phase IV: Distance interview with other participants.*** The key participant identified her husband ( $n = 1$ ), two female beneficiaries currently active in a baking project ( $n = 2$ ), and two nonactive female beneficiaries ( $n = 2$ ). The same data collection process took place for each of these participants ( $n = 5$ ).

With the exception of occasional poor tele communication, no unusual circumstances were encountered in data collection. There have been no variations in data collection as presented in proposal and illustrated in Figure 2b.

### **Data Analysis**

Yin (2009) identified data analysis as a crucial component of the research study. Yin emphasized that the preferred strategy for data analysis is to follow the theoretical propositions that led to the case study. The original objectives and design of the case study presumably were based on such propositions, which reflected a set of research questions, reviews of the literature, and new hypotheses or propositions.

Yin (2016) suggested that data analysis process take place in five phases: compiling, disassembling, reassembling, interpretation, and conclusion. The first phase is to compile and organize collected data in a secured area. In this case study, I compiled interview audio recordings and transcribed the recordings into a Word processing and

stored it in NVIVO as well as a password-secured external drive, and further uploaded to a drop box.

The second phase is disassembling the data in the data base. The purpose of this phase is to search common patterns. To ensure that proper patterns are identified, I reviewed notes and audio records to ensure that all data were captured at its entirety. At this phase, the open coding was used (Yin, 2016).

The third phase is reassembling, which is the process of identifying patterns and themes. In this research study, I created a code book that included themes and codes for each participant. The main themes identified for this research study are social status change, challenges, capacity development, and foreign aid. Each major theme is divided into subthemes, which are shown in Figure R1 in Appendix R.

The fourth phase was interpreting the reassembled data. In this case study, I added a row in code book that outlined the findings for each participant. Due to small number of unit of analysis, I used hand coding to ensure that all codes were identified properly.

The fifth phase was the conclusion, which was the final interpretation of the findings (Yin, 2009). In this phase, I added findings based on patterns identified in phase two. Yin (2009) identified five analytical techniques of (a) pattern matching, (b) explanation building, (d) iterative nature of explanation building, (e) time series analyses, and (f) logic model. For this study, the logic method was used to analyze the data.

Yin (2009, 2016) described the importance of the investigator's own expertise in conducting a quality research study. The main themes were derived from my own experience were linked to the research question. The subthemes were derived based on

data collected from interviews. The main themes and subthemes for this case study are as follows.

### **Main Theme: Social Status Change**

Social status refers to the honor or prestige attached to a person's position in society. In the case of Afghan women, they have gone through several changes in social status since 1880, with the most drastic social change being the collapse of the Taliban (1994–2001). The key participant (SY) in this study was born and raised in Iran; she is an educated woman with a law degree. She moved to a rural province after her marriage and as she was not able to practice law due to cultural constraints, she became a literacy teacher, teaching Dari to vulnerable women in the community level. Over the years and with the support and persistence, she acquired new skills in administration, project planning, and management, which resulted in securing a stable employment with an international NGO. Mrs. SY confirmed that her current social status included being respected and trusted by the community leaders as she is now occupying an advisory position in the local government. She confirmed that this was all due to her willingness to learn new skills and due to the support of her husband. Once she understood her potential, she became an active advocate to empower women in her province through implementing community-based educational projects, skill development, and income-generation projects, one of which is outlined in this case study.

When I asked Mrs. SY if other female participants ( $n=4$ ) had changed their social status willingly or due to external forces, such as poverty and economic reasons, she answered, "These women were vulnerable and not aware of their potential to earn a



stable income. Through the baking project, they learned new skills which led to a sustainable livelihood.” She added, “The support of the male populace had a profound impact in their progress; the male populace were more receptive for women to work outside of their premises.” Mrs. SY’s comments correlated to the Asia Foundation (2015) survey of Afghan people, which revealed that the percentage of Afghans who support women working outside the home has been steady in many provinces. In the Hazarajat region, when asked whether women should have freedom of movement, over 78.9% of men agreed with women working outside of their home; however, the percentage declined to 54.9% in the eastern and 47.5% in the southwestern provinces, mainly due to restricted movement.

During the interview with Mrs. SY, it was important to understand her motivating factor to move ahead; hence, the following subthemes were derived from further data collection.

**Subtheme: Motivating factors.** During the interview sessions with SY, she mentioned that her main motivating factor to get ahead in society was to be a role model for her children and give her children a better life through advanced education. She also wanted to demonstrate to her daughter that an Afghan woman can and must move behind the social norm. Mrs. SY added that “Afghan women are ready to challenge the status quo and build a sustainable livelihood through learning new skills”; the women’s enthusiasm was her motivating factor to implement the baking project. When I asked the other participants ( $n=4$ ) what was their motivating factor to move beyond their norm, they all answered “learning new skills to earn a stable living.”

Participant MA mentioned that her motivating factor was to help the family finances. While all participants concurred that changing their social status required self-motivation and self-drive, the changes that occurred in their lives were due to the efforts made by the key participant, SY. All participants agreed that SY had a major impact on their learning new skills.

**Subtheme: Support system.** In Afghan culture, family support is important for an Afghan woman to move forward. Mrs. SY mentioned that “if a woman does not have the support of her family and husband, she is not able to face the challenges imposed by the community members and religious leaders.” She stressed the importance of having the full support of her husband in gaining new knowledge and learning new skills. However, she specifically emphasized that the “support of a husband and family helps to gain the respect and trust of the community leaders and changes their perception.” Mr. SN mentioned that

in rural areas, the community elders play a vital role in decision making regarding women’s progress, and if they are not convinced of the value of a woman, they will do all that they can to sabotage the reputation of that woman.

However, he added that “Mrs. SY played a key role in changing the perception of the community elders.” Mrs. SY demonstrated that the baking project added value to the community.

Participant MA had stopped pursuing the project due to pressure from her husband and mother-in-law. Although her own mother persisted and motivated her to learn new skills, her mother-in-law restrained her from advancement. Mrs. MA

mentioned that the key participant made several attempts to bring her back to the project, with no success. The subtheme that emerged from this question also led to the identification of a nonsupportive system.

The Asia Foundation (2015) survey of Afghan people revealed that the percentage of Afghans who support women working outside the home has been gradually but steadily declining, from 70.9% in 2006 to 64.0% in 2015. Women (72.9%) were much more likely than men (53.8%) to agree that women should be allowed to work outside the home (Asia Foundation, 2015). Stated support for women working outside the home was highest in the central Hazarajat (78.9%) and Kabul (74.7%) regions and lowest in the southwestern (47.5%) and eastern (54.9%) regions (Asia Foundation, 2015, p. 140).

### **Main Theme: Challenges**

Although there are challenges facing Afghan women, this research study found that in addition to poor security, women in rural areas of the country faced ongoing challenges related to cultural protocols imposed on them by the male populace in their family and community. In this research study, all female participants unanimously agreed that security poses a major threat to their progress. Mrs. SY emphasized the importance of knowledge and information about national action plans, such as the National Action Plan (NAP) which was developed and approved by the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (GIROA). The plan mandates and promotes women's participation in peace-building and decision-making roles. With the exception of the key participant ( $n = 1$ ), the other female participants ( $n = 4$ ) were not aware of the NAP. This was a testimony that women in rural areas were ignored in the peace talks. As President

Ghani mentioned, in order for women at all levels to take part in the peace-building process, they should understand the concept and components of NAP (Embassy and Permanent Mission of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan in Vienna, 2015). Mrs. SY added that “in order for women to feel safe in the province, they should be a part of the peace building process and they must understand the security issues in order to manage challenges” There are many challenges facing Afghan women and it is not be possible to mention them all; however, based on in-depth interviews with the key participant ( $n = 1$ ) and confirmation by other participants ( $n = 5$ ), subthemes have been identified in the areas of security, traditional protocols, and illiteracy. The Asia Foundation survey of Afghan people (2015) showed that Afghan women face ongoing challenges in their daily lives, but the main challenges facing women in rural areas were identified as poor security and lack of confidence in the Afghan armed forces.

**Subtheme: Security.** As mentioned in the challenges section, poor security is a threat to women in Afghanistan, particularly in rural areas. Security deterioration has been an ongoing issue in the country. The province in this study has been relatively safe and secure due to its remote location; however, occasional security threats have hindered the progress of women in the province. Mrs. SY mentioned that the project implementation encountered some resistance from the community elders, which caused some security issues; however, by working with the local police, she and her husband were able to ensure the project participants’ safety. The Asia Foundation survey (2015) confirmed that security deterioration in the country causes instability and fear among Afghans, particularly in the rural areas.

**Subtheme: Traditional protocols.** As part of the challenges facing Afghan women in a rural area, Mrs. SY mentioned that Afghan traditions and religious protocols cause obstacles that prohibit women from exploring beyond their premises. Mr. SN mentioned that “women are afraid of exploring their potential, mainly due to cultural restrictions imposed on them by the husband, his family, and community elders. The Afghan culture dictates women must remain housewives, which precludes them from the society.” All female participants ( $n=5$ ) agreed that Mrs. SY’s efforts convinced the male family members to allow women to be a part of the baking project.

**Subtheme: Illiteracy.** As reported by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2015), Afghanistan has the lowest literacy rate in the world. The rate of illiteracy among women in rural areas is over 80% higher than in urban areas. The main reason for the high illiteracy rate is the remote location of many provinces, particularly the province in this study, which is remotely located in the western region of the country. Women in rural areas with no access to education and information have no knowledge about their basic human rights, hence no motivation to shift their social status from being a housewife to being an active member of the community (Schulz & Schulz, 1999). A question was raised about the importance of education; Mrs. SY was very clear about her opinion on women’s education and repeatedly mentioned that “a woman should have basic education to understand her potential and rights.” Participant SK mentioned that “while it is important for a woman to have an education, an illiterate woman is also capable of learning new skills in order to earn money.” All participants ( $n = 6$ ) agreed that education expanded opportunities to

move ahead in society, but in order for a woman to seek education, she must have a strong support system.

**Subtheme: Nonsupport system.** The Afghan culture is a male-dominated culture and highly influenced by religious leaders and community elders. This phenomenon was defined by Hofstede (1980) as the masculinity–femininity concept. The third dimension of culture was defined by Hofstede (1997) as power distance; this was the way a culture dealt with inequalities. Afghanistan is a high-power culture, where women and children are less powerful members of the society and are expected to respect and obey the higher power members of the society. The male figure in a family, community elders, and religious leaders exert high power over women in rural areas. Therefore, having no supportive family members or community leaders has created obstacles that hindered the progress of an Afghan woman in a rural province. Another cultural dimension mentioned by Hofstede (1997) was cultural masculinity, a concept that characterized societies where men were expected to be dominant, assertive, and tough, whereas women were expected to be subordinate, modest, and tender, and to tend to child bearing and family affairs. Within this theory, Afghan culture would be categorized as a high masculinity culture. Afghan women have constantly faced nonsupportive systems that inflicted challenges and obstacles on their advancement. These systems were groups of people known as religious leaders (*mullahs*), affluent land owners (*ullamahs*), community elders, and affluent women in high-ranking positions. Mrs. SY revealed her concerns about the women in public sector positions being a major threat to those women seeking advancement in the

society. She also expressed her thoughts about the bigotry of the religious leaders who saw a woman as a commodity and not of value.

Mr. SN revealed his challenges with the community leaders when he first started to support his wife in many activities: “I was constantly criticized by the community leaders for giving my wife the freedom of movement to explore beyond her premises.” Participants SK and HA voiced their opinion about the animosity that existed between the affluent women and the illiterate women in the province. Participants MA and MAH expressed their concerns about the pressures imposed by their husbands’ families, which created challenges to their advancement.

### **Main Theme: Capacity Development**

The capacity building theory was the baseline for sustainable development per Haq (1999) and Sen (2000). It was defined as a given choice by any individual to increase his/her capacity to achieve a sustainable livelihood. The ultimate end result of this approach was to avoid poverty.

To link the nature of the study to the theory of Haq (1999) and Sen (2000), I asked several questions in the areas of skill development and capacity building to understand the linkage between capacity building and a sustainable livelihood. Mrs. SY said that women in Afghanistan had gone through several years of turmoil during the past four decades; they fell from grace but managed to get back on their feet and conquer their position in the society. This shows persistence and willingness to move forward. She added that “Afghan women are survivors and will overcome obstacles.” She was very

clear about learning new skills: “Give a woman a proper resources and knowledge to understand her potential and ability to explore beyond the norm.”

Sen (2000) strongly believed that a strong capacity helped to build a strong character, which led to confidence and competency and in turn earned the trust and respect of the family and community. He also interlinked the capacity approach to avoiding poverty. Osmani (2005) demonstrated Sen’s theory that suggested the higher the level of a person’s capabilities, the higher the level of his/her well-being and ability to avoid poverty.

