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**How Have Women Been Empowered by Gender-Focussed
Development Projects in Post-Taliban Afghanistan?
Reviewing the Literature Which Incorporates the Critical
Consideration of Two Gender Focussed Development
Projects.**

**A research report presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
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ABSTRACT

This research report examines the empowerment approach within the Gender and Development (GAD) discussion, providing an emphasis on women's empowerment as an instrument of post-conflict reconstruction in post-Taliban Afghanistan. Utilising a comprehensive literature review, the report establishes the framework of Naila Kabeer as a consistent base for the comparing and contrasting of two gender-focussed development programmes in Afghanistan. The contextual background of empowerment programmes pursued over the past decade in Afghanistan are presented with an examination of the challenges and opportunities encountered pursuing women's political, economic, social and psychological empowerment. A specific consideration of the New Zealand-led Provincial Reconstruction Team in Bamyan Province, Afghanistan, and the Community Development Council initiative within the Afghanistan National Solidarity Programme is undertaken. The report concludes that while there have been enormous symbolic advances for women's political empowerment in the national sphere, the more private and local the sphere examined: the less decision-making agency Afghani women are empowered to exercise. While seeking to provide opportunities for women's economic empowerment the programmes have made little practical change to women's income or financial agency. The two gender-focussed programmes examined have made significant compromises to the extremities of the local context, and are considered 'gender accommodating' rather than 'gender transformative'. The large body of literature concerning Afghanistan substantiates that the road to gender equity will stretch across the generations and is necessarily gradual to remain sustainable. As Afghanistan enters further political turmoil, the empowerment attained by Afghani women in the past decade must be expressly guarded.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AKF	Aga Khan Foundation
ANDS	Afghanistan National Development Strategy
AREU	Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit
AWE	Afghanistan Women's Empowerment Grants Programme
AWEC	Afghan Women's Education Centre
AWRC	Afghan Women's Resource Centre
AWN	Afghanistan Women's Network
CERP	Commander's Emergency Response Program (me)
CDC	Community Development Council
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
CPRC	Chronic Poverty Research Centre
CSIS	Centre for Strategic & International Studies (United States of America)
DACAAR	Danish Committee for Aid to Afghan Refugees
DAWN	Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era
DFID	Department for International Development
FET	Female Engagement Team
FP	Facilitating Partner
FRU	Family Response Unit
GAD	Gender and Development
GII	Gender Inequality Index
HDI	Human Development Index
HRW	Human Rights Watch
IDLO	the International Development Law Organisation
INZ	Immigration New Zealand
IROA	Islamic Republic of Afghanistan
ISAF	International Security Assistance Force
MDG	Millennium Development Goal

MFAA	Markets for Afghani Artisans
MFAT	Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (New Zealand)
MOE	Ministry of Education (Islamic Republic of Afghanistan)
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
MOWA	Ministry of Women's Affairs (Islamic Republic of Afghanistan)
MP	Member of Parliament
MSH	Management Services for Health (United States of America)
NAPWA	National Action Plan for the Women of Afghanistan
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NATOCC	The NATO Council of Canada
NOREF	The Norwegian Peace-building Resource Centre
NSP	National Solidarity Programme
NZ	New Zealand
NZAID	New Zealand Agency for International Development (now the NZAP within MFAT)
NZAP	New Zealand Aid Programme (previously NZAID)
NZD	New Zealand Dollar
NZDF	New Zealand Defence Force
PBS	Public Broadcasting Service (United States of America)
PRT	Provincial Reconstruction Team
POPIN	United Nations Population Informative Network
RQB	Refugee Quota Branch (of Immigration New Zealand)
SDC	Swiss Development Co-operation
TAF	The Asia Foundation
TTC	Bamyan Teacher Training College
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
UNSCR	United Nations Security Council Resolution

UNWOMEN	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
USAEK	United States of America Embassy Kabul
USAID	United States Agency (for) International Development
USD	United States (Of America) Dollar
WID	Women in Development
WPS	Women, Peace and Security
WTC	World Trade Centre

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Introduction and overview

The question of the world's women and their empowerment now inhabits a prominent seat in the modern development debate, as illustrated by the following legacy statement by former United States Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton:

Whether I am meant to or not, I challenge assumptions about women. I do make some people uncomfortable, which I'm well aware of but that's just part of coming to grips with what I believe is still one of the most important pieces of unfinished business in human history – empowering women to be able to stand up for themselves. (In Sutherland & Rubidoux, 2013 pg.1)

Such certain political sentiments have been echoed strongly by political figures of international prominence over the past decade, including former New Zealand Prime Minister Helen Clark now Head of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 2013) and former United Nations Head Kofi Annan (Porter, 2013). Following the passing of United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 1325 in 2000 mandating women's equal participation in the complex issues of peace and security in post-conflict states, and the invasion of Afghanistan by international forces in 2001; Afghanistan stood as the torch-bearer for a renewed focus on the advancement and empowerment of women (Kandiyoti, 2005). However, the initial idealistic enthusiasm of those early years appears tempered in the following statement from Afghani MP Shinkai Karokhali:

After the fall of the Taliban everyone wanted to come and work for women's rights, they were proud to say they were here to help Afghan women. Slowly, slowly this disappeared. Women are not a priority for our own government or the international community. We've been forgotten. (Shinkai Karokhail Afghani Member of Parliament (MP), 4 June 2009 HRW, 2009).

The past decade of gender-focussed development initiatives in Afghanistan provides insight into the complexities of initiating, facilitating and guarding the achievements of social transformation in a religiously conservative region which remains riven by insecurity and poverty (AREU, 2013). Afghanistan is a country where ideal words on the status of women have always struggled to translate into action (Emadi, 2005; Giustozzi, 2000). While there is no question that the almost absolute powerlessness of women during the Taliban era left Afghani women deserving of empowerment, the stubborn complexities of Afghani society have illustrated just how fraught with difficulty the long walk to gender equity in Afghanistan will be (AREU, 2013). I intend that the following literature review and research components may provide an insight into these complexities and the value of empowerment initiatives to the lives of Afghani women.

Overview of women's circumstances in Afghanistan

Afghanistan is a land-locked South-Central Asian state with a population of approximately 28 million people, including almost 6 million repatriated Afghani refugees once resident in Pakistan and Iran. Approximately 80 per cent of the Afghani peoples live in rural areas; often in regions which are particularly inaccessible and remote (Emadi, 2005). The population consists of an ethnic conglomeration of the majority Pashto, Tajik, Turkmen, Uzbek and Hazara peoples; virtually all

Afghani's associate themselves strongly with the Islamic faith (Emadi, 2005). Most align themselves with the Sunni branch of the faith, while the great majority of the Hazara people subscribe to the tenets of the Shi'a branch of Islamic belief (Emadi, 2005).

Riven by phases of intense conflict with internal and external combatants since 1977 and with a human insecurity situation which continues to constantly endanger its citizens; Afghanistan continues to rank in the lowest reaches of the human development index (HDI). While ranked second to last in the UNDP HDI survey of 2009, Afghanistan is presently situated at number 175 of the 187 states measured in 2012 (UNDP, 2013). The quantifiable measures of human development aggregated by the UNDP for Afghanistan since 1980 make uncomfortable reading. In 2012, the average Afghani citizen could expect to live for 49.1 years, complete only 3.1 years of schooling and earn the equivalent of \$1,000 USD per year (UNDP, 2013). The gender disaggregated 'Gender Inequality Index' (GII) compiled by the UNDP portrays a state of particular disadvantage for Afghani women in development, with Afghanistan ranked 147 of the 148 examined states (UNDP, 2013). Contributing indicators to the Afghani GII include an extreme maternal mortality ratio of 460 per 100,000 births, adolescent fertility pegged at an almost impossibly high 99.6 per cent, a secondary school completion rate of only 5.8 per cent for women, with only 15.7 per cent of the female population participating in the labour sector outside of subsistence agriculture (UNDP, 2013). It is estimated that 12 per cent of Afghani women are literate, as opposed to almost 40 per cent of men (MOE, 2012).

Human Rights Watch (HRW, 2013) report that the incidence of forced child marriage below the legal age of 16 for girls hovers around 50 per cent, though in reality this figure is believed to be significantly higher. In the same report, HRW (2013 pg. 3) states that more than 85 per cent of women surveyed "reported that they had experienced physical, sexual, or psychological violence or forced marriage" while 60 per cent of women reported experiencing multiple forms of gender-based violence.

One heartening indicator of steps toward greater gender parity in Afghanistan is the ratio of women in the two house of parliament, a number which presently sits at 27.6 per cent (UNDP, 2013). However, it should be noted that the quota system largely responsible for this significant figure does not legislate the policy and decision making opportunities granted female parliamentarians following their election (Kandiyoti, 2005). Furthermore, a significant proportion of women who have agitated for political participation and/or stood for election at the local, provincial and national levels have faced denunciation from influential social conservatives, targeted threats of harm, and tragically assassination (UNWOMEN, 2013; HRW, 2009).

While these figures do not tell the complete and diverse story of women's position in Afghani society (Klasen & Schuler, 2011; Hasso, 2009), they do indicate that Afghanistan is a country where women have experienced, and continue to experience, a very significant disadvantage in development (Coleman, 2004); disadvantage which can also be expressed in terms of disempowerment (Kandiyoti, 2007). The contributing factors to the context of women's disadvantage in Afghanistan are complex, variously interdependent and often hidden from view in the private sphere (Povey, 2003).

Issues and Rationale for the Study

The historical disadvantage of women in Afghanistan reached draconian extremes during the Taliban regime between 1996 and 2001 (Johnson & Leslie, 2004). The terror attacks on the World Trade Centre (WTC) North and South Towers on 11 September 2001, focussed world attention on Afghanistan as a state sponsor and facilitator of extremist Islamic terror organisations including Al-Qaida (Johnson & Leslie, 2004). The historical disadvantage of women in Afghanistan was subsequently trumpeted by international forces as a primary factor in the case for the invasion and decade long occupation of the entire country, as the first target of George W. Bush's global war on terror (HRW, 2007; Rubin, 2006).

The removal of the Taliban regime from central power and the gathering of international forces and development actors in Afghanistan have created many opportunities for women; yet the presence of foreign forces and the establishment of a new republic have also presented enormous challenges (Kandiyoti, 2005). After a decade of concentrated development aid, there have been appreciable gains for the empowerment of some Afghani women, especially in the accessible urban areas; though this conclusion is tempered by the isolation of a majority of women from any contact with state institutions let alone gender focussed development programmes in dangerously insecure rural areas (Coleman, 2004; Rubin, 2006). As the post-Taliban reconstruction of Afghanistan reaches into its second decade, international forces gradually withdraw and peace negotiations with the Taliban gather pace, a critical examination of how women have been empowered by gender focussed development programmes is timely (Dharmapuri, 2012; Wimpelmann, 2012). An understanding of the empowerment achievements made by Afghani women in the past decade will be vital to sustaining and expanding those achievements in the difficult years of transition ahead (Wimpelmann, 2012).

Given the enormity and importance of the peace building and reconstruction effort in Afghanistan, there is a wealth of literature devoted to discussions of the Afghani situation; with a rich vein of literature discussing the development agenda and gender (Kandiyoti, 2005). However, the presence of international forces in active combat continues to set the militaristic tone of many academic papers contemplating the Afghani security situation (Kandiyoti, 2007); Influential security commentator Anthony H. Cordesman (2013), in his 57 page paper 'Afghanistan: Meeting the Real World Challenges of Transition' uses the terms 'women' and 'gender' once each in the entire document, and then only related to the operational concerns of military forces. The voices of feminist academics and development actors committed to gender focussed programmes as a path to peace and security for Afghanistan are often marginalised by international relations and security experts closer to the agendas of the military industrial complex (Hampton, 2004; Hoogensen & Stuvoy, 2006; Surkhe, 2007). This research report seeks to make a worthwhile contribution to the development literature; acknowledging and asserting the central importance of gender equity and empowerment to successful post-conflict reconstruction initiatives.

Events following the Socialist Saur Revolution of early 1978, and the political context and the human insecurity which has accompanied these events, conspired to leave only a handful of female Afghani academics in country by 2001 (Kandiyoti, 2005). A visible achievement of women's political empowerment through targeted education initiatives, the numbers of Afghani women now able to discuss and examine gender and development in Afghanistan academically has increased moderately year on year (Lough *et al.*, 2012). Therefore, the undertaking of this research report in 2013/14

allows the voice of indigenous female academics to be considered and incorporated more meaningfully than in the past.

With so much said and written of Afghanistan, post-conflict reconstruction, gender and development, and women's empowerment; it can be difficult to find a niche in the literature for gender focussed research on Afghanistan. However, after a thorough search I am not aware of another study which has brought together the New Zealand-led Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) and the Community Development Council (CDC) initiatives of the National Solidarity Programme (NSP) for critical consideration and comparison regarding women's empowerment. I take special interest in the NZ-led PRT as a student of development in New Zealand, and consider the closing of the programme in early 2013 as an opportune time to consider the value of the programme in its entirety. Furthermore, 2013 has seen the recent publication of data rich studies on the CDC initiatives, such as Beath *et al.* (2013) and the prolific and excellent work of Chona R. Echavez and her colleagues of the donor-funded Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU), providing a well-informed base for further investigation and comparison into a surprisingly broad range of local contexts across Afghanistan.

Hence, I believe that there is much to substantiate the value of undertaking this research report at this transitional stage of the development agenda in Afghanistan.

Research Aims and Objectives

Women's empowerment is a cornerstone of the internationally funded development strategy to build sustainable peace and security in Afghanistan, following the ousting of the literalist and religiously fundamentalist Taliban regime in 2001 (Kandiyoti, 2005). While conceptualised and practised in many different forms by international, state and non-governmental development actors (Luttrell & Quiroz, 2009), broadly speaking empowerment seeks to transform the engendered roles and relationships within a group to advance toward and maintain gender equity (Moser, 1989). In the context of post-conflict and reconstruction, women's empowerment has been elevated in relevant sections of the United Nations apparatus as a fundamental tool in building sustainable peace and security (Hoogensen & Stuvoy, 2006).

The overall aim of this research report is to critically consider the contributions two gender focussed projects have made to gender empowerment in Afghanistan, in the 12 years following the fall of the Taliban regime in 2001. The two gender focussed projects to be examined are:

- The Community Development Council (CDC) initiative, a section of the Afghanistan National Solidarity Programme; and,
- The New Zealand-led Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) aid programme in Bamyan Province, Afghanistan.

To adequately examine and consider these projects with regard to gender empowerment in Afghanistan, two important research questions are asked:

1. How has gender empowerment been conceptualised and practised in post-conflict societies in general and Afghanistan specifically?

2. How have women and girls (and men and boys) been empowered in the two chosen gender focussed projects?

This research report will answer the above questions by achieving the following key objectives:

- To discuss and define the various concepts and practices of the empowerment approach, with subsequent regard to post-conflict states
- To consider gender empowerment within the unique context of Afghanistan
- To investigate the aspects of empowerment and sectors of Afghan society the two chosen gender focussed projects concentrate on utilising the work of Naila Kabeer (1999)
- To examine how the two chosen gender focussed projects contribute to the wider agenda of women's empowerment in Afghanistan

I envisage that in answering these research questions and fulfilling the key research objectives above, this research report will not only provide a valuable insight into the context and achievement of women's empowerment initiatives in Afghanistan over the past decade, but also provide an informed basis for presenting preliminary recommendations for the continued and expanded success of women's empowerment initiatives in the near-future.

Background to the two gender-focussed projects critically considered in this research report

In this section, a background overview is introduced for the two gender-focussed projects which are critically considered in Chapter Three of this research report. Project one is the New Zealand-led Provincial Reconstruction Team and Project two is the Community Development Council initiative, which is a section of the Afghanistan National Solidarity Programme.

Project One: The New Zealand-led Provincial Reconstruction Team in Bamyan Province, Afghanistan

New Zealand led the Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) in Bamyan Province, Afghanistan for a decade, establishing their first presence in 2003 and closing New Zealand's formal deployment of NZDF troops to the PRT on 5 April 2013. As the NZ-led PRT closed, Chief of the New Zealand Defence Force, Lieutenant General Rhys Jones stated:

The impact of our development projects in the last 10 years is considerable. It is clearly visible in the classrooms built, the hospitals refurbished, the villages with water supplies, the sealed roads, bridges and flood protection that have been constructed. (NZDF, 2013)

Bamyan Province is centrally located with a population of approximately 420,000 people; constituting the largest province of the Hazarajat region and the cultural centre of the predominantly Shi'a Hazara people (Emadi, 2005). Bamyan is the home of the world famous 'Buddha niches'; the enormous Buddhist statues having been defaced and substantively destroyed by Taliban forces in 2001 (Johnson & Leslie, 2004). Picturesque, and significantly more secure than the conflict-ridden conservative southern provinces of Afghanistan such as Helmand or Kandahar, Bamyan has

portrayed itself as more open to international forces and development actors than most (MFAT, 2013 & USAID, 2006). However, the NZDF lost eight lives on the ground in Bamyan Province over the period of the PRT due to both insurgent attack and traffic fatalities (NZDF, 2013).

The PRT incorporated contributions from a number of New Zealand government entities into its programme in Bamyan; including a substantive placement of NZDF army personnel, 16 rotations of police personnel numbering 53 individuals over 10 years; as well as a number of specialist experts in renewable energy infrastructure, tourism, sustainable agriculture, education and teacher training, health, construction; and from 2009 a formal posting of several NZAP development programme co-ordinators (MFAT, 2013). The PRT structure, which was replicated across Afghanistan, also included co-operating placements of United States Army and Department of State personnel (USAID, 2006) and co-ordinated development activities with international security forces such as the Malaysian and Singaporean Armies in later years (MFAT, 2013). It is important to note that across Afghanistan, though constructively administered and operated on a day-by-day basis by the relevant country personnel, PRT initiatives and operations are co-ordinated on a consistent basis under the command of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), which in turn is substantively administered through the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) following the auspices of the 2001 Bonn Agreement (MFAT, 2013). The PRT statement of mission, which is incorporated into the ISAF Operational Plan, reflects its military foundations:

Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) will assist the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan to extend its authority, in order to facilitate the development of a stable and secure environment in the identified area of operations, and enable Security Sector Reform (SSR) and reconstruction efforts. (ISAF, 2006 pg. 3)

Both MFAT (2013), and the NZDF (2013) state that the New Zealand Government spent upward of \$80 million NZD on development initiatives during the period of the NZ-led PRT, a tiny sum when compared to the estimated 19 billion USD spent through USAID between 2001 and 2012 (PBS, 2012); yet significant to communities in Bamyan which have historically failed to garner any significant fiscal attention or resources from the Afghani state (MFAT, 2013).