This research study provided support for the theoretical framework of the development theory of Haq (1999) and Sen (2000). The development theory by Sen (2000) stated that once an individual earned a stable income, she/he became an active member of the family and gained the trust and respect of the family and the community members. In this case, an Afghan woman became more aware of her rights, which ultimately shifted her domestic role from an ordinary housewife to a partner. Within the community dynamics, she gained economic freedom, had purchasing power, and became an active member of the community; she contributed to the economy of her household and the community. The key participant ( $n = 1$ ) and two active female participants ( $n = 2$ ) of this research study stated that earning a sustainable income has given them confidence and economic freedom, but most important, they have no fear of falling into poverty. Mrs. SY shared an experience of serving as an adviser to the governor and the mayor, a position that had never been given to a woman in her province. Mrs. SY added that “a strong capacity gives a woman prestige and a new social status.” This confirms



the survey of Afghan people conducted by the Asia Foundation (2015), which stated that women's contributions to household income were most common in the Central/Hazarajat region (49.3%) and lowest in the southwest (15.6%) and northeast (16.9%) regions. The number of respondents in the Central/Hazarajat region who said that women contributed to household income nearly doubled since 2014, significantly more than all other regions. Compared to other regions, average household income in the Central/Hazarajat region was lowest, while support for women working outside the home was highest (Asia Foundation, 2015).

Mr. SN stressed the importance of a woman having basic education to willingly learn new skills—of course, all with the support of her family members. Mr. SN expressed his opinion of education and said, “My wife was not born to be a teacher; she is born to be a leader and make a difference in other women's lives.”

Mrs. HA expressed her opinion about moving forward in the society through learning new skills and earning a stable income. She mentioned that “a woman's value is measured based on her earnings; a woman is respected by her family and community if she earns a stable income.” This statement correlates with Echavez's (2012) finding that rural women earning a stable income were valued more and given a special status at the community level.

In-depth interviews with the key participant ( $n = 1$ ) and the other female participants ( $n = 4$ ) revealed subthemes in the areas of skill development, confidence, financial freedom/stability, and sustainable livelihood.

**Subtheme: Skill development.** The subtheme of skill development was derived from the main theme of capacity development. Mrs. SY repeatedly stressed the importance of education; however, she also emphasized the importance of learning new skills and added that “even an educated woman with no skills is not able to find a job these days, so having a skill is a must.” Mrs. SK added that while she was a good cook, she did not know how to bake special sweets and cakes and was not familiar with using special baking machinery; now she has learned how to operate baking machinery as well as how to decorate cakes, which was in high demand. Mrs. SY added that “learning new skills brings a new dimension to a woman’s life, it builds self-confidence and self-esteem.” All female participants, both active and nonactive ( $n = 4$ ), confirmed that it was mainly due to Mrs. SY that they learned a skill that could be used to earn a living. Mills and Kitch (2006) and Echavez (2012) showed that building a strong female work force and learning new skills leads to building a strong character and self-confidence in vulnerable women in rural Afghanistan.

**Subtheme: Confidence.** Mrs. SY mentioned self-confidence and self-esteem in several interviews. She strongly believed that new skills open up a new way of thinking for Afghan women, especially in rural areas. She elaborated her story of starting as a teacher, despite having a law degree, but she lacked self-confidence in pursuing other ventures. All participants ( $n = 6$ ) agreed that learning new skills and building a strong capacity led to greater self-confidence, which ultimately led to exploring their potential; however, none of this was possible without self-willingness and self-drive to overcome

challenges. Sen's (2000) theory of development shows that a person, particularly in a rural area, gains confidence once she understands her potential to earn a stable income

**Subtheme: Financial freedom/stability.** The development theory of Haq (1999) and Sen (2000) posited that anyone is capable of learning new skills. Learning new skills contributes to a stable income, which in turn gives an individual personal mobility and freedom to prevent poverty. Mrs. SY shared her thoughts about financial stability in contributing to the family livelihood and in particular to ensuring a quality education for her children. Active female participants ( $n = 2$ ) identified financial freedom as a way to better their lives and contribute to family finances. In fact, ever since they stopped participating in the baking project, the nonactive female beneficiaries (MA, MAH) have lost their self-confidence and returned to being housewives.

Mrs. SY explained that

a stable income leads to financial freedom for an Afghan woman. . . . A skilled Afghan woman who earns an income falls into another category in the society; she has purchasing power and finds herself in a decision-making role within her family. Financial freedom builds a strong sense of self-esteem in a woman, who is now able to contribute to family finances and in turn earn the respect of her husband and family members.

Mr. SN mentioned that "the earnings from my wife have affected our children's education." The key participant and her husband own their own residence and own a vehicle; their children attend a private school in a neighboring province.

Participant HA mentioned that “I know I am making a minimal income from [the] baking project, but I also know that my income contributes to the betterment of my family life style.” Participant MA mentioned that “earning money from [the] baking project enabled me to help my ailing mother.” All female participants, including the key participant ( $n = 5$ ), agreed that financial freedom contributed to the betterment of their life. Mills and Kitcha (2006) and Echavez (2012) showed that once a woman builds a strong capacity and earns a stable income, she becomes financially independent and enjoys financial prosperity and freedom, which places her in a different level in the society.

**Subtheme: Sustainable livelihood.** Considering Sen’s (2000) theory that capacity building is the main source of sustainable livelihood, I posed a question to all female participants ( $n = 5$ ) about the impact of capacity development on earning a sustainable income, which brings peace of mind and prosperity. Other female participants ( $n = 4$ ) answered favorably and confirmed that it was all due to the key participant’s efforts that they now had a sustainable income; not only have they learned new skills, they have also learned how to plan and manage their activities and finances. Mrs. SY replied that “in the end, nothing will happen without the willingness of a woman to learn new skills and make a change from the status quo.” Mrs. SK added, “The baking project also taught us how to plan our earnings accordingly and don’t plan above our means.” Mrs. HA said,

While there may not be so much hope for peace to return to Afghanistan, I know I have peace in my family. Their basic needs are met, and I am happy to be able to contribute to financial needs of my family.

### **Main Theme: Importance of Foreign Aid in Building a Strong Capacity**

Emphasizing the purpose of the study, which correlates capacity building to receipt of foreign aid, I asked a question of all female participants about the importance of foreign aid in building a sustainable livelihood. In response, all female participants ( $n = 5$ ) expressed their gratitude to the key participant for bringing foreign aid to the province. Mrs. SY said, “The foreign aid and the international donor community have given me the opportunity to learn new skills and contribute to building the capacity of 20 women.” Mrs. SY expressed her gratitude to USAID for the baking project. While she faced several challenges in implementing the project, she was not disappointed with its outcome, which was meant to equip beneficiaries with proper tools and resources in providing seed money to put their learning into action and open a bakery. Both participants SK and HA were critical of the sustainability of the baking project as a whole. While the project was the basis for them to learn new skills, the duration was not sufficient, and there was no follow-up by the donor agency.

Mrs. SY emphasized that “it was due to foreign aid assistance that I learned planning, training, and many other skills which led to building a strong workforce in my NGO.” She added, “I could have never been able to secure funds from USAID if I didn’t have proper skills to implement the project.” Other female beneficiary participants ( $n = 4$ ) pointed out that they had never experienced any foreign aid assistance, mainly due to the

location of the province in a remote and rural area. Mrs. MA said, “The baking project and the efforts made by Mrs. SY was the first foreign aid experience in a province that no one pays attention to.” All participants, unanimously agreed that given the remote proximity of the location and challenges as outlined above, the foreign aid has made a profound positive social impact in their lives. SIGAR’s (2014a, 2014b) reports on Afghan women’s progress showed the women in rural areas had been left out of foreign aid assistance due to their remote location. The World Bank, in *Afghanistan in Transition: Looking Beyond 2014* (Hogg et al., 2013), encouraged international donors to restructure their foreign aid assistance policies to ensure that foreign aid would reach the grassroots and the women in the rural areas would be given equal opportunity to advance in society.

**Subtheme: Afghan women’s life beyond foreign aid.** When asked about life beyond foreign aid, Mrs. SY expressed her deep concern and said, “The faith of Afghan women remains critical with the withdrawal of international armed forces in 2014 and drawdown of foreign aid.” She added, it is evident that GIROA does not have any capital or capacity to provide any funds for the development of Afghan women in society. . . . It is imperative for the international donor community to understand the intense condition of Afghan women beyond foreign aid. The future looks very grim for Afghan women. Participants SK and HA also expressed concern. However, they remained confident that they have secured a sustainable income and no longer have to rely on foreign aid. Participant MA stayed neutral, as she had very little knowledge about foreign aid. Participant MAH said she believed that “without foreign aid assistance, the country would fall apart.”

## **Evidence of Trustworthiness**

### **Credibility**

In this research study, all steps were taken to ensure proper documentation of all collected data. There was no deviation from the strategies stated in Chapter 3.

### **Transferability**

It is my intent to transfer the findings of this study to the masses through dissemination of a pamphlet to the CDCs to bring awareness of this success story to both men and women. This task will be achieved through a local NGO. In addition, the findings and recommendations will be incorporated into a concept note and submitted to MOWA and MRRD for formulation of a capacity-building action plan for rural women in Afghanistan.

### **Dependability**

As part of the dependability process, an audit trail was established to prevent redundancy. For this purpose, I kept data and documents, meeting notes, interview questions, audio recordings, collected data, findings, code book, and other relevant documents in an external hard drive and NVivo software.

### **Confirmability**

To ensure all data was captured properly, I transcribed the interview findings in both English and Dari and cross-checked with the participants for accuracy. The interview transcripts were forwarded to the key participant and her husband via e-mail for member checking. For other illiterate female participants ( $n = 4$ ), I verbally reviewed the findings via phone. The purpose of this process was to ensure all participants confirmed

the collected data and information was accurately captured and recorded in its entirety. An external auditor and editor were employed to review the entire research project. The external auditor had lived in Afghanistan for several years and has a thorough knowledge of the country; he reviewed the supporting documents to ensure accuracy.

In addition to all the above, I took all measures to ensure the confidentiality and safety of all participants. Permission for audio recording was sought from each participant. The interviews were transcribed verbatim; however, I used a coded system when presenting responses to the interview questions in order to protect the identity of the participants. No information was released to any party listing the actual name of the respondents. No information was released to a third party. The audio recording was kept in an external drive and Dropbox, to be destroyed 6 months after the completion of the study. There was no research assistant or interpreter assigned during the data collection phase. All data were collected and analyzed by me.

### **Study Results**

The purpose of this study was to discover whether an Afghan woman in a rural province, through receipt of foreign aid assistance, has built a strong capacity to secure a sustainable livelihood and make a social impact on the lives of other women. A central research question informed this study: “What factors determine the willingness of an Afghan woman to advance in the society?” Several subquestions were derived as a result of the answers to the central question.

While this was a single case study and the focus was on one Afghan woman, the key participant identified her husband as the main source of support and identified four



other female participants. This approach has been recognized by Patton (2002, p. 447) as a layered or nested process, meaning that within a single unit ( $n = 1$ ) one may do case studies of several participants. The key participant also identified six other female beneficiaries to be included in the study; however, they declined to be interviewed.

There were three sessions of interviews with the key participant, SY ( $n = 1$ ), one session with the key participant's husband, SN ( $n = 1$ ), one session with active female beneficiary SK ( $n = 1$ ), one session with active female beneficiary HA, ( $n = 1$ ), one session with nonactive female beneficiary MA ( $n = 1$ ), and one session with nonactive female beneficiary MAH ( $n = 1$ ). The language used in the interviews with the key participant and her husband was English. The other participants ( $n = 4$ ) did not speak English, so their interviews were conducted in Dari. For Dari speakers, the transcript of each interview was translated from English to Dari and verbally discussed with each participant to confirm and ensure all data and information were fully captured. Each participant was interviewed privately via Skype or phone at his/her home.

During the in-depth interviews, female participants ( $n = 4$ ) described the effect and the social impact that the key participant had in their lives. They repeatedly emphasized the importance of learning new skills to secure a stable livelihood and being able to have financial freedom to contribute to their family finances.

The research findings this chapter details are based on the analysis of the following data sources: structured and semistructured interviews and customized questionnaires developed for each participant. The results of this research study were derived from in-depth structured and semistructured interviews with all participants. A

background summary for each participant is presented herewith. The following section is a detailed illustration of interviews with all participants ( $n = 6$ ).

## **Background**

### **Key Participant (SY)**

“Build the capacity of a woman to build a strong community.”

“In the eyes of God, we are all the same, given the same power to make a difference.”

A key informant is defined as one who has particular knowledge about research settings and is a vital source of information to understand what is happening and why (Patton, 2002). The key participant of this research study (hereinafter identified as SY) was selected based on purposeful sampling as set out by Yin (2009). In addition to Yin’s (2009) methodology, I developed a set of specific criteria as presented in Appendix D.

Mrs. SY is a 36-year-old woman who married at the age of 23 and had two children. She had a master’s degree in law and moved from Iran to a remote western province in Afghanistan 13 years ago, where she assumed a job as a teacher, receiving \$30 a month. In addition to her immediate family of four, she lived with her husband’s family of eight and contributed to the family finances. In 2007, with the encouragement and support of a female friend, she established an NGO with the objective of assisting vulnerable, widowed women to learn new skills and avoid poverty. Because she implemented small community-based projects, she was not perceived as a credible implementing partner by multidonor agencies and struggled to secure funds for her projects. Her ongoing efforts to promote women in her province were often obstructed by

community elders who perceived her as a threat. In her remote and rural province, women were restricted to their homes and not allowed to easily venture beyond their boundaries or make any attempts to learn new skills and build a sustainable livelihood; these characteristics were not known or allowed in the highly male-driven, conservative society.

To explore her potential, in 2007 she joined an international NGO as a community trainer. The NGO was funded by USAID, and she earned \$550 a month. In this capacity, she supervised literacy and skill development projects for vulnerable and poor women at the community level. During the 2 years of her employment, she received numerous professional training opportunities in various areas that increased her capacity and built her confidence to reinstate her NGO in 2009 and become its executive director.

Beginning in 2009 and continuing for the next several years, she attended over 25 training programs in the areas of project management planning, communication, emergency planning, research, gender, human rights, peace building, and microcredit. The longest training program she undertook was in the area of human resources management, which was funded by the government of Japan for a period of 6 weeks in Japan. All the training courses she completed were funded by international donor agencies. After she received training, she was confident enough to undertake the implementation of large projects and implemented 33 projects during 2009–2012. At the time of the interview, her monthly earnings had increased to over \$6,000 per month.

In 2011, under the Ambassador Small Grants Program funded by USAID, she received a small grant to implement a baking project in a province where women were

not allowed to venture beyond their premises. This short 3-month project opened a new door for 20 women who were willing to learn new skills and earn a stable income. This new phenomenon of earning a stable income built the confidence of the women within their families and community. Upon completion of the project, seven women decided to continue their activities and still make a stable living from doing so; two of them were part of this study as active female beneficiaries ( $n = 2$ ), and two were nonactive female beneficiaries ( $n = 2$ ). The remaining 13 women were not able to continue due to financial constraints and restrictions imposed by their family members. This chapter presents the findings from the two active female beneficiaries ( $n = 2$ ) and two nonactive female beneficiaries ( $n = 2$ ).

In 2014, SY was selected as a candidate to participate in a 6-week human resources course in Japan. Upon completion of the course, she landed a midmanagement position with UNICEF, where she implemented education and skill development projects for internally displaced persons, both women and children. SY's ongoing efforts in women's empowerment have earned her several accolades from multidonor agencies. She recently participated in a provincial city council election and was ranked in the top 10 in the results. In addition, her track record in implementing projects successfully helped to build strong dialogue with many donor agencies and led one donor agency to award SY funding of \$250,000 to implement a women's empowerment project in her province. She has become well known and respected in a conservative, male-dominated province and serves as a development adviser to the mayor and the governor on development issues.

“My message to my Afghan sisters is to be aware of your rights and exercise your potential to move forward in the society. Our God has given equal power to men and women to advance.”

### **Key Participant’s Husband (SN)**

“Educate a man to understand the value of a woman.”

“Afghan women are the backbone in peace building.”

As previously mentioned and based on Patton (2002), building positive dialogue with affected parties is crucial in data collection. The key participant’s husband (SN) was identified as an individual who played a key role in the advancement of SY. Mr. SN was a 40-year-old man who was born in Afghanistan and had a high school diploma. He was the owner of a construction company located in SY’s province. Mr. SN was the main breadwinner for a family of eight. He was identified by SY as the main source of support for her to learn new skills and advance in the society.

In a lengthy interview with Mr. SN, he stressed the importance of education and having a strong capacity in order for women to move forward. He also said, “Afghan women, particularly those in rural areas, are not able to advance in society without the support of their families and the endorsement of the community leaders.” Mr. SN mentioned that community and religious leaders in rural areas often caused problems and challenges for women to get ahead in society, mainly due to their lack of knowledge and their perceptions; they viewed educated women as threats rather than as assets to the community.

Mr. SN stressed the value of women in peace building in families and in the community. He said that “an educated woman will bring value to the community and should not be perceived as a threat.” Mr. SN had supported his wife since 2007; while he encountered ongoing challenges with the community leaders for doing so, he resisted the challenges and proved to the community leaders that his wife was capable of building a strong capacity for herself and other women, and that her efforts should not be perceived as a threat to Afghan culture and traditional protocols. He mentioned that while he was facing those challenges, his immediate family supported his position.

Mr. SN expressed his concern about the withdrawal of international armed forces and the reduction of foreign aid over the next few years he said it “will be extremely problematic for Afghans, in particular for Afghan women.” He reiterated though that “the Afghan government should build its own capacity to help people and should no longer build upon and rely on foreign aid.” Mr. SN emphasized the importance of women being educated in order to understand their basic human rights, which would empower them to strengthen their capacity. He said that “a skilled woman is capable of securing a stable living; and a stable income will earn her the respect and trust among her family and community members.”

In response to the question, “What made him act against his cultural constraints and allow his wife to attend a long course in another country?” he responded without hesitation: “Trust and respect.” Mr. SN elaborated on his religious doctrine, which states that “Muslims, men and women, are ordered to be trustworthy and follow the example of our prophet.”

**Active Female Beneficiary Participant (SK)**

“An illiterate woman is still capable of making a difference in her community.”

“Learn new skills; build a strong capacity to avoid poverty.”

Mrs. SK was an illiterate 40-year-old woman, who had been married for 22 years and had seven children. SK also took care of her ailing mother. In 2011, based on the motivation and encouragement from her husband and persistence of the key participant, she participated in the USAID-funded baking project and learned how to operate baking machinery and bake Afghan sweets and cakes. Upon completion of the project, which lasted 3 months, she decided to continue with the baking. She has been successful in making and distributing sweets and cakes to various shopkeepers in the capital city of the province. Prior to learning these new skills, she was a housewife and had no skills or income. She mentioned that “it was mainly due to the persistence of the key participant that I decided to join the project and now [I am] earning a stable income.” At the time of the interview, she earned around \$767 per month, which was distributed among six partners.

Mrs. SK identified security as the major challenge that hinders progress to venture beyond boundaries of the capital city and reach the other parts of the province; however, she said that “once a woman establishes the respect of the community, then her safety is warranted.” She also added that the key participant made all efforts to ensure her security and safety during the implementation of baking project. Mrs. SK described her social status change as a “miracle” and mainly due to the efforts of the key participant. While there were many challenges, such as animosity from affluent female community members

as well as the community religious leaders, she always depended on the expertise and the reputation of the key participant to resolve ongoing issues. She elaborated on the resistance she and the others received from the community leaders in the beginning of the project. Mrs. SY made ongoing attempts to convince the community elders that women brought value, and she changed their perception from threat to value.

When asked about her motivating factor to advance, she responded, “I always wanted to make a difference and move beyond being a regular housewife. Mrs. SY had a major influence in my decision to join the baking project.” She wanted to have financial freedom, earn a sustainable income, contribute to family finances, and become a respected member of the community.

Mrs. SK added that “without receiving proper tools and new skills provided by Mrs. SY, I would have never been able to move forward in society.” Mrs. SK said that “an Afghan woman should first have basic education in order to understand her potential, and then be self-driven and willing to change her social status, of course with the support of her family.”

At the end of the interview, Mrs. SK raised her grave concerns about the drawdown of foreign aid. In response to the question, “What is the future for Afghan women beyond foreign aid?” she answered, “It is a dire situation, and Afghans should not be depending on foreign aid. We should be sustainable by now; it’s been over 13 years.” She also added, “I am not so worried about the drawdown of foreign aid, as I have been given new skills to build a sustainable livelihood.”



**Active Female Beneficiary Participant (HA)**

“Give a woman proper tools and resources to succeed.”

“Education is the key in understanding capability and potential.”

Mrs. HA was an illiterate 37-year-old woman, who had been married for 19 years and had seven children. In 2011, she participated in a baking project funded by USAID and organized by the key participant (SY). The major motivating factor for Mrs. HA for participating in the project was the encouragement received from the key participant, SY. Mrs. HA mentioned that “it was because of Mrs. SY that I learned new skills and now [I am] able to earn a stable income.” Mrs. HA emphasized the ability to help her family with finances as being a major factor in participating in baking project. Her contribution to the family finances changed her position from being just a housewife to being an active member of the family, where she now participated in family decision making. She confirmed that the baking project had enabled her to earn a stable income of \$767 per month, which was equally divided among six partners. While this is a minimal amount, it is a stable livelihood. Prior to learning these new skills, she was a housewife and had no income.

Mrs. HA repeatedly underlined the importance of family support, in particular the support she received from her husband, but mainly the efforts made by the key participant to convince her husband to allow Mrs. HA to participate in the baking project. She also added that she had experienced challenges imposed by affluent members of the community and the religious leaders at the beginning of the project that hindered her progress initially. She pointed out that SY was a major instrument in changing the

perception of the nonsupportive community members; she said, “It’s important for community members to see a woman as valuable and not a threat.” Mrs. HA identified “security, lack of education, and poverty” as the main challenges for a rural Afghan woman to progress. She revealed that “an education is the door to success. An educated woman is aware of her rights, she will work and make a living and avoid poverty, and it’s all linked together.”

Mrs. HA was born in a rural district of the province and had been distressed by the cultural hypocrisy that exists in rural Afghanistan. She explained that “rural women have very limited access to education; hence they are not aware of their rights and cannot see their capacity beyond the veil.” Mrs. HA was very clear about foreign aid and its impact in Afghanistan and Afghan women; however, she very clearly said that

foreign aid has not reached the poor and the grassroots level. Life for women in the rural areas hasn’t changed much since the overthrow of the Taliban. We

would have never experienced the impact of foreign aid, if it wasn’t for Mrs. SY.

She said, “The future of Afghan women after the drawdown of foreign aid looks very somber”; however, “the drawdown of foreign aid will not have an effect on me personally, as I have already established a stable income, thanks to Mrs. SY.”

**Nonactive Female Beneficiary Participant (MA)**

“Family should provide security and safety to a woman to be able to venture beyond the veil.”

“Security begins from home.”

Mrs. MA was a 23-year-old woman with a high school education; she was married 1 year ago and at the time of the interview lived with her husband's 11-member family. MA had no children. Due to her mother's persistence and motivation and after consultation with the key participant, she joined the baking project at the age of 18. Prior to joining the project, she had no baking experience; through the project, she learned how to use baking machinery and bake a variety of cookies and cakes. She continued with the baking project until a year ago, when she got married; at the insistence of her husband and mother-in-law, she ceased her involvement with the project. Her husband's decision came from pressure by his family and community elders, who believed a woman should not move outside of her home premises and should remain a housewife.

When working on the baking project, she made minimal earnings, but it was a stable income and was able to help her family with purchasing food and paying for other incidentals. Throughout the project, she met with the key participant who ensured she was capable of dealing with animosity caused by female friends who were jealous of her success. A few female community members were challenging her activities, but her mother with the support of the key participant overcame the challenges.

When asked if she would go back to the project, she said, "Yes, but the decision is up to my husband and the mother-in-law." Mrs. MA said, "The support of family and husband are the primary factors for an Afghan woman to get ahead. . . . Family's support overrules other challenges." Mrs. MA was currently baking sweets from home for her family and neighbors and had a very minimal income. She identified the key participant as the main source of learning this new skill and said, "I would have never thought to

pursue this line of work, but Mrs. SY believed in my ability to learn a skill which may result in earning an income in future.” Her message to other Afghan women was “to first educate yourself so you can educate men and the community to understand the value a woman can bring to the community.”

#### **Nonactive Female Beneficiary Participant (MAH)**

“Family support is the core for an Afghan woman to succeed.”

“An Afghan woman can and must overcome challenges through showing her skills.”

Mrs. MA was a 27-year-old illiterate woman, married with two boys, living in a family of seven people. In 2011, she was invited by the key participant to be included in the baking project and was provided with training and given new tools to bake sweets and cakes. Through learning this new skill, she earned a stable income and was able to contribute to the family finances. She was highly supported by her husband, who was convinced by the key participant. While she continued with the venture, she ended her involvement after 3 years due to family obligations and financial constraints (not being able to purchase raw materials to produce the goods).

When working on the baking project, she worked closely with the key participant and learned innovative methods in baking sweets and cakes. Her minimal earnings gave her financial ability to help her family. She was well received by the community elders, as she became a part of a large group of women who made sweets and new goods, which was to the liking of the community.

Mrs. MA confirmed that security in her province was not an issue; however, her personal security was an issue, and she needed to have a male companion at all times to move around the city. She said that “Afghan women have the capability to venture beyond the veil, but this is not possible without the support of the husband and family.” She also concluded that “Mrs. SY made us believe in our ability to venture beyond the norm.”

### **Summary**

The purpose of the study was to determine whether an Afghan woman in a rural province, through building capacity supported by a foreign aid grant, made a social impact on her life as well as the lives of other women in her province. A qualitative single case study based on Yin’s (2005, 2009) framework was selected to gather data through structured and semistructured interviews via phone and Skype. While this study focused on one Afghan woman, the key participant identified other participants to help illuminate her story; this approach was recognized by Patton (2002) as a layered case study.

The interviewees included in this study were the key participant ( $n = 1$ ), key participant’s husband ( $n = 1$ ), two female active beneficiaries ( $n = 2$ ), and two female nonactive beneficiaries ( $n = 2$ ). An intense data collection took place through phone interviews which contributed to reaching saturation.

The main research question, “What factors determine the willingness of an Afghan woman to advance in the society?” was posed to all participants ( $n = 6$ ), which generated subquestions. A tailored questionnaire was crafted for each participant, based

on his/her level of effort and contribution to the purpose of the study. The main themes were identified during data collection; subthemes emerged and were identified based on open coding and are presented in this chapter. Chapter 5 outlines the interpretation of findings, limitations of the study, recommendations, social implications, and conclusion.

## Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of the study was to determine whether an Afghan woman in a rural province, through building capacity supported by a foreign aid grant, made a social impact on her life as well as the lives of other women in her province. The nature of the study was a single case study based on Yin (2005). This research study was conducted to bring about awareness of the importance of capacity building to alleviate poverty in rural areas of Afghanistan.

The key findings of this research study were derived from the main themes and are focused in the areas of (a) challenges, (b) capacity development, and (c) importance of foreign aid in building a strong capacity.

### **Interpretation of Findings**

In this section of the research study, I interpret the findings in relation to the previous literature to demonstrate whether a rural Afghan woman had built a strong capacity to be self-reliant without dependency on foreign aid assistance. The theoretical foundation of this study was based on the development theory of Haq (1999) and Sen (2000), whose theory was the baseline to develop UNDP HDR. Sen believed that given the proper tools and resources, an individual was capable of being self-reliant and avoiding poverty. Sachs (2005) also promoted self-sufficiency through capacity building in avoiding poverty. Another example of sustainability to avoid poverty has been demonstrated in community-based projects implemented in Nepal and India (Purushothaman, 1997).

The findings of this research study were derived from the themes and subthemes and were identified as (a) challenges, (b) capacity development, and (c) importance of foreign aid in building a strong capacity.

Although there have been many challenges facing Afghan women, the challenge most frequently mentioned by all participants in this study ( $n = 6$ ) was related to poor security and safety, which has hindered women's empowerment in the country. The Asia Foundation (2015) survey placed poor security as the highest concern for the Afghan people. As mentioned in the previous chapter, President Ghani has made all efforts to ensure UNSCR 1325 is embedded in the NAP and women are included in the peace process (Embassy and Permanent Mission of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan in Vienna, 2015). While the instability and poor security have been widespread problems, they have affected people and particularly women in rural areas, where armed forces have not been equipped with the proper technical resources to fight the insurgency. The high levels of corruption and practice of sharia law have often superseded the justice system in rural areas. Mrs. SY expressed her concern and said she believed that

security is a major issue, but the overall security and safety are born from the support of the family. . . . There is compelling evidence that Afghan police are easily influenced by religious leaders, hence avoid fighting insurgency. There is no trust with the local armed forces and their genuine effort to protect the civilians. . . . Despite all the publicity of including women in the peace building, not much has been done to ensure full integration of women in peace building in the rural areas.



There is a common challenge facing women in the conflict countries of Iraq and Afghanistan, which bridges the comment made by Mrs. SY (above) and the report published by the United States Institute of Peace (Kuehnast, Omar, Steiner, & Sultan, 2012). While the donor community understands the importance of women integrating into peace building, what is missing is the buy-in of the community religious leaders to support the women's efforts in the process; this shows the influence of the community elders and religious leaders in the Afghan setting. Kuehnast et al. (2012) concluded that in a conflict country such as Afghanistan, the women, both in rural and urban areas, should be given the right to be part of the decision-making process from the beginning. The findings revealed that when women are a part of the decision making from the beginning, they take ownership of the task and ensure a successful implementation.

To address the security issues and safeguard women's safety in rural Afghanistan, the NATO Secretary General's Special Representative for Women, Peace and Security, Ambassador Schuurman, assured First Lady Rula Ghani that NATO would continue support to build the participation of women in the armed forces and to encourage rural women to take charge and become a part of the peace-building process in their communities (NATO, 2015). GIRoA has been reported to have over 869 women in the Afghan National Army and 2,334 women in the Afghan National Police, with plans to increase this number by 10% annually (NATO, 2015).

To reinforce this process, President Ashraf Ghani supported a NAP to ensure full participation of women in peace building within the UN Security Council Resolution 1325, which promoted women, peace, and security (Embassy and Permanent Mission of

the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan in Vienna, Austria, 2015). The NAP was approved on June 30, 2015, to promote the inclusion of women in the peace-building and decision-making process. While the plan encouraged equal participation by men and women in peace process, there has been limited evidence that it has led to including rural women in the process (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2015). The current research study revealed that with the exception of the key participant, the other female participants ( $n = 4$ ) were not aware of the NAP and their rights to participate in peace negotiations.

In addition to poor security and personal safety, which threaten the lives of Afghans but mostly Afghan women in rural areas, the participants in this research study expressed several other challenges that have obstructed their progress. The main challenge they encountered was the cultural restrictions imposed on them by the community religious leaders. As echoed by Mrs. SY, the belief system was that “an Afghan woman is controlled by a male figure and the belief is that her place is in the kitchen.”

This phenomenon has been noticed in many research studies. In a study of women at the community level, Echavez (2012) mentioned that the male populace at the community level changed their perception of women once they noticed that the women brought value in building a strong community. Rural women, through learning new skills and contributing to the community, have changed the perception of the community leaders; they no longer are perceived as unfortunate, nonactive members of the community. In this research study, Mrs. SY built a female workforce through building their capacity, thus convincing the community leaders that women were capable of

running a business—in this case, the baking project that brought prosperity to the community. Mrs. SY stated that “working with the community leaders requires patience, but once trust is built, you will gain their full support.”

Illiteracy and a lack of access to information are another challenge for women in rural Afghanistan. Although the UNDP HDR (2014b) showed that some progress had been made in the education system, rural women have been left out in acquiring basic education, due to the remote location of their provinces. Access to education in Afghanistan is an issue that can only be resolved by support of the national government and strong leadership of the subnational government to promote education for all.

This research study was based on the development theory of Haq (1999) and Sen (2000), which stated that building a strong capacity led to sustainable development and eliminated poverty. The answer to the central question led to capacity development, which was identified as a major theme based on in-depth interviews with the key participant and other female participants ( $n = 5$ ). The development theory, as created by Haq and Sen and successfully implemented in many underdeveloped countries, stated that, given the proper tools and resources, an individual should be able to earn a stable income and avoid poverty. The overall findings of this research study are aligned with the development theory of Haq and Sen.

Several studies, including the one conducted by Echavez (2012), revealed that women at the grassroots received strong capacity and training through national programs, which led them to gain confidence and self-esteem in making decisions to better their community. The key participant in this study, Mrs. SY, confirmed that her advancement

in society was mainly due to receiving training and building a strong capacity in areas where she was then able to encourage and enhance other women's capacity, all with one objective in mind: "To earn a sustainable income and avoid poverty." This approach is well aligned with Sen's (2000) development theory, which promotes building a strong capacity to avoid poverty.

There is also the issue of a high rate of illiteracy among rural women. According to UNESCO (2015), Afghanistan has the lowest literacy rate in the world. The rate of illiteracy among women in rural areas was over 80% higher than in urban areas. The main reason for the high illiteracy rate was the remote location of many provinces, particularly the province in this study. Women in rural areas with no access to education and information have had no knowledge about their basic human rights, hence no motivation to shift their social status from being a housewife to being an active member of the community (Schulz & Schulz, 1999). In this research study, all female participants ( $n = 5$ ) strongly agreed that an illiterate woman is capable of learning new skills to secure a sustainable livelihood. Mrs. SY emphasized that learning a new skill may be taken for granted in any other country, but in Afghanistan, for a woman in a rural province, a new skill opens doors and builds hope for a better future. The interpretation of findings showed that skill development contributes to the following:

- Confidence building
- Financial freedom/stability
  - Sustainable income
  - Contribution to family finances

- Shifting from an ordinary housewife to a household partner
  - Purchasing power—contribution to local economic growth
  - Freedom of movement
- Trust building within family and the community
- Ensures safety
  - Change in perception (from threat to asset)
  - Freedom of movement

Once an Afghan woman is given tools and resources to learn new skills, she ultimately transforms from being a housewife to a partner in the family who contributes to family finances. Her confidence builds a new social status that gives her financial freedom and changes the status quo. In this research study, Mrs. SY was a living testimony that her social status change from a teacher to an executive director of an NGO and development adviser to the national government was a result of enhancement of her capacity in several training programs, all supported by foreign aid. She said, “I would have remained a teacher for the rest of my life, if there was no opportunity to learn new skills.” The active female participant in the baking project, Mrs. SK, mentioned that “I never thought I could learn a new skill which brings me prosperity; this is all due to the efforts made by Mrs. SY. I now have a steady income, as minimal as it may be.”

The importance of foreign aid in building a strong capacity and life beyond foreign aid was discussed in depth with Mrs. SY and other participants ( $n = 5$ ). Mrs. SY mentioned that “foreign aid assistance changed my life from being a teacher to an adviser to the mayor and governor. However, the problem still persists that foreign aid is not

equally allocated to reach to the rural areas.” She believed that “once the foreign aid draws down, the GIRoA does not have the financial and technical resources to continue providing funds in the women’s empowerment projects.” She concluded, “Now that we learned how to walk, there is no support given to keep on walking.”

The major problem with foreign aid not reaching the grassroots is the level of hierarchy created at the national level. The MOWA at the ministerial level allocated the budget to the Department of Women’ Affairs (DOWA) to implement and oversee projects at the subnational level. Due to the high level of corruption in the DOWA, the funds died out without reaching the grassroots. The overall interpretation of this finding confirms the findings of the Asia Foundation (2015) survey: A large percentage of Afghans believed that corruption was the core problem, and they had lost confidence in the central government. Mrs. SY said she believed that “once the foreign aid assistance is exhausted, the country will fall apart and women in particular will suffer a great deal. Therefore, it’s imminent for all of us to learn new skills and ensure a secure income.”

### **Limitations of the Study**

This research study involved a small unit of analysis ( $n = 6$ ). The purposeful sampling, based on Patton (2000), was used to identify the key participant. I had worked in the province of the study for 2 years and knew the key participant for her efforts to advance women in this rural province. The key participant identified her husband as the main source of support ( $n = 1$ ) and four other female beneficiaries ( $n = 4$ ). There were no limitations of the study during data collection. The research used triangulation to

strengthen the trustworthiness of the study. I had no prejudice and reported the outcome of each interview accurately.

### **Recommendations**

Afghan women have gone through social turmoil during the past 4 decades. The international invasion of Afghanistan in October 2001 caused devastation and confusion among Afghans; however, Afghan women embraced the invasion, as it offered a glimpse of hope for their liberation (Hirshking & Mahmood, 2002). Many women did not wish to be liberated (Mills & Kitcha, 2006), but the majority were eager to live in a democratic environment (Moghadam, 2007).

All female participants ( $n = 5$ ) interviewed in this research study recognized the importance of foreign aid in building the skills needed to be self-reliant. All participants ( $n = 6$ ) acknowledged their concern about the security and safety of women in rural areas, due to the lack of capacity of the Afghan National Police and Army to protect the citizens in remote provinces.

As identified by all female participants ( $n = 5$ ) and revealed by the data, there has been no effort by the national government to promote the NAP and encourage women to participate in peace building and negotiation as intended by President Ashraf Ghani (Rasmussen, 2014). All the participants interviewed in this research study ( $n = 6$ ) agreed that learning new skills brings economic prosperity and a way out of poverty (Sachs, 2005). Based on the collected data and identification of the major themes and thorough literature study, as presented in Chapter 2, the following recommendations are made for future studies.

1. To ensure equal participation of women in peace building and negotiation, a further research study should be conducted to determine if the CDCs have the capacity to conduct training programs to bring awareness of NAP to both men and women.
2. Further research is needed to enhance and expand this study on a wider scale to reach out to various regions of the country and make a comparative analysis of women's progress in their environment (i.e., south, southeast, west, north, and central).
3. Further research is needed to understand the dynamics of the motivation factor of an Afghan man to support or not support his wife to make a social change. What can be done to change the perceptions of a nonsupport system?

### **Implications**

This research study has positive social change implications for policy makers, MOWA, MRRD, and other entities advocating for women's empowerment in rural areas of Afghanistan. With a better understanding of the value of women, the male populace at the community level may have a paradigm shift and accept women as an asset rather than a threat. The NGOs and the CDCs can use the results of this research study as part of training programs to bring awareness of learning new skills and earning a stable income. An executive summary of the research study can be compiled and shared with the concerned stakeholders. In addition, it is important to ensure that women in the grassroots are aware of such a success story. To accomplish this task, I will create a simple pamphlet to demonstrate this success story in a case study format that will be used as a



training tool to facilitate dialogue with both men and women. The goal is for women to understand their potential to learn new skills and for men to recognize women as a value and not a threat. On a ministerial level, the recommendations will be transcribed into a concept note and will be submitted to MOWA for consideration in formulation of an action plan for capacity building for women in rural Afghanistan. The same information will be submitted to MRRD, which is the ministry working in rural development, to consider the inclusion of a capacity-building component in their rural skill development projects

### **Conclusions**

Once active members of the society, holding high-ranking positions, Afghan women fell from grace to grave under the dark terror of the Taliban regime. Their liberation from oppression by the Taliban was reinforced by the international invasion of Afghanistan in October 2001. The international donor community pledged its support and commitment to improving the lives of women in Afghanistan through ratification of international conferences and conventions, amendments to the Afghan Constitution, establishment of MOWA, and formulation of NAPWA and NAP to ensure that women would be treated equally in all spheres of life.

Despite the outpouring of billions of dollars of foreign aid assistance to rebuild Afghanistan and empower women to regain their social status, there has been a lack of specific case studies providing lessons learned about the impact of foreign aid on building a self-reliant female work force in rural areas. Poor security, followed by poverty, severely hampers women's development in society. There is skepticism about

whether the government has the technical, human, and financial resources to support women to move ahead beyond foreign aid.