Up until the 2012/2013 fiscal year, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade stated that approximately 40 per cent of development spending in Bamyan through the PRT had targeted 'Sustainable Economic Development' (MFAT, 2013 pg. 7). Significant multi-million NZD investments were also made in 'Humanitarian & Reconstruction Projects', 'Governance, Justice and Rule of Law' and 'Education' (MFAT, 2013 pg. 7). 'Health' initiatives commanded approximately 5 per cent of development expenditure, while a supplementary budget of NZD \$89,296 had been expended on project monitoring and review expenses (MFAT, 2013)

Interestingly, the NZAP has never implicitly planned, implemented, administered and/or reviewed a women's empowerment project in Bamyan Province; however, gender is a prioritised cross-cutting theme across the entire PRT programme, including that led by New Zealand (MFAT, 2013); aligning with the gender mainstreaming agenda which has arguably predominated since the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995 (Jaquette & Staudt, 2006). Furthermore, gender equity is explicitly noted as a prioritised cross-cutting theme in the Afghanistan National Development Strategy (ANDS) of which the PRT programme derives legislative legitimacy (ISAF, 2006; IROA, 2007 & Shah, 2009)

Project Two: The Community Development Council initiative, a section of the Afghanistan National Solidarity Programme

The National Solidarity Programme (NSP) is the single largest development programme nominally devised and administered by the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan through the IROA Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development (MRRD); presently the NSP includes over 30,000 participant Afghani villages, having been initiated in a staggered expansion of participant villages since 2003 (Beath *et al.*, 2013; NSP, 2013). Working in partnership with the World Bank and a number of international donors such as the United Kingdom development institution DFID, the NSP has now expended over one billion USD yet interestingly it is predominantly regarded by the participant Afghani population as a programme wholly-owned and operated by the IROA Government (Beath *et al.*, 2013; Nixon, 2008). After approximately three years of involvement in the NSP programme, villages which have experienced success are encouraged to approach donors directly, decreasing the direct involvement of the state (Nixon, 2008).

The primary focus of the NSP is the delivery of representative governance institutions at the local level focussed directly on local development (NSP, 2013). Once established, these representative institutions are entrusted with identifying, prioritising and implementing service delivery and infrastructure development projects among their immediate rural locality (NSP, 2013). NSP governance initiatives explicitly promote gender equality as a priority objective; this prioritisation is drawn directly from the Afghanistan National Development Strategy (ANDS) document and the National Action Plan for the Women of Afghanistan (NAPWA) (Azerbaijani-Moghaddam, 2010; IROA, 2007).

The Community Development Council (CDC) is the most local, village level governance institution facilitated by the NSP (NSP, 2013). Theoretically, all CDC elections should be decided by secret ballot and each CDC should be comprised of an equal number of village-resident men and women over 18 years of age (Azerbaijani-Moghaddam, 2010). The CDC is then responsible for distributing grants equivalent to 200 USD per family, and liaising with the wider community to undertake local development projects; 10 per cent of these costs must be met by villagers though most often this 10 per cent payment is offered in labour rather than cash (Beath *et al.*, 2013). Participation and voting rules within the NSP have been structured to demand the participation of 60 per cent of village residents, necessitating the agreement of village women and one project identified by village women must be prioritised in each CDC plan (Azerbaijani-Moghaddam, 2010; AREU, 2013). In most participating villages the identified projects prioritised by women have been an educational training course in literacy and training in the production and sale of traditional handicrafts (Echavez, 2012a).

It is noted that in the most socially conservative areas, often demarcated by a predominance of Pashto and/or Tajik peoples, a strong religious power base and more imminent security concerns; the NSP has pragmatically acclimatised to the socio-cultural context. In such areas, a need to maintain separation between male and female CDC members and participants has been identified and pursued; effectively initiating two parallel CDC groups divided by biological sex (Azerbaijani-Moghaddam, 2010). The male CDC councils in these areas often consist of a seconded *shura* council, the traditional local governance and resolutions mechanism of Afghanistan which has always been the domain of male decision-making to the exclusion of female participation (Echavez, 2012a).

Methodology

There is a vast repository of literature addressing the security question of Afghanistan in the 21st Century, with a significant sub-section of literature pertaining to the women, peace-building and security agenda; including specific literature addressing the importance of empowerment to Afghani women. While I feel that it would be beneficial to undertake a more concentrated study of several in-country gender focussed projects in Afghanistan, the breadth of the subject and the intricacies of the Afghani context place unobtainable demands on a research report of this size. As such, I envisage that the critical consideration of the two chosen projects will provide an informed insight into the rewards and difficulties of undertaking gender focussed programmes in a religiously conservative, post-conflict state such as Afghanistan while informing future empowerment project planning and implementation.

In this desk based study, I critically review the literature and draw on a comprehensive range of primary and secondary sources. The primary sources analysed include governance documents and agreements, official development plans, policy documents, monitoring and review reports, and quantitative statistical data collected by international, state and non-governmental organisations relevant to development programmes in Afghanistan, and more specifically the two gender focussed programmes at the heart of this study.

The secondary data utilised includes a range of relevant academic books, development studies journal articles, conference papers and several timely media reports sourced from the holdings of Massey University Library and the Country Research Library of Immigration New Zealand, located in Wellington New Zealand. As the author, I would also acknowledge that the tone of my background knowledge on the Afghani situation and the Afghani people has been significantly informed by undertaking upward of 70 refugee resettlement interviews with Afghani refugees on behalf of the New Zealand Refugee Quota Branch (RQB) of Immigration New Zealand (INZ) in 2009, 2011 and 2012. While no specific reference should be, or has been made to the personal details of these interviews in this research report; I have taken great interest in the personal experiences of these resilient people. As such, I wish to improve the lives of the Afghani people in Afghanistan in some small way. These factors have also motivated me to undertake the research following.

Report Outline

This research report is arranged as follows:

Chapter 1 of this report provides a brief introduction and background to the research at hand, touching on the country context of the report, the issues raised by the study and the rationale under which the research has been undertaken. The two research questions to be addressed are presented with four contributing key objectives. Finally, the methodology utilised in producing this research report is outlined, as are the contributing chapters to the document. The remaining sections of this report are logically structured to address the two research questions and four key objectives previously outlined in the 'Research Aims and Objectives' section.

Chapter 2 of this report is split into two substantive sections. The first addresses how gender empowerment has been conceptualised and practised in post-conflict societies from a normative perspective. This includes a summary discussion of how empowerment has been understood in development; and a discussion of how empowerment has been incorporated into the literature on

post-conflict states and reconstruction. The first section also includes a summary discussion of the work of Naila Kabeer on empowerment; as Kabeer's work provides a framework for critically analysing the two chosen gender focussed projects in Chapter 3. The second section addresses the Afghani context specifically, examining the barriers and opportunities for gender empowerment in Afghanistan since 2001 with supplementary examples of practice and achievement.

Chapter 3 of this report utilises the work of Naila Kabeer on empowerment outlined as a sub-section of Chapter 2, to critically consider the contributions two gender focussed projects have made to empowerment in Afghanistan. The two gender focussed projects considered are the Community Development Council (CDC) initiative as a section of the Afghanistan National Solidarity Programme (NSP); and the New Zealand-led Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) aid programme in Bamyan Province, Afghanistan. The sectors of empowerment and the sectors of society addressed by these projects are investigated; the projects are summarily contrasted; and the two projects' contribution to the wider empowerment commitment in Afghanistan is discussed.

Chapter 4 of this report provides a succinct summary and conclusion to the literature review and critical consideration presented in Chapters 2 & 3. These conclusions include a brief discussion of how the results of this research might inform future empowerment project planning and implementation in Afghanistan.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

How gender empowerment has been conceptualised and practised

The empowerment approach to development in the third world originated with the call of indigenous women's organisations and associated academics for their own voice in the development debate (Razavi, 1997). This formative period of conceptualisation through-out the nineteen seventies and nineteen eighties was essentially radical, carving a natural niche in the growing importance of 'Gender and Development' (GAD) theory (Razavi & Miller, 1995). Academic collectives such as 'Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era' (DAWN) were representative of the early critiques of the 'Women in Development' (WID) approach which accompanied the call for women's empowerment; addressing the imposition of Western feminist concepts and aspirations onto indigenous societies as neo-colonial in nature, requesting a re-examination of gender as a fundament of how individuals and communities relate to each-other, and demanding a transformed future free of gender, class or racial oppression (Sen *et al.*, 1987; Ravazi & Miller, 1995).

Moser (1989) asserts that women's disadvantage in development should not be surmised by their biological sex, instead women's disadvantage truly stems from the terms of the social relationship between men and women. Understood through the prism of gender as opposed to biological sex, women have been subordinated within the social constructs of gender relations with gender differences being shaped by "ideological, historical, religious, ethnic, economic and cultural determinants" (Moser, 1989 pg. 1800). Given the fundamental emphasis on gendered relations, the GAD discourse contends that the transformative pursuit of gender equity can-not occur within a societal vacuum (Jaquette & Staudt, 2006). To unpack the concept of empowerment as a transformer of relations, it is logical to consider how 'power' can be exercised in the context of social relationships between individuals, and between groups in society through the eminent work of Jo Rowlands.

Rowlands (1997) notes that traditionally in the development discourse 'power' has been bestowed as a symbolic gift from the modern developed state to the modernising developing state, a gift in the makers image that can be as easily removed as granted. The author asserts that this traditional gifting of power is incompatible with the sustainable structural transformation empowerment should demand. Whilst seeking to provide a linguistically informed explanation of how empowerment has been and could be embraced by such juxtaposed factions such as Marxist feminist academics and neo-liberal World Bank policymakers, Rowlands (1997 pg. 13) gives a concise summary of the different forms of relational power, as follows:

- Power over:
 - the 'zero-sum' concept of power where power is held over another, and the empowerment of one party would require the disempowerment of the related party;
- Power to:
 - a productive power where the possibilities or actions of one party are broadened without relation to the dominating power of a related party;

- Power with:
 - the accumulated power of a like-minded group where the possibilities for action available outweigh the value of individual contribution; and,
- Power from within:
 - the unique and unquantifiable strength of human spirit which resides within each of us, the basis of self which intangibly unites the individual to the equity of human experience.

The idea that power is exercised in relation to others, as opposed to existing as a finite quality which can be amassed or stolen is attributable to the work of Foucault, yet Rowlands (1997) framework illustrates how feminist understandings of power extend considerations of the political into the personal; as barriers to exercising individual agency can be and often are internalised. Therefore, Rowlands (1997 pg. 15) considers that empowerment is experienced and demonstrated in three realms: the personal, the relational and the collective. The final three forms of power itemised above suggest strongly that empowerment requires much more than the appropriation of resources from men to women; Rowlands (1997 pg. 14) states that women should enter a situational space where they “perceive themselves as able and entitled to make decisions.”

As evident above, the expansive feminist understanding of how power can be generated and demonstrated has complex implications for an organisation seeking to empower project participants (Baden & Reeves, 2000). Eyben & Napier-Moore (2009) illustrate how the institutionalisation of the empowerment approach into international, state and non-governmental development agency programmes has predictably suppressed the radical agenda demanding the transformation of social relations posited by ground-breaking feminist theorists. Furthermore, while the recognition of empowerment as pivotal to positive change at such forums as the Beijing Platform for Action is laudable; the adoption of empowerment into the operational policy processes of myriad development organisations has further contributed to a ‘fuzziness’ of definition which can drift remarkably toward the measurable, fundable and safe (Eyben & Napier-Moore, 2009; Luttrell & Quiroz, 2009). Further complicating matters, Luttrell & Quiroz (2009) describe how the translation of the word empowerment into languages such as Spanish is a descriptor of ‘power over’ without a nuanced inclusion of the internalised or collective understandings of power. Such differences of understanding become instrumentally troublesome as terms such as ‘gender’ have attained an arguably confusing academic definition, often misused in English and virtually impossible to concisely convey in host languages. Where empowerment would demand addressing women’s strategic gender needs, in reality many projects are bound by institutional history, process and reporting; hence such projects tend to focus on women’s practical gender needs utilising women’s reproductive and productive roles to create ‘empowering situations’ which do not challenge or transform social constructs of gender (Donno & Russett, 2004).

In light of these considerations, just what does empowerment imply in the wider development discourse? The eminent feminist scholar Caroline Moser (1989 pg. 1801) states that empowerment encompasses the “right to determine choices in life and to influence the direction of change, through the ability to gain control over material, and non-material resources.” Naila Kabeer (1999) does not fundamentally disagree with Moser’s position noting that there is an importance in women improving their ability to “control resources, determine agendas and make decisions” (in Rowlands, 1997 pg. 21), however, Kabeer stresses that the personal element of empowerment and the awakening of the ‘power within’ are essential; yet challengingly “such power cannot be given; it has

to be self-generated” (in Rowlands, 1997 pg. 21). Furthermore, Kabeer notes that the ‘triple roles’ model formulated by Moser does not adequately address the fact that most resources are produced in a variety of locations such as markets, communities or states. (Razavi & Miller, 1998).

In 1995 the United Nations Population Information Network (POPIN) was tasked by the Secretariat of the United Nations Inter-Agency Task Force on the Implementation of the ICPD Programme of Action to produce “Guidelines on Women’s Empowerment”. The POPIN definition of empowerment however might not be considered a definition so much as an instrumental classification of relevant components referencing a human rights approach. Furthermore, though the POPIN consideration of empowerment’s scope is admirably broad, it retains an understandable bias toward the institutional capabilities and expectations of the United Nations at this time, stating:

What, then, is women’s empowerment? Women’s empowerment has five components: women’s sense of self-worth; their right to have and determine choices; their right to have access to opportunities and resources; their right to have the power to control their own lives, both within and outside the home; and their ability to influence the direction of social change to create a more just social and economic order, nationally and internationally. (POPIN, 1995 pg.1)

The evolution within the political sphere of a more instrumental understanding of empowerment is well illustrated by the development of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in the year 2000 (Porter, 2013). MDG Three seeks to “promote gender equality and empower women” (UN, 2013). Tellingly, the substantive monitoring target of MDG Three to achieve women’s empowerment is to “eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and in all levels of education no later than 2015” (UN, 2013). The associated indicators of women’s empowerment include the ratio of girls to boys in education, literacy ratios, the share of women’s employment outside of agriculture, and the proportions of women in elected office (UN 2013); here the bias toward the measurable and safe is palpable (Kabeer, 1999). The consideration of a self-initiated ‘power within’ and disruptive social transformation do not sit easily within an operationalized international development agenda, though such considerations appear vital to a true sense of empowerment (Kabeer, 2005).

Naila Kabeer and empowerment

Essential elements of the work of Jo Rowlands and Naila Kabeer on empowerment can be considered to be rooted in the seminal work of Brazilian academic Paulo Freire, especially the book ‘Pedagogy of the Oppressed’ originally published in 1970. Freire (1972) presented innovative ideas on the educational empowerment of the individual through a process of critically awakening the consciousness to the personal and social preconditions of oppression. On this point Freire stated: “The oppressed must be their own example in their struggle for redemption.” (Freire, 1972 pg.54)

In this vein, Kabeer (1994, 1999 & 2005) asserts that an essential factor in the empowerment of women is a self-generated process of consciousness-raising where the arbitrary nature of patriarchal social structuring is boldly questioned, and the legitimacy of the patriarchal social order rejected. Prior to such conscientisation Kabeer contends that women are “competent but socially constrained actors who are capable of making choices, articulating priorities and taking responsibility” (in Rowlands, 1997 pg. 22). Kabeer (1999 pg. 437) states that empowerment is “inescapably bound up with the condition of disempowerment, and refers to the processes by which those who have been

denied the ability to make choices acquire such an ability.” Where alternatives can be imagined by the critically conscious, the agency of the individual, and then importantly a like-minded collective may be able to exercise choice (Kabeer, 1999). The author further refines the notion of choice into two critical categories: the more consequential strategic choices such as whether to marry, or to have children inhabit the first order, while the less consequential choices that affect an individual’s quality of life occupy the second-order (Kabeer, 1999). Additionally, recognising the subtlety between indications of ‘differences in choice’ as opposed to ‘inequalities in choice’ is vital to building a more robust picture of the empowerment of an individual and their community.

In this model, empowerment should be identifiable from ‘the bottom-up’ as opposed to an imposition of power from the outside (Kabeer, 1994). Additionally, empowerment may be regarded as a process, as opposed to an ends; fostering both individual agency and structural change (Luttrell & Quiroz, 2009). In her work considering the opportunities available to measure empowerment, Kabeer (1999 pg. 437) frames the ability to exercise choice in three inter-dependant categories, with the first two embodying the parallel concept of ‘capabilities’:

- Resources: the pre-conditions of being able to exercise choice;
 - Inclusive of material resources AND the human and social resources which make it possible to exercise more choice. The ability to inhabit a decision-making role in a hierarchical structure may be considered a resource; as may social networking and leadership skills which have been subverted, suppressed or dismissed by traditional power structures.
- Agency: the process of being able to exercise choice; and,
 - Inclusive of decision-making AND the “meaning, motivation and purpose which individuals bring to their activity....’the power within’ (Kabeer, 1999 pg. 438). Agency refers to the ability of the individual to act in an independent manner and make their own decisions (Luttrell & Quiroz, 2009).
- Achievements: the outcomes of being able to exercise choice
 - Indications that empowerment as a process, has in-fact taken place.

In considering Kabeer’s (1999) position, several points are worth noting. Though concerned for the individual Kabeer strongly believes in the benefits of the like-minded collective, identifying the “intangible resources of analytical skills, social networks, organisational strength, solidarity and the sense of not being alone” (Kabeer, 1999 pg. 438) as aspects of empowerment available to the group. Also of note, Kabeer (1999) asserts that sustainable empowerment for poorer women must entail moving beyond participation in projects into the broader, strategic agenda of development policy (and the political sphere). Finally, though the author laments the difficulty of precisely measuring empowerment she contends that we should not accept the more instrumental, quantifiable development models as the embodiment of empowerment simply because social transformation and the expression of the ‘power within’ is difficult to measure (Kabeer, 1999 & 2005).

Women's empowerment in post-conflict and reconstruction literature

Study after study has taught us that there is no tool for development more effective than the empowerment of women...no policy is more important in preventing conflict, or in achieving reconciliation after conflict has ended. Kofi Annan, UN Secretary General 1997-2006, quoted 2005, in Porter (2013, pg. 1).

The international relations literature on security issues has traditionally been, and in more conservative militaristic literature remains, largely disengaged from considerations of gender (Blanchard, 2003; McKay, 2004). However, the broadening respect for the 'human security' discourse and the advancement of the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda signifies a shift in the academic conceptualisation of post-conflict reconstruction (Willett, 2010). Much of this broadening respect for concepts of post-conflict reconstruction which emphasise, and seek to institutionalise and operationalise gender-aware development can be attributed to the drafting and unanimous passing of United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 in 2000, and sister resolutions UNSCR 1820 in 2008, and UNSCR 1888 and 1889 in 2009 (Karam, 2010; Henry, 2007 and Porter, 2013).

Most dramatically, UNSCR 1820 urges member states to: "ensure increased representation of women at all decision-making levels in national, regional and international institutions and mechanisms for the prevention, management, and resolution of conflict" (UNSC, 2000, para. 1). This call for the public political empowerment of women in post-conflict contexts is reinforced strongly in UNSCRs 1820, 1888 and 1889 (Porter, 2013). UNSCR 1325 also states at paragraph 8 that all relevant actors should seriously consider adopting gender sensitive responses to: "the special needs of women and girls during repatriation and resettlement and for rehabilitation, reintegration and post-conflict reconstruction." (UNSCR, 2000, para.8).

The innovative aspects and urgency of UNSCR 1325 can be attributed to several historical determinants, including highly-embarrassing scandals associated with the sexual misconduct of male United Nations peace-keeping troops in conflict states such as the Democratic Republic of Congo (Simic, 2010; Pankhurst, 2010). Furthermore, through-out the 1990s conflicts such as those in the Balkan states had shown how gender-based and sexual violence has become a deliberate and strategic weapon of war (Radoi, 2011). Therefore, practical steps to enact UNSCR 1325 would focus inwardly on the empowerment of women to participate more meaningfully in institutional peace-keeping operations AND outwardly on the empowerment of women in post-conflict states to participate more meaningfully in peace negotiations, political structures and the prevention of gender-based and sexual violence (Antoniljevic, 2011).