The past 4 decades have been nothing but social and economic turmoil for Afghan women, who have faced horrendous challenges but somehow managed to overcome these challenges and strive for excellence. However, there is a spark of hope for Afghan women to be integrated into society and work outside of their homes. The Asia Foundation (2015) survey of Afghan people revealed that the percentage of Afghans who support women working outside the home has been gradually but steadily declining, from 70.9% in 2006 to 64.0% in 2015. Women (72.9%) were much more likely than men (53.8%) to agree that women should be allowed to work outside the home. The number of respondents in the Central/Hazarajat region who said that women contributed to household income nearly doubled since 2014, significantly more than all other regions. Compared to other regions, average household income in the Central/Hazarajat region was lowest, while support for women working outside the home was highest (Asia Foundation, 2015).

Afghan women's persistence and willingness to overcome challenges is boundless and goes above and beyond the Hindu Kush mountains. This research study demonstrated the willingness and ambition of one Afghan woman in a remote rural province to overcome all challenges and, against all odds, to change her social status from a community teacher to an adviser to the national government. Through her efforts, she has made an incredible social impact on the lives of 20 vulnerable women by building their capacity to become self-reliant.

Today's political environment has struck a spark of hope for Afghan women. The newly elected President Ashraf Ghani and his wife are committed to supporting women to regain their social status and once again be considered as active members of society. While Afghan women remain strong and hopeful for a brighter future, the unknown future diminishes this hope—the uncertainty of what is ahead.

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## Appendix A: Glossary

*Burka:* An outer garment worn by women in some Islamic traditions to cover the entire body, with a mesh screen for the eyes.

*Buzkashi:* A national sport mainly played in the central provinces.

*Hazaras:* Persian-speaking Shia Muslims who mainly live in central Afghanistan.

*Mujahidin:* An opposition group formed in Afghanistan in response to the Soviet invasion.

*Mullah:* A religious leader; mosque prayer leader.

*Pashtu:* One of Afghanistan's official languages, mainly spoken in the eastern and southern provinces of Afghanistan.

*Pashtun:* The largest ethnolinguistic group in Afghanistan, living primarily in eastern and southern Afghanistan.

*Pashtunwali:* Customary laws based on tribal law, mainly practiced in eastern and southern Afghanistan.

*Qur'an:* The Islamic holy book.

*Sharia:* Islamic code of law; literally translates to "consultation."

*Shura:* Community-based council.

*Suni:* The largest denomination of Islam, which is based on the belief that Prophet Mohammad died without appointing a successor to lead the Muslim community.

*Tajik:* The second largest ethnic group in Afghanistan, mainly located in provinces bordering Tajikistan.

*Taliban*: Plural of *talib*, an Arabic word meaning someone who is seeking religious knowledge.

*Ullamah*: A class of individuals with knowledge in Sunni Islam who have been trained in the religious sciences.

*Zane bi sarparast*: A title meaning “an unfortunate women,” given to a widow.

## Appendix B: Acronyms

ANDS: Afghanistan National Development Strategy

AREU: Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit

AWSDC: Afghan Women's Skill Development Council

CDC: Community Development Council

FP: facilitating partner

GIRoA: Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan

MOWA: Ministry of Women's Affairs

MRRD: Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development

NAPWA: National Action Plan for the Women of Afghanistan

NSP: National Solidarity Programme

UNDP: United Nations Development Programme

## Appendix C: Stake (2005) Checklist

1. Is the report easy to read?
2. Does it fit together, each sentence contributing to the whole?
3. Does the report have a conceptual structure (for example, themes or issues?)
4. Are its issues developed in a serious and scholarly way?
5. Is the case adequately defined?
6. Is there a sense of story to the presentation?
7. Is the reader provided with some vicarious experience?
8. Have quotations been used effectively?
9. Are headings, figures, artifacts, appendixes, and indexes used effectively?
10. Was it edited well, then again with a last minute polish?
11. Has the writer made sound assertions, neither over- nor under-interpreting?
12. Has adequate attention been paid to various contexts?
13. Were sufficient raw data presented?
14. Were the data resources well-chosen and in sufficient number?
15. Do observations and interpretations appear to have been triangulated?
16. Are the role and point of view of the researcher nicely apparent?
17. Is the nature of the intended audience apparent?
18. Is empathy shown for all sides?
19. Are personal intentions examined?
20. Does it appear that individuals were put at risk?

#### Appendix D: Key Participant Selection Criteria

- Gender: Female
- Location: Rural areas of Afghanistan
- Age range: 25–40
- Marital status: Married
- Education: No preference
- Recipient of foreign aid within the past 5 years
- Current recipient of foreign aid assistance
- Current business or NGO owner in a rural province
- Acquired stable and sustainable skills due to receipt of foreign aid

## Appendix E: Interview Questions—Key Participant (SY)

The following questions were developed for the key participant. Subquestions were derived from the answers.

### **Introductory**

1. Can you tell me about yourself? Be as specific as possible.
  - Where were you born?
  - How old are you?
  - What is your education level?
  - How long have you been married?
  - How many children do you have?
  - How many people live in your household?

### **Professional Experience**

2. What is your profession at the moment?
3. What is your ranking at the moment?
4. How many people (if any) do you supervise?
5. How long have you been working in this position?
6. How many hours a week do you work?

### **Capacity Building**

7. What skills are required to excel in your profession? What is the timeline?
8. When you started in 2007, what skills did you have to move your NGO forward?
9. Which donor agency funded your skill development trainings?



10. What skills have you learned? And how did the new skills contributed to your advancement?
11. What is the longest training you have received which had a profound impact on your capacity? Where was the training held? Who funded the training?
12. Who motivated you to attend a long-term training program?
13. What was the perception of donors when you first established your NGO and began seeking funds in 2007?
14. What was the perception of donors after you acquired proper skills during 2009?
15. Which donors funded projects in your province?
16. How did capacity building drive you to apply for larger funds?
17. What motivated you to learn new skills?
18. How did learning new skills contribute to your image in your province?
19. When you took steps to learn new skills, what kind of challenges did you have to overcome?

#### **Sustainable Income Generation Questions**

20. What is an example of an income generation project that you have implemented that led to sustainable employment for women in your province?
21. Who funded the project? How long was the project?
22. What was the outcome of the project?
23. How many people benefited from this project?
24. How many are currently working on this project? And what is their main motivating factor? Who is their support system?

25. How many have stopped working on this project? What caused them to stop?
26. What was the community's perception of these women?
27. Who supported their engagement in this project?
28. What was the ultimate goal for the project? Was there sustainability? How can this goal be achieved?
29. What challenges do women have in learning new skills and advancing themselves in remote, rural areas? How can they overcome the challenges?

### **Social Status Change Questions**

30. How would you describe women's status in Afghanistan?
31. What are the challenges Afghan women face that hinders their advancement in society?
32. How can they overcome challenges?
33. What do Afghan women need to make a social change?
34. Why do educated women live the country?
35. When did you start noticing women making a social change in Afghanistan?
36. In which sector in society do you see the social change for Afghan women? Why?
37. Which sectors are most challenging for Afghan women who wish to advance in society? Why?
38. When women go through education and they go through university, after that what happens? And why?
39. How do you perceive your own advancement? Was it due to your willingness or were you forced?

40. Who supported your movement? Please be as explicit as possible.
41. What advice would you give to your Afghan sisters on how to understand their potential and advance in society?

**Foreign Aid**

42. What was foreign aid success? And why?
43. What should foreign aid have done differently in empowering women in rural areas?
44. What is life for Afghan women beyond foreign aid? How will they survive? Who will support their movement?

## Appendix F: Interview Questions—Key Participant's Husband (SN)

**Introductory**

1. Can you tell me about yourself? Be as specific as possible.

Where were you born?

What is your religion?

What is your education level?

What is your current employment?

How many people live in your household?

Who is the main supporter in the household?

**Social Status Change**

2. What made you decide to go against the Afghan tradition and support your wife?

What motivated you to support her? And why?

3. How has her advancement made an impact on family dynamics? What was the impact?

4. What challenges, if any, have you faced when supporting your wife? What was the perception of the community leaders?

5. What is your wife's reputation in the community? How is she perceived by the community leaders?

**Foreign Aid Assistance**

6. What was the contribution of foreign aid in building your wife's capacity? How could your wife advance without foreign aid?

7. How do you perceive Afghan women's future beyond foreign aid?

**General**

8. What is the role of an Afghan man to motivate an Afghan woman to advance in society?
9. What would you describe as the biggest challenges for an Afghan woman to advance in society?
10. What is Afghan women's future beyond foreign aid? How will they survive?
11. What advice would you give to your Afghan brothers in supporting women to advance in society?

## Appendix G: Interview Questions for Active Female Beneficiary Participant (SK)

### **Introductory**

1. Can you tell me about yourself? Be as specific as possible.
  - Where were you born?
  - How old are you?
  - What is your education level?
  - How long have you been married?
  - How many children do you have?
  - How many people live in your household?
  - How many people do you financially support?

### **Capacity Building, Skill Development**

2. What is your profession at the moment?
3. What were you doing prior your current profession?
4. Where did you acquire the skills in order to have the current profession?
5. Who helped you with the skill development?
6. Who supported you to learn new skills? And why?
7. What was the motivation factor for you to acquire new skills? And why?
8. What made you decide to advance in the society? And why?
9. How much are you earning at the moment? (per week/month)
10. How did new skills and capacity building contribute to sustainable income generation?

11. Who helped you to decide to learn new skills? What skills did you learn?
12. Who supported you in learning new skills?
13. How did new skills lead to sustainable income generation?

### **Social Status Change**

14. When did you decide to change your status? What made you decide? Was this voluntarily or by force?
15. How many people in your family have been affected as the result of your new skills and having a sustainable income?
16. How has your life changed by earning an income?
17. Who made a profound impact in your social status change?
18. What is the role of family support in women's advancement in society?
19. What is your perception of women's status in Afghanistan, especially in rural areas?
20. What can be done to encourage women in rural areas to acquire new skills and build a sustainable livelihood? Who should motivate them?
21. What is the family's role in women's advancement in society?
22. What is the biggest challenge for women in Afghanistan to become self-sustaining?
23. How can an Afghan woman in a rural area change her social status?
24. What is the biggest challenge for an Afghan woman that hinders her advancement in society?

### **Foreign Aid**

25. How did foreign aid help with your social movement?
26. What is life for Afghan women beyond foreign aid? How can the government help Afghan women to get ahead? How will they survive?

**Motivation and Persistence**

27. What motivates you to get ahead in society?
28. Why do you continue with the baking project? What is your vision?
29. What advice would you give to your Afghan sisters in making a social movement?
30. What advice would you give to Afghan men in promoting women to advance in society?



## Appendix H: Interview Questions for Active Female Beneficiary Participant (HA)

### **Introductory**

1. Can you tell me about yourself? Be as specific as possible.
  - Where were you born?
  - How old are you?
  - What is your education level?
  - How long have you been married?
  - How many children do you have?
  - How many people live in your household?
  - How many people do you financially support?

### **Capacity Building, Skill Development**

2. What is your profession at the moment?
3. What were you doing prior your current profession?
4. Where did you acquire the skills in order to have the current profession?
5. Who helped you with skill development?
6. Who supported you to learn new skills? And why?
7. What was the motivation factor for you to acquire new skills? Why?
8. What made you decide to advance in society? And why?
9. How much are you earning at the moment? (per week/month)
10. How did new skills and capacity building contribute to sustainable income generation?
11. Who helped you to decide to learn new skills? What skills did you learn?

12. Who supported you in learning new skills?
13. How did new skills lead to a sustainable income generation?

### **Social Status Change**

14. When did you decide to change your status? What made you decide? Was this voluntarily or by force?
15. How many people in your family have been affected as the result of your new skills and having a sustainable income?
16. How has your life changed by earning an income?
17. Who made a profound impact in your social status change?
18. What is the role of family support in women's advancement in society?
19. What is your perception of women's status in Afghanistan, especially in rural areas?
20. What can be done to encourage women in rural areas to acquire new skills and build a sustainable livelihood? Who should motivate them?
21. What is the family's role in women's advancement in society?
22. What is the biggest challenge for women in Afghanistan to become self-sustaining?
23. How can an Afghan woman in a rural area change her social status?
24. What is the biggest challenge for an Afghan woman that hinders her advancement in society?

### **Foreign Aid**

25. How did foreign aid help with your social movement?

26. What is life for Afghan women beyond foreign aid? How can the government help Afghan women to get ahead? How will they survive?

**Motivation and Persistence**

27. What motivates you to get ahead in the society?
28. Why do you continue with baking project? What is your vision?
29. What advice would you give to your Afghan sisters in making a social movement?
30. What advice would you give to Afghan men in promoting women to advance in society?

## Appendix I: Interview Questions from Nonactive Female Beneficiary Participant (MA)

**Introductory**

1. Can you tell me about yourself? Be as specific as possible.
  - Where were you born?
  - How old are you?
  - What is your education level?
  - How long have you been married?
  - How many children do you have?
  - How many people live in your household?
  - How many people do you financially support?