Yet, when viewed through the prism of a human security perspective, the mandate provided by UNSCR 1325 extends well beyond immediate gendered concerns for security and protection immediately following conflict (Porter, 2013). Feminist theorists, such as Pankhurst (2010), assert that the post-conflict situation offers the very best opportunity to undertake the challenging societal upheaval and transformation that the empowerment approach demands. This assertion appears especially true in post-conflict states which have suffered considerable trauma, such as Rwanda where the numerical balance of the sexes has been strongly distorted by the death of male combatants and women have stepped into non-traditional roles as a matter of survival (Cohn, 2004). Remarkably, women now hold more ministerial positions in Rwanda than any other state on the

planet, with 63.8 per cent of the lower house and 38.5 per cent of the upper house constituted of female representatives (UNDP, 2013).

As noted by Kofi Annan in the quote commencing this section, there is a striking co-relation between measures of gender equity and empowerment, and positive measures of prosperity, peace and security in nation states (Porter, 2013). Although a generalisation, statistics do substantiate that the most gender equitable nations on the planet are for the most part, the most prosperous and peaceful (UNDP, 2013). Therefore, when approached holistically, a strong argument can be made that the most reliable medium to long-term path to peace and security in a post-conflict society is the transformative political, economic, social and psychological empowerment of women and men seeking a gender equitable balance (Porter, 2013). However, there are practical and philosophical shortcomings in framing the advancement of women's rights as solely a functionary of a security agenda (Hudson, 2013).

Hudson (2013) notes that the instrumentalist arguments of UNSCR 1325, which appear to reduce women's resource and agency to the naive generalism that women are "naturally peaceful", can actually reinforce traditional gender roles, ignore the diversity of women's voice, undermine women's political options, and unfairly expect women to make further contributions to society for the good of security rather than the other way around. Furthermore, while UNSCR 1325 is written in 'politically aspirational language', the past 13 years have illustrated that significant investment in gender-informed skill sets and experts on the ground are required to make any practical difference in post-conflict states (Hudson, 2013). Some commentators have noted that subscribing to the language of women's empowerment as an instrumental function of a security agenda presents a cheap and conveniently humane face to the industrial military complex of the United States as the pentagon begins a slow military retreat from Afghanistan (Wimpelmann, 2012).

More recently, the discourse on development regarding post-conflict reconstruction from the 'bottom-up' has consciously and conspicuously raised the careful consideration of local context as the first and fundamental principle of best-practice project planning and intervention (Hilhorst *et al.*, 2010). Porter (2013, pg.3) states "connecting empowerment with the fulfilment of equality and the realisation of rights must be locally driven in order for empowerment to be practised in cultures where gender equality is not the norm."

Hilhorst *et al.* (2010) acknowledge the rationale which has led to the increasing decentralisation of post-conflict reconstruction practice by development actors, in countries such as Afghanistan in the past decade. Factors contributing to the rationalisation of 'reconstruction from below' in the Afghani context include recognition that:

- Significant portions of Afghanistan remain in a flux of conflict; there is not a linear declination between a national state of war or peace. Therefore, movements by the central state (and its international backers) to 'enforce' institutional development on some areas raises the profile and significance of non-state combatants in instigating reactive combat against Kabul, disproportionately endangering the security of women and girls (Kandiyoti, 2005).
- The dynamics which align local, war-lord led kinship clans with larger collective ideologies such as the Taliban are diverse and can be obscure. Political ideology often takes a back seat to historical village feuds, rival dealings in the illicit drug or weapons market or even macho

posturing (Ruttig, 2013). Such complexity of relations cannot be unpacked, understood and treated effectively at a regional, national or international level (Hilhorst *et al.*, 2010).

- In countries where political and economic corruption is endemic, such as Afghanistan, ‘top-down’ development programmes are more vulnerable to back-room deals, allegiances and ‘the calling in of favours’. Such patrimonialism when large sums of money are in question can quickly ignite political jealousies and conflict (Lough *et al.*, 2012). Furthermore, women are traditionally excluded from these decision-making mechanisms at the national level (Lough *et al.*, 2012).
- The perception of local communities as to their needs can differ remarkably from the agendas of the state or international actors (Hilhorst *et al.*, 2010). For example, while many in the international community perceive the removal of the *burqa* of prominent concern to the empowerment of all Afghani women, many Afghani women have expressed their own views that matters of education, health, security or entrepreneurship remain of much greater urgency (Coleman, 2004).
- Local ownership ensures that local women maintain a personal investment in empowerment initiatives in their own community, increasing the chance of the sustainable empowerment of local women and the transformation of social relations within kinship groups (Porter, 2013).

Given the assertions above, the argument that ‘reconstruction from below’ offers a more advantageous stage for the empowerment of women in Afghanistan than the institutional development programmes of the state applied from the ‘top-down’ appears relatively assured (AREU, 2013). However, Hilhorst *et al.* (2010) caution strongly against the perception that ‘reconstruction from below’ offers a magic cure-all. Of significance to the Afghani context and empowerment, the authors assert that local elites can dominate or hi-jack local empowerment initiatives, especially in rural areas where the vast majority of local women are illiterate. Additionally, parallel institutional mechanisms can proliferate which lie outside the regulation of the law and therefore, subvert the attempts of the state to provide the services of a functional government committed, as a nation and CEDAW signatory, to gender equity (Hilhorst *et al.*, 2010). These issues are among those which will be discussed in the specific circumstances of the two gender-focussed programmes examined later in this report.

The Afghani context and empowerment

In this literature review section, I endeavour to present the challenges and opportunities the Afghani context has presented to gender focussed development projects in the past decade.

With respect to the categories of empowerment utilised to consider the Afghani context, the influence of the framework devised by Regina Scheyvens (1999) to gauge the impacts of ecotourism initiatives on local communities through the lens of empowerment is acknowledged. Scheyvens’ framework identifies signs of empowerment and juxtaposes them with signs of disempowerment in ecotourism projects within the spheres of political, economic, social and psychological empowerment (Scheyvens, 1999); apart from economic empowerment, Scheyvens (1999) states that these categorisations are themselves drawn from the work of Friedmann (1992). In addition, a consideration of human rights and empowerment is presented; asserting that improved access to inalienable human rights such as quality education, health provision, nutritional food and potable water should not themselves be considered specific instruments of empowerment. Instead, where

women have access to these fundamental provisions of life they are in an advantageous circumstance to achieve a higher level of political, economic, social and/or psychological empowerment through development initiatives. It is noted that significant cross-over is apparent across the breadth of these categorisations, with factors of empowerment in one categorisation often contributing to situations of empowerment in other areas.

The context of political empowerment in Afghanistan

Women's rights have always been politicised, and nowhere more so than in the Muslim world. The articulation of different conceptions of modernity, nationalism and cultural integrity singled out gender relations as a critical area for the expression of contending political visions. (Kandiyoti, 2005 pg. 5)

The suppression of women's political resource and agency under the Taliban between 1996 and 2001 was absolute and zealously enforced on ideological grounds (Johnson & Leslie, 2004). The Taliban's literalist and draconian reading of the Sharia law and the Koran not only forbade all women from public office or any position of decision making authority at national, regional or local *shura* but essentially barred women from any participation in the public sphere (Coleman, 2004). It was also strictly mandated that women should remain separate within the home compound and have no contribution to familial decision-making beyond child-rearing, as this would bring shame to the family patriarch (Moghadam, 2005). With women and girls prohibited to travel alone, attend school or undertake any form of paid employment; it is with certainty that we can consider the political disempowerment of Afghani women under the Taliban to have been virtually absolute (HRW, 2009).

Following the removal of the Taliban regime in 2001, the women's empowerment programme of the United States Government in Afghanistan has placed an overwhelming emphasis on women's 'political empowerment' (USAEK, 2009). In the past decade this emphasis on women's political empowerment, especially at the national and regional level, could be argued to have come at the exclusion of alternative development opportunities (Kandiyoti, 2005). The emphasis on political empowerment is illustrated well by the 'Afghanistan Women's Empowerment' (AWE) Grants Programme guidebook for applicants which states categorically:

AWE grants are intended for civil society organizations, including non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and universities, to undertake projects *advancing women's participation in political life* (author's emphasis) (USAEK, 2009 pg. 15).

Over the past decade the AWE programme has led widespread educational campaigns through indigenous women's organisations; explaining the democratic process to Afghani women, encouraging women to stand for parliament and providing specific educational courses for female candidates on electoral campaigning and the responsibilities of high office (USAEK, 2009). However, a recent change of focus for the empowerment efforts of the United States Aid Apparatus is noted, with the signing of the 2013 Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the IROA Government placing future emphasis on efforts advancing the economic empowerment of Afghani women (IROA & US Government, 2013).

The participation of women at the Emergency *Jirga* and subsequent constitutional *Loya Jirga* (traditional national gathering of community representatives) which preceded the draft constitution of 2004 was dangerously controversial in the first instance given the historic exclusivity of male

participation in these forums (Kandiyoti, 2005). Female representatives of indigenous women's organisations, co-ordinated by the Afghan Women's Network (AWN), bravely broke the ground for the normalisation of women's participation in political decision-making at the national-level (Kandiyoti, 2005). Kandiyoti (2005) states that the securing of legislative change to the 2004 constitution of the IROA declaring that women and men are equal before the law, and the expansion of parliamentary electoral quota for women represent the earliest significant achievements for women's organisations in post-Taliban Afghanistan. Afghanistan became an unreserved signatory to the Convention to Eliminate All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 2003, illustrating the IROA's attempt to portray a commitment to gender equality to the international community (TAF, 2010).

Lough *et al.* (2012) echo these sentiments of achievement with a degree of pragmatism, noting that the gulf between gender equitable legislation, equitable action and equitable achievements for the average Afghani woman remain extremely large. Suspicions concerning the realpolitik of President Karzai's regime have been raised by the passing of specific legislation in 2010 allowing Shi'a men coercive control over the actions of their wives, including sexual consent (HRW, 2013). The apparent absence of women from peace discussions with Taliban representatives, and the increasing probability that President Karzai's successor may welcome Taliban representatives into a power-sharing agreement; show that the political status of women remains tenuous, negotiable and ultimately disposable in modern Afghanistan (Lough *et al.*, 2012; AREU, 2013; HRW, 2013). The assassination of prominent women who have bravely held office in the more conservative regions, such as Police Lieutenant Colonel Malalai Kakar in 2008, show that women's political empowerment remains a primary target of fundamentalist backlash (HRW, 2009).

While relevant and fundamental, prominent academics such as Naila Kabeer (1999) and Deniz Kandiyoti (2005), correctly contend that the political empowerment of women entails much more than setting and fulfilling a quota of female representatives in a regional council, state senate or national parliament. As the political is personal and visa-versa, empowerment initiatives which concentrate solely on the inclusion of women into the fledgling democratic machinery of state governance ignore the urgency of empowering women to make the personal decisions that intimately shape human lives including choices regarding education, health, employment, marriage, family size, dress and movement (Kabeer, 1999). Furthermore, the development programmes of the United States Government in Afghanistan carry an alternative agenda, concerned with establishing and maintaining a modern democratic state which no longer harbours fundamentalist elements, exports narcotics nor prevents large-scale resource extraction or favourable terms of trade (HRW, 2009). The United States AWE Grant's Programme would never consider contributing to a socialist or religiously fundamentalist women's organisation however robust and self-realised their empowering political vision may be (USAEK, 2009).

While a measure of women's political empowerment is visible at the national level, it is at the local level that political empowerment may significantly transform the lives of Afghani women (Estavez, 2012a; Kakar, 2005). The political barriers faced by women in the local context are burdensome (Kakar, 2005). Each community in Afghanistan has a suite of power-holding governance positions and resolution councils which are the exclusive providence of men with women having little to no say in such appointments and no ability to speak in resolution councils, even in their own defence (HRW, 2009). Drawn from Kakar (2005 pg. 7), the positions exclusive to men include:

- *Malik*: Community head and responsible for liaison with the state, involved in resolution disputes and use of communal land holdings;
- *Mirab*: Protector of the local water supply or canal;
- *Khan*: Wealthy and influential land owner who controls land and employment through ownership;
- *Ulema*: Religious leader with moral influence over the community. Also consulted in the edicts of the *Shar'ia* law; and,
- *Shura* and *Jirga*: Resolution seeking local councils which only meet when specific disputes have been raised.

There are myriad examples of how the gender specificity of these roles and the power wielded through them place Afghani women in a situation of political disempowerment (Nixon, 2008). The state-run judicial system remains ineffectual, unaffordable and inaccessible to the great majority of Afghani women; meaning that accusations of gender violence (including sexual violence) are still handled by *Malik*, *Ulema* and *Shura* without allowing the contribution of women (HRW, 2009). The patriarchal bias of these positions of power most often conclude in resolutions which maintain 'tradition' and 'community harmony' rather than acknowledge and appropriately punish the specific crimes of men against women (HRW, 2009). Many women who have been raped end up as victims of local judicial systems punished for moral crimes such as adultery; or are severely punished for seeking to be with their partner of choice rather than a husband arranged (HRW, 2013). Women are unable to utilise local power structures to voice their opinions regarding the use of vital resources such as land, water or village funds (Nixon, 2008). Within the home, the traditional role of the male household head remains prevalent, with these men retaining decision-making control over the mobility and discretionary spending of the family (Kakar, 2005; Beath *et al.*, 2013). The absolute privacy of the private sphere in Afghanistan is sacred and subtle strategies of political empowerment in the home appear advantageous in avoiding increased gender violence from male household heads against women and girls (HRW, 2013).

The context of economic empowerment in Afghanistan

The comparative significance of women's economic empowerment is substantial, as it encompasses the opportunity to choose a profession and be to granted equal and fair opportunities to progress or to choose another; the fair payment for work undertaken and most importantly, the power to make independent decisions regarding how such earnings are spent (Echavez, 2012a). Gender roles in Afghanistan have traditionally been strongly prescribed regarding acceptable sectors of paid employment for women (Emadi, 2005). Historically these employment opportunities have rarely strayed beyond the production of handicrafts in rural districts, and civil service positions such as teachers or women's doctors in more affluent urban areas (Echavez, 2012a).

Recent studies affirm that most Afghani men subscribe to the role of primary provider and protector of the family as a fundamental indicator of masculine worth (Emadi, 2005; AREU, 2013). Given that this factor is so important in establishing the relative position and power of men in the village community, it is of little surprise that the ability of women to earn an income is most often considered as supplementary to the expected provision of unpaid household labour (Estavez, 2012a). Discretionary spending of any supplementary income earned by women is most often targeted towards the needs of the family under the express permission of the male head of the

household and women are only given permission to undertake paid employment if their husband is already employed (AREU, 2013).

In a society where the majority of women have not received an education, have particularly limited mobility outside of their village, are birthing their first child soon after puberty and are expected to care for the daily needs of a large extended household; it is perhaps unsurprising that most women are not in a position to participate meaningfully in the already depressed Afghani labour market (Stark, 2013). It should also be noted that where women do participate in paid labour, it is often under the extreme pressures of poverty (AREU, 2012). The ineffectual state-administered judicial system in Afghanistan offers little recompense to women who are harassed, threatened or attacked due to their choice to work (HRW, 2013); while health and safety, minimum age or minimum wage provisions are non-existent or unenforced in the great majority of cases (HRW, 2013).

When considering Afghani women as candidates for entrepreneurship, the factors which prevent most women from undertaking satisfactory paid employment are magnified (Estavez, 2012a). These factors include:

- Limited mobility: The expectation that a male relative should accompany a woman in the public sphere remains pertinent. These limitations prevent women from travelling freely between villages to trade goods and services (Estavez, 2010);
- Limited education: 88 per cent of Afghani women are presently illiterate and few have had the opportunity to surpass basic numeracy (MOE, 2012). These limitations prevent women from entering formal contracts and leaves women vulnerable to corrupt businessmen (AREU, 2013);
- Limited capital: Independent lending from Afghani financial institutions to women is rare (Estavez, 2012a);
- Limited security: Women visibly entering business are visible targets to fundamentalist groups (HRW, 2009);
- Limited acceptance: Acting as a trader or market-holder is a role traditionally held only by men (Estavez, 2010)
- Limited time: The expected demands of keeping the household and child-raising leaves little time or space for most women to undertake paid employment (Estavez, 2010);
- Limited agency: Even as an entrepreneur a woman may be expected to hand her income to the male household head for spending (Wilson *et al.*, 2012); and,
- Limited opportunity: The Afghani economy is presently depressed and requires growth and diversification to develop (Cordesman, 2013). There are few opportunities for Afghani citizens to participate in modern business sectors such as Information Technology which requires security, a specialist workforce, sizable investment and extensive infrastructure development (Cordesman, 2013).

The factors outlined above combine to make satisfactory employment and independent economic agency unobtainable goals for most Afghani women (Beath *et al.*, 2013). Interestingly, where widows are household heads, a measure of agency in fiscal management is observed with many sons passing their income to their mother (Estavez, 2012b). However, in juxtaposition the prospects for widows to obtain satisfactory paid employment are particularly dire in most regions (Estavez, 2012b).

An example of a women's economic empowerment initiative in Afghanistan is outlined by Wilson *et al.* (2012). The 'Markets for Afghan Artisans' (MFAA) programme delivered by the indigenous Non-Governmental Organisation *Zandozi* takes a two-pronged approach to the production and sales of traditional garments (Wilson *et al.*, 2012). Women who have displayed skill in preliminary workshops are given business training relevant to garment procurement and on-selling to the male merchants of the local bazaar; these skills include influential negotiation, business planning and numeracy training (Wilson *et al.*, 2012). Women are taught how to save and reinvest profits for business growth and expansion while artisan women producing quality handicrafts are able to sell their wares without leaving the home or dealing directly with an unknown male (Wilson *et al.*, 2012). In this way, *Zandozi* envisions the self-sustaining economic empowerment of a range of women within the community and enables many women in the community to profit while others challenge the gender prescriptions associated with the role of 'market on-seller' (Wilson *et al.*, 2012).

The context of social empowerment in Afghanistan

In referencing signs of social empowerment in a framework assessing an eco-tourism initiative in a local community, Scheyvens (1999, pg. 247) states:

[Ecotourism]...maintains or enhances the local community's equilibrium. Community cohesion is improved as individuals and families work together to build a successful ecotourism venture. Some funds raised are used for community development purposes, e.g. to build schools or improve roads.

Meanwhile signs of disempowerment would include:

Disharmony and social decay. Many in the community take on outside values and lose respect for traditional culture and for elders.

When removed from the exclusive context of ecotourism, this definition of signifiers of social empowerment is problematic in the Afghani context. Given the extent of women's disadvantage in development in most Afghani communities, and the conservatism of the most populous rural areas; it is unlikely that the social transformation fundamental to successful empowerment would produce harmonious community equilibrium in the short to medium-term. In rural areas, the empowerment of women may be regarded as a specific example of social decay by religious conservatives, as they perceive outside values to predominate and respect is lost for 'traditional culture and for elders' (Kandiyoti, 2005; AREU, 2013). Therefore, regarding social empowerment in the Afghani context it is worthwhile to consider how development projects may have empowered community women to come together as a more powerful unit than the sum of participating individuals to advance women's resources and agency (Rowlands, 1997).

Afghani tradition, especially in Pashto areas practising the strict 'honour' restrictions of *Pashtunwali*, places inordinate emphasis on the family and kinship bonds as the basis of women's social interaction (Emadi, 2005). Unlike many indigenous communities where village women would come together to collect water, care for children or prepare food; the great majority of rural Afghani wives are confined within the household compound and most do not routinely work or socialise with unrelated women in the village day-by-day (Emadi, 2005). Under such regulated social mores and security concerns, it is unsurprising that the idea of bringing Afghani women of differing ethnicity, Islamic belief or status together to experience a sense of social empowerment is more difficult than

in most third world societies (Kakar, 2005; Beath *et al.*, 2013). Please note that the achievements of Community Development Councils (CDC) to empower women socially in the local village context is considered in Chapter Three of this research report.