**Capacity Building, Skill Development**

2. What is your profession at the moment?
3. What were you doing prior your current profession?
4. Where did you acquire the skills in order to have the current profession?
5. Who helped you with skill development?
6. Who supported you to learn new skills? And why?
7. What was the motivation factor for you to acquire new skills? Why?
8. What made you decide to advance in society? And why?
9. How much are you earning at the moment? (per week/month)
10. How did new skills and capacity building contribute to sustainable income generation?
11. Who helped you to decide to learn new skills? What skills did you learn?

12. Who supported you in learning new skills?
13. How did new skills lead to a sustainable income generation?

### **Social Status Change**

14. When did you decide to change your status? What made you decide? Was this voluntarily or by force?
15. How many people in your family have been affected as the result of your new skills and having a sustainable income?
16. How has your life changed by earning an income?
17. Who made a profound impact in your social status change?
18. What is the role of family support in women's advancement in society?
19. What is your perception of women's status in Afghanistan, especially in rural areas?
20. What can be done to encourage women in rural areas to acquire new skills and build a sustainable livelihood? Who should motivate them?
21. What is the family's role in women's advancement in society?
22. What is the biggest challenge for women in Afghanistan to become self-sustaining?
23. How can an Afghan woman in a rural area change her social status?
24. What is the biggest challenge for Afghan women that hinders their advancement in society?

**Foreign Aid**

25. What is your perception of foreign aid? How did foreign aid help with your skill development?
26. What is your perception of life for Afghan women beyond foreign aid? How can the government help Afghan women to get ahead? How will they survive?

**Motivation and Persistence**

27. What motivated you to learn new skills?
28. Why did you stop with the baking project?
29. Will you return to the project? What would motivate you to return and why?
30. What advice would you give to your Afghan sisters in making a social movement?
31. What advice would you give to Afghan men in promoting women to advance in society?

## Appendix J: Interview Questions from Nonactive Female Beneficiary Participant (MAH)

### **Introductory**

1. Can you tell me about yourself? Be as specific as possible.
  - Where were you born?
  - How old are you?
  - What is your education level?
  - How long have you been married?
  - How many children do you have?
  - How many people live in your household?
  - How many people do you financially support?

### **Capacity Building, Skill Development**

2. What is your profession at the moment?
3. What were you doing prior your current profession?
4. Where did you acquire the skills in order to have the current profession?
5. Who helped you with the skill development?
6. Who supported you to learn new skills? And why?
7. What was the motivation factor for you to acquire new skills? And why?
8. What made you decide to advance in the society? And why?
9. How much are you earning at the moment? (per week/month)
10. How did new skills and capacity building contribute to sustainable income generation?
11. Who helped you to decide to learn new skills? What skills did you learn?

12. Who supported you in learning new skills?
13. How did new skills lead to a sustainable income generation?

### **Social Status Change**

14. When did you decide to change your status? What made you decide? Was this voluntarily or by force?
15. How many people in your family have been affected as the result of your new skills and having a sustainable income?
16. How has your life changed by earning an income?
17. Who made a profound impact in your social status change?
18. What is the role of family support in women's advancement in society?
19. What is your perception of women's status in Afghanistan, especially in rural areas?
20. What can be done to encourage women in rural areas to acquire new skills and build a sustainable livelihood? Who should motivate them?
21. What is the family's role in women's advancement in society?
22. What is the biggest challenge for women in Afghanistan to become self-sustaining?
23. How can an Afghan woman in a rural area change her social status?
24. What is the biggest challenge for Afghan women that hinders their advancement in society?



**Foreign Aid**

25. What is your perception of foreign aid? How did foreign aid help with your skill development?
26. What is your perception of life for Afghan women beyond foreign aid? How can the government help Afghan women to get ahead? How will they survive?

**Motivation and Persistence**

27. What motivated you to learn new skills?
28. Why did you stop with the baking project?
29. Will you return to the project? What would motivate you to return and why?
30. What advice would you give to your Afghan sisters in making a social movement?
31. What advice would you give to Afghan men in promoting women to advance in society?

## Appendix K: Key Participant (SY) Verbal Consent Form via Skype

Date:

Time:

Place:

My name is Hilda Grigorian. I am a Ph.D. candidate at the Walden University. To fulfill my doctoral studies, I am conducting research to determine if the foreign aid has contributed in developing a stable livelihood through capacity building of ONE Afghan woman in your province.

The purpose of the study is to demonstrate the impact of the foreign aid on building a strong capacity of ONE Afghan woman. Due to building a strong capacity and given proper tools, the Afghan woman in turn made a positive social impact on building the capacity of other women in the province.

While this study focuses on ONE woman, the anticipated benefit of the findings will be manifold. The findings will be disseminated discreetly to other women in your province to bring awareness of the importance of skill development with the intent for other Afghan women to explore their potential and advance in the society. The findings will be submitted to the Ministry of Women's Affairs for consideration and inclusion into the National Action Plan for Women of Afghanistan (NAPWA).

You have been selected as a key participant for this study, mainly due to your successful performance and track record in making a social change and building a strong female workforce in the province. You have shown a successful track record on

implementing projects through your own NGO as well as the successful completion of USAID Ambassador Small Grants Project in the province which resulted in building the capacity of 20 vulnerable women in the province and led to a sustainable livelihood for these women. Based on your past and current performance and meeting the entire criteria set by the researcher, you have been selected as a key participant for this research study.

The criteria set by the researcher are as follows:

1. An Afghan woman in a rural province
2. A recipient of foreign aid during the past 5 years
3. Age: 25-40
4. Married
5. Education level of high school or higher
6. Evidence of a sustainable livelihood due to receipt of foreign aid

### **Data Collection Process**

Due to security unrest in the country, the researcher has been advised to not travel to the province at this time. A distant data collection will take place via Skype. After your approval is secured to conduct an interview with your spouse, the following steps will take place to collect data.

1. An initial interview will be done via Skype lasting approximately 2 hours.
2. There may be follow-up interviews which will be determined based on the findings from the initial interview. If a follow-up interview is needed, I will give you ample notice.

3. You will be asked to provide contact information for others you think it would be beneficial for me to contact.
4. Review my initial interpretations to ensure I adequately collected data and recorded what you said.

### **Validation and Confirmation of Collected Data**

Upon compilation of data, a draft document will be submitted to the key participant for review, comments, and/or clarification.

### **Confidentiality**

This research will NOT reveal the key participant's identity or the location. To protect the key participant's true identity, a fictitious name will be assigned at all times. To secure the safety of the key participant, the researcher will NOT keep any written consent with original signature. All data will be kept in a safe external website and will not be shared with anyone except the dissertation committee members.

### **Safety and Risk Management**

I have spent around 8 years in Afghanistan and fully understand and acknowledge minimal risk factors which may be associated with this study; however, it is my intent to ensure the key participant's safety at all times. I will do my best to keep the risk at a minimum by arranging meetings via Skype at different hours, do not keep a routine schedule, and ensure the key participant is in the comfort of her resident, accompanied by a male companion.

### **Potential Conflict of Interest**

I have previously worked as a USAID Field Program Officer in the province (2009–2010), but I left Afghanistan in 2012 and am no longer associated with the USAID or any other donor agency. This research study is apart from my previous role as a USAID representative in your province and is not a conflict of interest.

### **Point of Contacts**

My role is the researcher for this study. At the moment, I am residing in Armenia with a time difference of 30 minutes behind Afghanistan. Should you need to contact me at any time, please note that I will be available on Skype Monday through Sunday from 09:00–14:00 and 16:00–19:00 (Afghanistan Time).

My contact information is as follows:

[Redacted]

In my absence, please contact Dr. Kathleen Schulin at: [kathleen.schulin@waldenu.edu](mailto:kathleen.schulin@waldenu.edu)

### **Withdrawal From the Study**

Please note that you are under NO OBLIGATION to participate in this research; this is STRICTLY a voluntary participation and you are free at will to withdraw from this research at any time, should you feel threatened. Please be informed that you have **72 hours** to make a decision on participating in this study. Please let me know of your decision by e-mail to: [Redacted].

**Researcher Statement**

I, Hilda Grigorian (researcher) attest that this consent was discussed in detail with the key participant via Skype on \_\_\_\_\_. A verbal consent was received on (date)\_\_\_\_\_ at (time and location)\_\_\_\_\_.

Researcher Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher Signature:

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Time: \_\_\_\_\_

Place: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix L: Key Participant's Husband (SN) Verbal Consent Form via Skype

Date:

Time:

Place:

My name is Hilda Grigorian. I am a Ph.D. candidate at the Walden University. To fulfill my doctoral studies, I am conducting research to determine if foreign aid has contributed in developing a stable livelihood through capacity building of ONE Afghan woman (key participant) in your province.

The purpose of the study is to demonstrate the impact of foreign aid on building a strong capacity of ONE Afghan woman. Due to building a strong capacity and given proper tools, the Afghan woman in turn made a positive social impact on building the capacity of other women in the province

While this study focuses on ONE woman, the anticipated benefit of the findings will be manifold. The findings will be disseminated discreetly to other women in your province to bring awareness of the importance of skill development with the intent for other Afghan women to explore their potential and advance in the society. The findings will be submitted to the Ministry of Women's Affairs for consideration and inclusion into the National Action Plan for Women of Afghanistan (NAPWA).

Your spouse has been selected to be the key participant in this study, mainly due to her successful performance and track record in building a strong female workforce in the province. Her story will encourage other Afghan women to explore their potential and move forward in life. Your support has been instrumental in her success and will open

new doors to other Afghan men to understand that women can be vital members of the society.

### **Data Collection**

Due to security unrest in the country, the researcher has been advised to not travel to the province at this time. A distant data collection will take place via Skype. After your approval is secured to conduct an interview with your spouse, the following steps will take place to collect data.

1. An initial interview will be done via Skype, lasting approximately 2 hours.
2. There may be follow-up interviews which will be determined based on the findings from the initial interview. If a follow-up interview needed, I will give you ample notice.
3. Review my initial interpretations to ensure I adequately collected data and recorded all that was said.

### **Validation and Confirmation of Collected Data**

Upon compilation of data, a draft document will be submitted to the key participant for review, comments, and/or clarification.

### **Confidentiality**

This research will NOT reveal your spouse's (key participant) identity or the location. To protect the true identity of your spouse (key participant), a fictitious name will be assigned at all times. To secure the safety of your spouse (key participant), the researcher will NOT keep any written consent with original signature. All data will be



kept in a safe external website and will not be shared with anyone except the dissertation committee members.

### **Safety and Risk Management**

I have spent around 8 years in Afghanistan and fully understand and acknowledge minimal risk factors which may be associated with this study; however, it is my intent to ensure that your spouse (key participant) is safe at all times. I will do my best to keep the risk at minimum by arranging meetings via Skype at different hours, do not keep a routine schedule, and ensure your spouse (key participant) is in the comfort of her residence, accompanied by a male companion.

### **Point of Contacts**

My role is the researcher for this study. At the moment, I am residing in Armenia with a time difference of 30 minutes behind Afghanistan. Should you need to contact me at any time, please note that I will be available on Skype Monday through Sunday from 09:00-14:00 and 16:00-19:00 (Afghanistan Time).

My contact information is as follows:

[Redacted]In my absence, please contact Dr. Kathleen Schulin

at:kathleen.schulin@waldenu.edu

### **Withdrawal From the Study**

Please note that you are under NO OBLIGATION to participate in this research; this is STRICTLY a voluntary participation and you are free at will to withdraw from this research at any time, should you feel threatened. Please be informed that you have **72**

**hours** to make a decision on participating in this study. Please let me know of your decision by e-mail to: [hilda.grigorian@waldenu.edu](mailto:hilda.grigorian@waldenu.edu)

**Researcher Statement**

I, Hilda Grigorian (researcher) attest that this consent was discussed in detail with the key participant husband via Skype on \_\_\_\_\_. A verbal consent was received on (date)\_\_\_\_\_ at (time and location)\_\_\_\_\_.

Researcher Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher Signature:

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Time: \_\_\_\_\_

Place: \_\_\_\_\_

Appendix M: Active Female Beneficiary Participant (SK) Verbal Consent Form via  
Skype

Date:

Time:

Place:

My name is Hilda Grigorian. I am a Ph.D. candidate at the Walden University. To fulfill my doctoral studies, I am conducting research to determine if foreign aid has contributed in developing a stable livelihood through capacity building of ONE Afghan woman in your province. While this study focuses on ONE woman, the anticipated benefit of the findings will be manifold. The findings will be disseminated discreetly to other women in your province to bring awareness of the importance of skill development with the intent for other Afghan women to explore their potential and advance in society. The findings will be submitted to the Ministry of Women's Affairs (MOWA) for consideration and inclusion into the National Action Plan for Women of Afghanistan (NAPWA).

The purpose of the study is to demonstrate the impact of foreign aid on building a strong capacity of ONE Afghan woman. Due to building a strong capacity and given proper tools, the Afghan woman in turn made a positive social impact on building the capacity of other women in the province. You have been identified by the key participant as an active beneficiary, currently working on the baking project funded by the USAID, and have been included in this study for the following reasons:

1. You have participated in a foreign aid funded project which resulted skill development.
2. The new skills have made a profound social impact in your life and affected your livelihood.
3. You now have a sustainable livelihood which has affected your social status.

### **Data Collection**

1. An initial interview will be done via Skype lasting approximately 2 hours.
2. There may be follow-up interviews which will be determined based on the findings from the initial interview. If a follow-up interview needed, I will give you ample notice.
3. Review my initial interpretations to ensure I adequately collected data and recorded all that was said.

### **Validation and Confirmation of Collected Data**

Upon compilation of data, a draft document will be submitted to the key participant for review, comments, and/or clarification.

### **Confidentiality**

This research will NOT reveal your identity nor the location. To protect your true identity, a fictitious name will be assigned at all times. To secure your safety, the researcher will NOT keep any written consent with original signature. All data will be kept in a safe external website and will not be shared with anyone except the dissertation committee members.

**Safety and Risk Management**

I have spent around 8 years in Afghanistan and fully understand and acknowledge minimal risk factors which may be associated with this study; however, it is my intent to ensure your safety at all times. I will do my best to keep the risk at a minimum by arranging meetings via Skype on different hours, do not keep a routine schedule, and ensure you are in a comfortable environment and accompanied by a male companion.

**Potential Conflict of Interest**

I have previously worked as a USAID Field Program Officer in the province (2009-2010), but I left Afghanistan in 2012 and am no longer associated with the USAID or any other donor agency. This research study is apart from my previous role as a USAID representative in your province and not a conflict of interest.

**Point of Contacts**

My role is the researcher for this study. At the moment, I am residing in Armenia with a time difference of 30 minutes behind Afghanistan. Should you need to contact me at any time, please note that I will be available on Skype Monday through Sunday from 09:00-14:00 and 16:00-19:00 (Afghanistan Time).

My contact information is as follows:

[Redacted]

In my absence, please contact Dr. Kathleen Schulin at: [kathleen.schulin@waldenu.edu](mailto:kathleen.schulin@waldenu.edu)

**Withdrawal From the Study**

Please note that you are under NO OBLIGATION to participate in this research; this is STRICTLY a voluntary participation and you are free at will to withdraw from this

research at any time, should you feel threatened. Please be informed that you have **72 hours** to make a decision on participating in this study. Please let me know of your decision by e-mail to:[Redacted].

**Researcher Statement:**

I, Hilda Grigorian (researcher) attest that this consent was discussed in detail with participant A via Skype on \_\_\_\_\_. A verbal consent was received on (date)\_\_\_\_\_ at (time and location)\_\_\_\_\_.

Researcher Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher Signature:

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Time: \_\_\_\_\_

Place: \_\_\_\_\_



Appendix N: Active Female Beneficiary Participant (HA) Verbal Consent Form via  
Skype

Date:

Time:

Place:

My name is Hilda Grigorian. I am a Ph.D. candidate at the Walden University. To fulfill my doctoral studies, I am conducting research to determine if foreign aid has contributed in developing a stable livelihood through capacity building of ONE Afghan woman in your province. While this study focuses on ONE woman, the anticipated benefit of the findings will be manifold. The findings will be disseminated discreetly to other women in your province to bring awareness of the importance of skill development with the intent for other Afghan women to explore their potential and advance in the society. The findings will be submitted to the Ministry of Women's Affairs (MOWA) for consideration and inclusion into the National Action Plan for Women of Afghanistan (NAPWA).

The purpose of this study was to determine whether an Afghan woman in a rural province, through receipt of foreign aid assistance, has built a strong capacity to secure a sustainable livelihood and in turn made a social impact on building the capacity of other women in your province. For this purpose, you have been identified by the key participant as an active beneficiary, currently working on the baking project funded by USAID and you have been included in this study for the following reasons:

1. You have participated in a foreign aid funded project which resulted skill development.
2. The new skills have made a profound social impact in your life and affected your livelihood.
3. You now have a sustainable livelihood which has affected your social status.

### **Data Collection**

1. An initial interview will be done via Skype lasting approximately 2 hours.
2. There may be follow-up interviews which will be determined based on the findings from the initial interview. If a follow-up interview needed, I will give you ample notice.
3. Review my initial interpretations to ensure I adequately collected data and recorded all that was said.

### **Validation and Confirmation of Collected Data**

Upon compilation of data, a draft document will be submitted to the key participant for review, comments, and/or clarification.

### **Confidentiality**

This research will NOT reveal your identity nor the location. To protect your true identity, a fictitious name will be assigned at all times. To secure your safety, the researcher will NOT keep any written consent with original signature. All data will be kept in a safe external website and will not be shared with anyone except the dissertation committee members.

**Safety and Risk Management**

I have spent around 8 years in Afghanistan and fully understand and acknowledge minimal risk factors which may be associated with this study; however, it is my intent to ensure your safety at all times. I will do my best to keep the risk at a minimum by arranging meetings via Skype at different hours, do not keep a routine schedule and ensure you are in a comfortable environment and accompanied by a male companion.

**Potential Conflict of Interest**

I have previously worked as a USAID Field Program Officer in the province (2009-2010), but I left Afghanistan in 2012 and am no longer associated with the USAID or any other donor agency. This research study is apart from my previous role as a USAID representative in your province and not a conflict of interest.

**Point of Contacts**

My role is the researcher for this study. At the moment, I am residing in Armenia with a time difference of 30 minutes behind Afghanistan. Should you need to contact me at any time, please note that I will be available on Skype Monday through Sunday from 09:00-14:00 and 16:00-19:00 (Afghanistan Time).

My contact information is as follows:

[Redacted]

In my absence, please contact Dr. Kathleen Schulin at: [kathleen.schulin@waldenu.edu](mailto:kathleen.schulin@waldenu.edu)

**Withdrawal From the Study**

Please note that you are under NO OBLIGATION to participate in this research, this is STRICTLY a voluntary participation and you are free at will to withdraw from this

research at any time, should you feel threatened. Please be informed that you have **72 hours** to make a decision on participating in this study. Please let me know of your decision by e-mail to: [Redacted].

**Researcher Statement**

I, Hilda Grigorian (researcher) attest that this consent was discussed in detail with the participant B via Skype on \_\_\_\_\_. A verbal consent was received on (date)\_\_\_\_\_ at (time and location)\_\_\_\_\_.

Researcher Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher Signature:

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Time: \_\_\_\_\_

Place: \_\_\_\_\_

Appendix O: Nonactive Female Beneficiary Participant (MA) Verbal Consent Form via  
Skype

Date:

Time:

Place:

My name is Hilda Grigorian. I am a Ph.D. candidate at the Walden University. To fulfill my doctoral studies, I am conducting research to determine if foreign aid has contributed in developing a stable livelihood through capacity building of ONE Afghan woman in your province. While this study focuses on ONE woman, the anticipated benefit of the findings will be manifold. The findings will be disseminated discreetly to other women in your province to bring awareness of the importance of skill development with the intent for other Afghan women to explore their potential and advance in the society. The findings will be submitted to the Ministry of Women's Affairs (MOWA) for consideration and inclusion into the National Action Plan for Women of Afghanistan (NAPWA).

The purpose of this study was to determine whether an Afghan woman in a rural province, through receipt of foreign aid assistance, has built a strong capacity to secure a sustainable livelihood and is able to make a social impact on the lives of other women. You have been identified by the key participant as a non-active beneficiary, who formerly participated in the baking project funded by the USAID, and you have been included in this study for the following reasons:

1. You have participated in a foreign aid funded project which resulted in skill development.
2. The new skills have made a profound social impact in your life and affected your livelihood.
3. You now have a sustainable livelihood which has affected your social status.

### **Data Collection**

1. An initial interview will be done via Skype lasting approximately 2 hours.
2. There may be follow-up interviews which will be determined based on the findings from the initial interview. If a follow-up interview needed, I will give you ample notice.
3. Review my initial interpretations to ensure I adequately collected data and recorded all that was said.

### **Validation and Confirmation of Collected Data**

Upon compilation of data, a draft document will be submitted to the key participant for review, comments, and/or clarification.

### **Confidentiality**

This research will NOT reveal your identity nor the location. To protect your true identity, a fictitious name will be assigned at all times. To secure your safety, the researcher will NOT keep any written consent with original signature. All data will be kept in a safe external website and will not be shared with anyone except the dissertation committee members.

**Safety and Risk Management**

I have spent around 8 years in Afghanistan and fully understand and acknowledge minimal risk factors which may be associated with this study; however, it is my intent to ensure your safety at all times. I will do my best to keep the risk at minimum by arranging meetings via Skype at different hours, do not keep a routine schedule, and ensure you are in a comfortable environment and accompanied by a male companion.

**Potential Conflict of Interest**

I have previously worked as a USAID Field Program Officer in the province (2009-2010), but I left Afghanistan in 2012 and am no longer associated with the USAID or any other donor agency. This research study is apart from my previous role as a USAID representative in your province and not a conflict of interest.

**Point of Contacts**

My role is the researcher for this study. At the moment, I am residing in Armenia with a time difference of 30 minutes behind Afghanistan. Should you need to contact me at any time, please note that I will be available on Skype Monday through Sunday from 09:00-14:00 and 16:00-19:00 (Afghanistan Time).

My contact information is as follows:

Hilda.grigorian@waldenu.edu

In my absence, please contact Dr. Kathleen Schulin at:kathleen.schulin@waldenu.edu

**Withdrawal From the Study**

Please note that you are under NO OBLIGATION to participate in this research, this is STRICTLY a voluntary participation and you are free at will to withdraw from this



research at any time, should you feel threatened. Please be informed that you have **72 hours** to make a decision on participating in this study. Please let me know of your decision by e-mail to: [hilda.grigorian@waldenu.edu](mailto:hilda.grigorian@waldenu.edu)

**Researcher Statement**

I, Hilda Grigorian (researcher) attest that this consent was discussed in detail with the participant B via Skype on \_\_\_\_\_. A verbal consent was received on (date)\_\_\_\_\_ at (time and location)\_\_\_\_\_.

Researcher Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher Signature:

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Time: \_\_\_\_\_

Place: \_\_\_\_\_

Appendix P: Nonactive Female Beneficiary Participant (MAH) Verbal Consent Form via  
Skype

Date:

Time:

Place:

My name is Hilda Grigorian. I am a Ph.D. candidate at the Walden University. To fulfill my doctoral studies, I am conducting research to determine if foreign aid has contributed in developing a stable livelihood through capacity building of ONE Afghan woman in your province. While this study focuses on ONE woman, the anticipated benefit of the findings will be manifold. The findings will be disseminated discreetly to other women in your province to bring awareness of the importance of skill development with the intent for other Afghan women to explore their potential and advance in the society. The findings will be submitted to the Ministry of Women's Affairs (MOWA) for consideration and inclusion into the National Action Plan for Women of Afghanistan (NAPWA).

The purpose of this study was to determine whether an Afghan woman in a rural province, through receipt of foreign aid assistance, has built a strong capacity to secure a sustainable livelihood and has been able to make a social impact on the lives of other women. You have been identified by the key participant as a non-active beneficiary, who formerly participated in the baking project funded by the USAID, and you have been included in this study for the following reasons:

1. You have participated in a foreign aid funded project which resulted in skill development.
2. The new skills have made a profound social impact in your life and affected your livelihood.
3. You now have a sustainable livelihood which has affected your social status.

### **Data Collection**

1. An initial interview will be done via Skype lasting approximately 2 hours.
2. There may be follow-up interviews which will be determined based on the findings from the initial interview. If a follow-up interview needed, I will give you ample notice.
3. Review my initial interpretations to ensure I adequately collected data and recorded all that was said.

### **Validation and Confirmation of Collected Data**

Upon compilation of data, a draft document will be submitted to the key participant for review, comments, and/or clarification.

### **Confidentiality**

This research will NOT reveal your identity nor the location. To protect your true identity, a fictitious name will be assigned at all times. To secure your safety, the researcher will NOT keep any written consent with original signature. All data will be kept in a safe external website and will not be shared with anyone except the dissertation committee members.

**Safety and Risk Management**

I have spent around 8 years in Afghanistan and fully understand and acknowledge minimal risk factors which may be associated with this study; however, it is my intent to ensure your safety at all times. I will do my best to keep the risk at minimum by arranging meetings via Skype at different hours, do not keep a routine schedule, and ensure you are in a comfortable environment and accompanied by a male companion.

**Potential Conflict of Interest**

I have previously worked as a USAID Field Program Officer in the province (2009-2010), but I left Afghanistan in 2012 and am no longer associated with the USAID or any other donor agency. This research study is apart from my previous role as a USAID representative in your province and not a conflict of interest.

**Point of Contacts**

My role is the researcher for this study. At the moment, I am residing in Armenia with a time difference of 30 minutes behind Afghanistan. Should you need to contact me at any time, please note that I will be available on Skype Monday through Sunday from 09:00- 14:00 and 16:00- 19:00 (Afghanistan Time).

My contact information is as follows:

Hilda.grigorian@waldenu.edu

In my absence, please contact Dr. Kathleen Schulin at:kathleen.schulin@waldenu.edu

**Withdrawal From the Study**

Please note that you are under NO OBLIGATION to participate in this research, this is STRICTLY a voluntary participation and you are free at will to withdraw from this

research at any time, should you feel threatened. Please be informed that you have **72 hours** to make a decision on participating in this study. Please let me know of your decision by e-mail to: [hilda.grigorian@waldenu.edu](mailto:hilda.grigorian@waldenu.edu)

**Researcher Statement**

I, Hilda Grigorian (researcher) attest that this consent was discussed in detail with the participant B via Skype on \_\_\_\_\_. A verbal consent was received on (date)\_\_\_\_\_ at (time and location)\_\_\_\_\_.