An encouraging development in Post-Taliban Afghanistan is the formation of at least 100 independent and indigenous women's organisations; most maintaining a relationship with the Afghan Women's Network (AWN) umbrella Non-Governmental Organisation (AWN, 2007; AREU, 2013). Predominantly focusing on the rights of women to education, healthcare, political agency and freedom from violence; indigenous organisations such as the Afghan Women's Education Centre (AWEC) and the Afghan Women's Resource Centre (AWRC) have brought educated urban women together to reach out to women in rural communities (AREU, 2013). While AREU (2013) argue that the proliferation of indigenous women's organisations has created a sector which competes overtly for donor funds rather than co-ordinating resources as a single strong voice; there is no doubt that these organisations have also socially empowered Afghani women to come together seeking to advance women's rights in a way unimaginable during the Taliban era (Nixon, 2008; AREU, 2013).

The context of psychological empowerment in Afghanistan

In referencing signs of psychological empowerment in a framework assessing an eco-tourism initiative in a local community, Scheyvens (1999, pg. 247) states:

Self-esteem of many community members is enhanced because of outside recognition of the uniqueness and value of their culture, their natural resources and their traditional knowledge. Increasing confidence of community members leads them to seek out further education and training opportunities. Access to employment and cash leads to an increase in status for traditionally low-status sectors of society e.g. women, youths.

While considering just how important psychological empowerment is to the human individual, as Kabeer (1999) notes that psychological empowerment is best when self-realised and initiated as well as being particularly difficult to measure in any quantitative degree. These factors have arguably led to psychological empowerment being considered a positive side-effect of political or economic empowerment in the majority of development initiatives undertaken by international and state development actors (Kabbeer, 1999). Qualitative interviews with women who have substantially participated in political and economic empowerment initiatives such as the Community Development Councils indicate that participation in community decision-making does raise the self-confidence and belief of many women in their abilities to chart the course of their own lives in both the public and private spheres to some degree (Estavez, 2010). However, these positive results are tempered by the high rates of psychological turmoil and trauma that surviving as a women in Afghanistan can entail (HRW, 2013). For most women, the achievements of self-activating the 'power-within' present circumstances where personal empowerment must be defended under direct and constant opposition from both the private and public sphere (Kakar, 2005).

Human rights and empowerment in Afghanistan

When a conservative Islamic country has been plunged into the dirge of conflict and political chaos Afghanistan has been over the past 35 years (Ruttig, 2013), the dire position of Afghanistan on the United Nations Human Development Index (HDI) is understandable (UNDP, 2013). In such a position of 'disempowerment', it could be argued that almost any development initiative which touches the lives of Afghani women could be termed as 'empowering' (Coleman, 2004). A 'populist' leaning to the understanding of empowerment can be seen in the brochures of many Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), promoting basic education or health programmes for women and girls as 'empowerment' initiatives (Eyben & Napier-Moore, 2009).

Given the discussions of empowerment and its definition cited previously, I would argue that the provisions of access to a primary education, rudimentary health care, potable water or measures of protection from gender-based violence are more usefully considered inalienable human rights which should be available to all the citizens of Afghanistan; as opposed to specific instruments of women's empowerment. However, in the Afghani situation where the provision of such basic services is sub-standard it is evident that when women are illiterate, ill, victims of physical or sexual abuse or unable to leave the family compound; the final levels of empowerment achievable through a development initiative are lessened. I contend that, where women have heightened access to these provisions they are in an advantageous circumstance to achieve a higher level of political, economic, social and/or psychological empowerment through development initiatives. Referencing Kabeer (1999), of course this does not mean that uneducated, ill or poor women should not or cannot be empowered; rather it is asserted that the achievements of specifically defined empowerment initiatives depend substantially on the provision of basic inalienable human rights.

The examination of the Afghani context for the empowerment of women above reveals several reoccurring themes which are considered inalienable human rights; the provision of which can facilitate a more successful situation of empowerment. These themes include:

- Education: The quality education of girls and women is foremost for the future of Afghanistan's particularly young demographic (Stark, 2013). As of 2012, 2.7 million girls are enrolled in schools though the gender parity ratio with boys falls markedly to .49 for secondary enrolments (AREU, 2013 pg. 24). A quality education is pivotal in providing women the political and economic resources that accompany greater life choice (Stark, 2013);
- Health: Social mores and particularly inadequate medical services, including maternity attention, leave most rural Afghani women disassociated with any form of modern health-care (HRW, 2013). Acceptance of birth control strategies is low; though encouragingly child and maternal health data is beginning to lift (AREU, 2013 pg. 27). The dangers of child-bearing too young or under unattended circumstances remain prevalent (HRW, 2013). Untreated serious health conditions contribute to the lessening of physical abilities and life choice; as well as the particularly low life expectancy for Afghani women (HRW, 2013);
- Security: Women in areas which remain prone to conflict are more likely to be a victim of gender based violence and less likely to exercise mobility outside of the home or to send their daughters to school (AREU, 2013). Empowerment initiatives are unlikely to be deliverable to rural regions where the likelihood of open combat is heightened (IROA, 2007).

- Freedom from gender based and sexual violence: Rates of gender based violence appear particularly high in Afghanistan, with 85% of women interviewed by Human Rights Watch reporting some form of abuse from a man (including sexual attacks) in their lifetime (HRW, 2013). While specialised gender units, consisting of trained female Afghani police officers, have been deployed in certain regions; distrust in formal judiciary remains strong in Afghanistan regarding the treatment of female victims of gender based crime (HRW, 2013). The freedom of women from the fear of gender based violence from men is implicit in enabling a safe space for women's empowerment (AREU, 2013).

There is evidence that the development conditions for Afghani women outlined above are slowly improving, yet the sustainability of these advancements is uncertain during the political transition the withdrawal of international forces entails (UNDP, 2013; AREU, 2013). Regarding the critical consideration of the two gender-focussed projects examined in the following chapter, it is noted that the New Zealand-led Provincial Reconstruction Team (NZPRT) has focussed the majority of its efforts on the provision of improved access for women to the factors outlined above as the basis of their commitment to gender-aware development in Bamyan (MFAT, 2013; Cowan, 2008; Carswell, 2009). This differs to the Community Development Council (CDC) initiative which focusses strongly on the political empowerment of women in local governance structures (Estavez, 2010; Estavez, 2012b).

CHAPTER 3: PRESENTATION OF RESEARCH CONCERNING THE TWO CHOSEN GENDER FOCUSSED PROJECTS

In the following chapter, a critical consideration of the New Zealand-led Provincial Reconstruction Team in Bamyan Province (henceforth referred to as 'NZPRT'), Afghanistan, and the Community Development Council initiative within the Afghanistan National Solidarity Programme (henceforth referred to as 'CDC') is presented with special reference to women's empowerment. The reader is directed to the Chapter One sub-section: 'Background to the two gender-focused projects critically considered in this research report' for a brief introduction to both initiatives. The substantial basis of this critical consideration is the work of Naila Kabeer (1999) regarding the understanding and measurement of women's empowerment; examining the women's resources and agency each project has identified and fostered, and examining the achievements of the empowerment process. Again, the reader is directed to the Chapter Two sub-section: 'Naila Kabeer and empowerment' for an introduction to Kabeer's empowerment framework as referenced in the following critical consideration. Additionally, gender considerations within the development actors delivering the two chosen projects are discussed. Finally, a short contextual note is made on how the results of the critical consideration found in this chapter may intersect with the ideal empowerment situation: The social transformation of relations attaining gender equity in Afghanistan.

The relevant development actors and gender

The CDC is the largest development programme in Afghanistan focussing on village development initiatives; the CDC is administered by the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan through the IROA Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development (MRRD) (Nixon, 2008). As stated in the Afghanistan National Action Strategy (ANDS) and the National Action Plan for the Women of Afghanistan (NAPWA), gender considerations are required to be 'mainstreamed' through-out the operations of all Afghani state ministries, including the MRRD, under the advice and authority of the Afghani Ministry of Women's Affairs (MOWA) (Echavez 2012a). A comprehensive study undertaken by academics at the Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit (AREU, 2013) shows that the MOWA's efforts at facilitating and enforcing gender mainstreaming through-out Afghani state institutions have been substantially under-resourced and largely ignored by Ministries such as the MRRD in business-as-usual planning and operations.

While gender disaggregated employee data for the MRRD was not located by the author it is noted that the number of women in the Afghani civil service has fallen to approximately 20 per cent in the past five years, and the majority of female civil servants are employed as teachers and health professionals (AREU, 2013). While the edicts of former regimes have conspired to severely restrict the pool of women now available to undertake positions in more diverse sectors of the state, a subscription to more traditional roles for women also appears to pervade Ministries such as the MRRD where few Afghani women have obtained leadership or operational positions, or have received the opportunity to do so in the future (AREU, 2013).

While the MRRD is responsible for administering the CDC, the initiative itself is delivered at the village level through one of fifteen Afghani Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) referred to as 'facilitating partners' (FP) (Kakar, 2005). The FP's are substantively staffed by male Afghani nationals who do not experience the mobility restrictions traditionally placed upon Afghani women (Kakar,

2005). In reviewing the difficulties the CDC had encountered in initiating women's inclusive participation, Kakar (2005) states that many participant women had felt ostracised by the gender bias of some Afghani male FP employees. These Afghani men had negotiated terms primarily with the traditional male leaders of the village and had avoided running fair CDC elections in the name of cultural tradition and community harmony (Kakar, 2005). However, cynically these terms of engagement may also be regarded as a power retention strategy for those already wielding 'power-over' the community through the traditional village hierarchy (Estavez, 2012b). Nixon (2008) and Kakar (2005) note that, as well as FPs benefiting from more capable Afghani women being able to travel safely across the regions as facilitators; Afghani FP employees would benefit greatly from more specific gender and development (GAD) training. It is anticipated that this training would give FP employees a greater respect for the importance of women's equal participation in the CDC as a primary objective of the initiative; a respect which would translate into more inclusive initial process (Kakar, 2005).