Researcher Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher Signature:

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Time: \_\_\_\_\_

Place: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix Q: Interview Matrix

Name	Interview location	Frequency/Duration	Duration
Key participant (SY)	Home	Interview 1. Initial introductory interview: Introduced study, discussed benefits, explained consent form and sought permission for audio recording.	1 hr 45 min
	Home	Interview 2. Discussed follow-up notes from initial introductory interview. Reviewed questions and answers to ensure all answers were captured properly.	2 hr
	Home	Interview 3. Discussed the entire questionnaire, clarified answers from participant.	1 hr 45 min
Key participant's husband (SN)	Home	Interview 1. Introduced study, benefits, explained consent form, sought permission for audio recording.	1 hr
	Home	Interview 2. Reviewed questions and answers, clarified input from participant.	2 hr
Active female beneficiary participant (SK)	Home	Interview 1. Discussed the study, benefits, explained the consent form, and sought permission for audio recording.	30 min
	Home	Interview 2. Reviewed questions and answers, clarified input from participant.	1 hr 45 min



Name	Interview location	Frequency/Duration	Duration
Active female beneficiary participant (HA)	Home	Interview 1. Discussed the study, benefits, explained the consent form, and sought permission for audio recording.	30 min
	Home	Interview 2. Reviewed questions and answers, clarified input from participant.	1 hr 30 min
Nonactive female beneficiary participant (MA)	Home	Interview 1. Discussed the study, benefits, explained the consent form and sought permission for audio recording.	20 min
	Home	Interview 2. Reviewed questions and answers, clarified input from participant.	40 min
Nonactive female participant (MAH)	Home	Interview 1. Discussed the study, benefits, explained the consent form and sought permission for audio recording.	20 min
	Home	Interview 2. Reviewed questions and answers, clarified input from participant.	50 min

## Appendix R: Main Themes and Subthemes

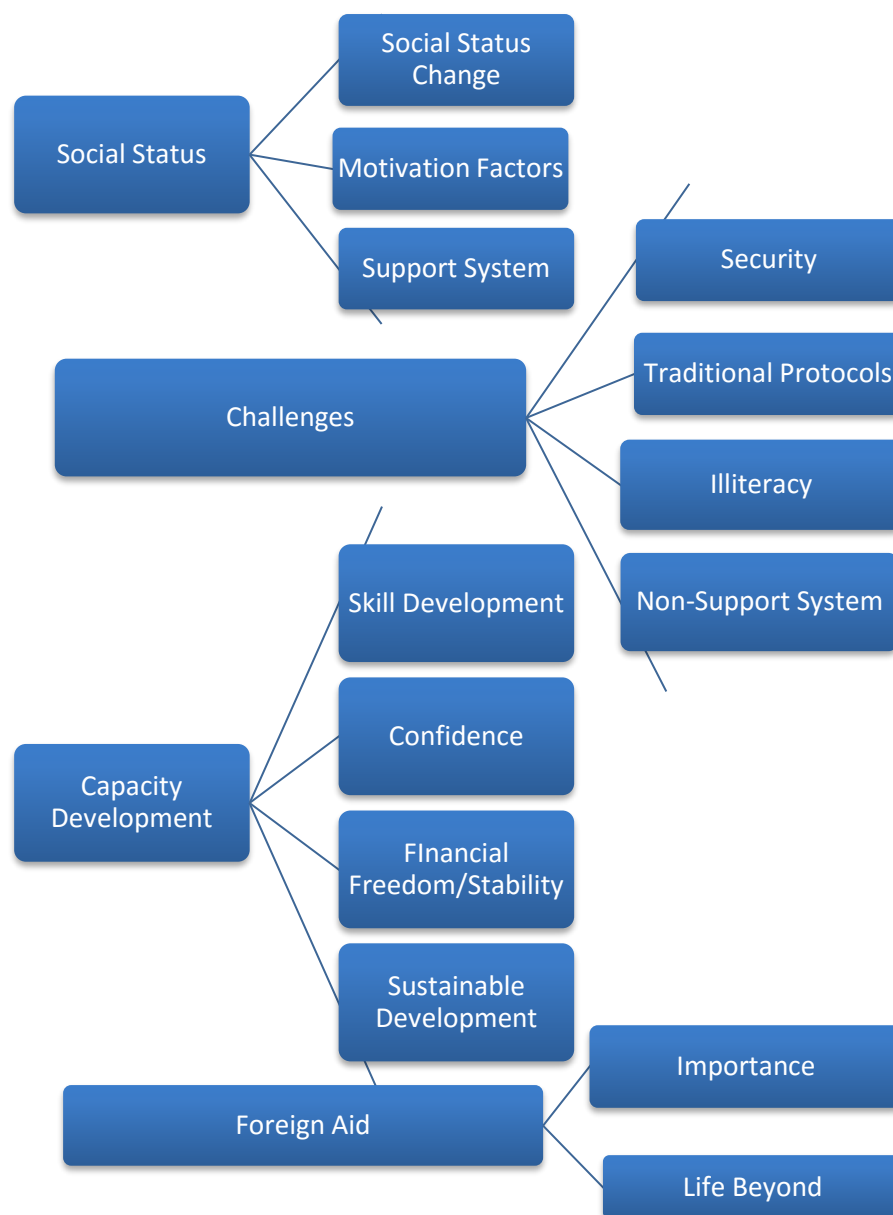


Figure R1. Main themes and subthemes.

## Appendix S: Project Photos



*Figure S1.* Women prepare a tray of cookies for baking.



*Figure S2.* Women learn to operate the new baking equipment.



*Figure S3.* The new bakery has become a popular place to buy bread, cakes, and sweets.

## Appendix T: Afghanistan Travel Warning

On September 5, 2014, the U.S. State Department issued an Afghanistan Travel Warning for U.S. citizens. The following is an extract of an e-mail sent by the Department of State.

**The Department of State warns U.S. citizens against travel to Afghanistan.** The security situation in Afghanistan is extremely unstable, and the threat to all U.S. citizens in Afghanistan remains critical. This Travel Warning supersedes the Travel Warning for Afghanistan issued on February 20, 2014.

No province in Afghanistan should be considered immune from violence and crime, and the strong possibility exists throughout the country for hostile acts, either targeted or random, against U.S. and other foreign nationals at any time. Elements of the former Taliban regime and members of other terrorist organizations hostile to the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and foreign nationals remain active in every province of the country. Furthermore, travel to all areas of Afghanistan remains unsafe due to ongoing military combat operations, landmines, banditry, armed rivalry between political and tribal groups, and the possibility of insurgent attacks, including attacks using vehicle-borne or other improvised explosive devices. The threat situation in Afghanistan is still considered critical and is expected to remain so through the current political and military transition.

There is an ongoing and serious risk throughout the country of injury and death to U.S. citizens, including those with protective security details or with Afghan and coalition security forces nearby. In March 2014, four insurgents armed with small arms infiltrated and attacked the Serena Hotel, killing ten civilians including four foreigners, one of whom was a U.S. citizen. Also in March 2014, a suicide bomber and three insurgents attacked the compound of an international non-government organization, killing two Afghan citizens and wounding another ten. On April 24, an Afghan guard at Cure Hospital killed three U.S. doctors and wounded another U.S. doctor and nurse.

Despite numerous security operations and checkpoints by Afghan and coalition forces in and around the city, Kabul remains at high risk for militant attacks, including vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices (VBIED), direct and indirect fire, and suicide bombings. Buildings or compounds that lack robust security measures in comparison to neighbouring facilities may be viewed as targets of opportunity by insurgents. Twice in March 2014, groups of insurgents attacked the office complex of Afghanistan's Independent Election Commission with person-borne improvised devices, rocket propelled grenades, and small arms killing two Afghan policemen and three civilians, and wounding five others. On July 17, 2014, a group of insurgents detonated a VBIED and occupied a building north of Kabul International Airport, targeting the airport with small arms and rocket-propelled grenades.

Proximity to or presence in areas and facilities under coalition force or U.S. government control is no guarantee of safety and should not lull U.S. citizens residing in or visiting Kabul into a false sense of security. On July 22, 2014, a suicide bomber attacked a U.S. base near the Kabul International Airport, killing six guards and wounding ten. On August 6, a lone gunman opened

fire on a group of high-level military officers inspecting Marshal Fahim National Defense University, killing a U.S. two-star General and wounding twelve others, which included U.S. citizens. On August 20, an assailant stabbed a U.S. soldier to death near Kabul International Airport.

Riots and incidents of civil disturbance can occur in Afghanistan, often without warning. U.S. citizens should avoid all rallies and demonstrations. Protests intended as peaceful can become confrontational and escalate into violence at any point. The size of these demonstrations has ranged from as small as 50 to as large as 2,500 people. The issues that typically prompt demonstrations include grievances against the government and coalition forces, as well as spontaneous, public expressions of social, political, and ethnic tensions.

Ambushes, kidnappings, robberies, and violent crime can add to the insecurity in many areas of the country. U.S. citizens representing various foreign interests in property or contract disputes -- a common problem for U.S. and foreign companies doing business in Afghanistan -- have reported that local counterparties to the disputes have threatened their lives or held them or their employees captive under extrajudicial conditions while awaiting payouts or intervention by local authorities. U.S. citizens who find themselves in such situations should not assume that local law enforcement or the U.S. Embassy will assist them in resolving such disputes or intervene on their behalf with Afghan officials.

The Department of State considers the threat to U.S. government personnel in Afghanistan sufficiently serious to require them to live and work under strict security restrictions. All locations outside the U.S. Embassy and other U.S. government facilities are considered off limits to Embassy personnel unless there is a compelling government interest in permitting such travel that outweighs the risk. In addition, the internal security policies of the U.S. Embassy may be changed or adjusted at any time and without advance notice. Periodically, the Embassy will restrict or prohibit movements by its personnel, often on short notice and for reasons such as terrorist attacks, security threats, or demonstrations. Potential target areas include key national or international government establishments, international organizations, universities, and locations frequented by the expatriate community, such as restaurants, hotels, and guesthouses.

The U.S. Embassy's ability to provide emergency consular services to U.S. citizens in Afghanistan is limited, particularly for those persons outside of Kabul. U.S. citizens who choose to visit or remain in Afghanistan despite this Travel Warning are encouraged to monitor the [Embassy's website](#) and to enroll in the [Smart Traveler Enrollment Program](#) (STEP) in order to obtain the most current information on travel and security within Afghanistan. Enrollment in STEP makes it easier for the Embassy to contact U.S. citizens in case of emergency. U.S. citizens without Internet access may enroll directly with the U.S. Embassy.

U.S. government-facilitated evacuations occur only when no safe, commercial alternatives exist. Evacuation assistance is provided on a cost-recovery basis, which means the traveller must reimburse the U.S. government for travel costs. The lack of a valid U.S. passport and Afghan visa may hinder a U.S. citizen's ability to depart the country and may slow the U.S. Embassy's ability to assist. U.S. citizens in Afghanistan should ensure that they have proper and current documentation at all times. Evacuation options from Afghanistan are extremely limited due to the lack of infrastructure, geographic constraints, and other security concerns. The U.S. government typically evacuates U.S. citizens to a safe haven, and travellers are responsible for making their own onward travel plans. U.S. citizens should not expect to be evacuated to the United States and should always maintain medevac insurance while living or traveling abroad in case they need

emergency medical evacuation back to the United States, which can be a significant expense. For more information, see ["What the Department of State Can and Can't Do in a Crisis."](#)

The U.S. Embassy in Kabul is located at Great Massoud Road (also known as Bibi Mahru or Airport Road) between Radio Television Afghanistan (RTA) and the Ministry of Public Health. The Consular Section of the U.S. Embassy can be reached at 301-490-1042, ext. 8499, from the United States or +93(0) 700-108-499 from abroad during business hours, Sunday through Thursday, 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., Kabul time. For after-hours, truly exigent emergencies involving U.S. citizens, please contact the Embassy Duty Officer at +93-(0)700-108-001. Any routine consular correspondence relating to services for U.S. citizens may be sent to [KabulACS@state.gov](mailto:KabulACS@state.gov).

The U.S. Embassy often receives threat information concerning U.S. citizens and interests in Afghanistan. For the latest security information, U.S. citizens living or traveling abroad should regularly monitor the Department of State's [Consular Affairs website](#) where the current [Worldwide Caution](#), [Travel Alerts and Travel Warnings](#), and [Country Specific Information for Afghanistan](#) can be found. Up-to-date information on security can also be obtained by calling 1-888-407-4747 toll free in the United States and Canada or, for callers in other countries, by calling a regular toll line at 1-202-501-4444. These numbers are available 8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. Eastern time, Monday through Friday (except U.S. federal holidays).

The U.S. Embassy also encourages U.S. citizens to review the [Traveler's Checklist](#), which includes valuable security information for those living or traveling abroad. Follow us on [Twitter](#) and the Bureau of Consular Affairs page on [Facebook](#) as well.

## Appendix U: IRB Approval

workflow@laureate.net

8/25/15

to me, kathleen.schul., mai.moua

Congratulations! Your Walden Institutional Review Board application has been approved. As such, you are approved by Walden University to proceed to the final study.

If you have questions about the final study process, please contact [research@waldenu.edu](mailto:research@waldenu.edu).