The NZPRT provides a striking contrast to the CDC as NZPRT personnel were drawn substantively from the New Zealand Defence Force (NZDF) and New Zealand Police (NZP) rather than Afghani nationals (MFAT, 2013). While administered in co-ordination with Afghanistan National Development Strategy (ANDS) in later years, the New Zealand Government did not direct funds or operations under the direct supervision of an Afghani State Ministry; instead NZPRT operations were co-ordinated under the auspices of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) following the provisions of the ISAF Provincial Reconstruction Team Handbook (ISAF, 2006). However, it is noted that the NZPRT did hire a number of local *Hazara* men as translators in the field; these local men working closely with NZPRT personnel on a day to day basis (MFAT, 2013). Local *Hazara* women were not considered for in the field translation positions due to the strongly defined cultural restrictions surrounding women interacting with unknown men (ISAF, 2006).

The gender balance of NZPRT personnel was broadly reflective of the source institutions gender balance in New Zealand (Carswell, 2009). With most NZDF personnel being drawn from the infantry, traditionally the most exhaustively physical sections of a regular army, the numbers of female soldiers in the NZPRT rarely breached double figures at any one time (Carswell, 2009). However, given the social mores of Afghanistan regarding the contact of unacquainted or related foreign men with Afghani women, at the early stages of the PRT programme it was recognised that a female community liaison faculty would be vital to engaging the female population (NATOCC, 2013). These attachments are referred to as 'Female Engagement Teams' (FETs); an initiative initially consisting of female members of the United States Marine Corps (NATOCC, 2013). The NZPRT was not large enough to sustain a permanent FET; however, following cultural protocol female NZPRT personnel were responsible for liaising with Afghani women with a female *Hazara* translator where available (MFAT, 2013). Interestingly, a female development professional who has served in Afghanistan stated to the author that, while male NZPRT personnel could not enter women's space; as a Western woman she was able to interact with both men and women in their respective spaces and was willingly served tea and food by Afghani men as an equal. She commented that as a Western woman she inhabited 'a third sex' in the Afghani social hierarchy and was not considered to fall under the strictest provisions of *Shar'ia* or *Purdah*.

The ISAF PRT Handbook reserves a single page of 283 to discuss 'gender' and the PRT; heavily referencing UNSC 1325 as the basis of gender equitable security operations in a post-conflict state (ISAF, 2006). The ISAF PRT Handbook does not specifically prescribe under which circumstances a

gender analysis assessment should be undertaken as a function of development project planning; or if a gender analysis might be obligatory at all (ISAF, 2006). However, NZAID and its successor NZAP have been closely associated with the co-ordinated planning of development initiatives in Afghanistan with the NZDF, NZP and related parties since 2003; with especially close involvement from 2009 to 2013 as NZAP development professionals were sent to the PRT (MFAT, 2013). Illustrating an institutional commitment to gender and development NZAID and the NZAP have published a 'Gender Analysis Guideline' (NZAID, 2006a); with this document being expanded into specific knowledge sheets on gender in relation to development sectors such as Agriculture, Education and Tourism (NZAP, 2012a). Furthermore, NZAID and NZAP have published several short documents on the importance of women's empowerment to the success of New Zealand's governance and economic initiatives in the Pacific, though it is noted that the programme in Afghanistan is not mentioned in a NZAID or NZAP document specifically addressing women's empowerment (NZAID, 2007a & 2007b). While MFAT (2013) states that development initiatives in Afghanistan have been undertaken with an approach sensitive to gender equity; specific project planning documents are not available to the author to substantiate under what circumstances a gender analysis assessment has been completed in project planning.

An examination of women's resources in the two chosen projects

Kabeer (1999 pg. 437) states that 'resources' constitute the pre-conditions of exercising the process (or agency) of decision-making and choice for women. While substantively material resources, these resources may also include the latent skills that women hold and are unable to exercise in their initial situation of disempowerment; resources which many women do not believe they could exercise proficiently, if at all, until given the opportunity to discover and enhance their own abilities (Kabeer, 1999). Therefore, a development initiative committed to women's empowerment would benefit markedly from exploring the resources which individual women already retain or may possess access to; informing project planning for the targeted increase of resource access for women in areas, which in turn may facilitate the exercise of greater agency (Kabeer, 1999). Such an assessment helps identify prospective project scope, participants, leaders, and delivery and sustainability strategy (Kakar, 2005; AREU, 2013).

The CDC programme presents itself as a vehicle for the political empowerment of women (NSP, 2013; Estavez, 2010). As outlined previously, women in Afghanistan do not traditionally retain any form of decision-making contribution or position in the local context as all community positions of power and resolution are held by men (Emadi, 2005). Estavez (2010 & 2012b) relates that the majority of women participating in her studies of CDC in Kabul and Parwan Provinces were initially sceptical of the practical contribution they could make, feeling that their lack of education or decision-making experience confirmed the widely held notion of community men that women were incapable of making informed rational decisions.

Kakar (2005) and Estavez (2010 & 2012b) discuss the difficulty the MRRD and FPs encountered in convincing male village *Malik* and *Shura* of the worth of women's participation in CDC for the first intake of eligible villages, often needing to emphasise that the monetary benefit to the community outweighed the 'danger' of women making decisions regarding community development. At this stage, many men openly voiced their fears that women's participation in the CDC was engineered to build a bloc of politically activated women who would owe their allegiance to foreign powers seeking to corrupt traditional culture (Kakar, 2005). Additionally, many *Malik* and *Shura* participants held a

deep rooted perception that the occupying forces retained an agenda to disempower traditional hierarchies to gain political control, mimicking Soviet efforts at socialist transformation in the nineteen eighties (Nixon, 2008). Later expansions of the CDC were able to point to the relative success of earlier CDC participant villages as evidence that women's participation was in fact beneficial to the achievements of village development and held no hidden political agenda (Estavez, 2012a).

The most prominent resource delivered by the CDC project for women is the creation of the community development council and the positions of governance within it; the sole community decision-making forum local women may inhabit (Nixon, 2008). In theory, each CDC should ideally consist of approximately 12 to 15 representatives; an equal mix of the sexes, resident in the village over the age of 18, elected in a secret ballot and able to contribute the vital resource of 'adequate time' to CDC business when required (AREU, 2013). FPs were contracted to enter the village and hold an extended public forum in which the election process including candidate selection and campaigning strategy were presented; FPs were then to return shortly after and administer CDC elections, including the monitoring of leadership appointments, including the positions of treasurer and secretary (AREU, 2013). In these initial forums, villagers were to be encouraged to consider the leadership qualities and relevant skills demonstrated by candidates in daily life rather than referencing existing positions of power or perceived educational standing (AREU, 2013). Financial resources (cash) were to be transferred to a single CDC bank account once the council had been satisfactorily established; with one project to be prioritised expressly by the female representatives upon the council. It was envisioned that while women's resources to make important decisions for the community would be enhanced; council participants would also garner improved project management, negotiating and influencing, as well as financial skills (Estavez, 2012a). Furthermore, in most villages the women's chosen priority project incorporated training to enhance women's economic resources (Estavez, 2012a). Participant's social networking skills across and outside of the community were also resources to be recognised, utilised and enhanced; acknowledging how under-utilised these skills seem in the Afghani context (Kakar, 2005).

Estavez (2012b) illustrates well the inherent difficulties of operationalizing these ideal theories in her study of a CDC in Kabul Province. The following points present the specific difficulties presented in the delivery of this village CDC, showing how the social context of Afghanistan can affect the resources made available to women in even the best-meaning empowerment initiative:

- Segregation of CDC participants: Initial forums delivered by the FP had to be run twice with men and women separated as per the request of the village hierarchy referencing cultural appropriateness. Village women affirmed that this separation was beneficial as they did not feel able to voice their opinions under the scrutiny of village men. This separation was to extend to the separate election of a male and female CDC council with voting rights kept along the lines of biological sex. In practice there was to be little communication between these two CDC functions, leaving the male CDC to administer the bulk of decisions while the female CDC was left only to administer their one priority project. Women were left without a forum to exercise decision-making agency among men and the bulk of development resources granted to the village through the programme.
- Financial control retained by men: Elected male CDC representatives refused to recognise the treasurer nominated by the female CDC representatives due to her moderate literacy and lack of formal financial or numerical experience or education. Rather than seeking to

provide the female nominee the training and resources demanded of the position, the male CDC appointed an overarching treasurer for both councils and retained the only sign-off permission for the CDC bank account. Female CDC representatives were distanced from all financial transactions, including those pertaining to the prioritised handicraft training module for women. Hence, village men had created a virtual transactional veto over the fiscal decisions made by the women's CDC. The FP supported this act; wishing to assure donors that money was being handled responsibly by experienced individuals.

- Electoral manipulation: The majority of village women, including elected CDC representatives felt that the secret ballot electing the female CDC leader had been fraudulent. These women felt that the 'elected' leader had manipulated the vote so that she could join her husband whom was the village *Malik* and elected leader of the male CDC. There were suspicions that the male CDC leader had initiated this act to maintain control over the direction of the female CDC through the power he held over the actions of his wife.
- Unpopular self-interested leadership: The majority of village women including elected CDC representatives stated that the female CDC leader was not the best person for the job: this leadership resource actually belonged with the women widely believed to have won the most votes in the secret ballot. The female CDC leader used her position to award a training contract to her own under-qualified daughter and refused to distribute the projects stock of 20 sewing machines outside of her own household.
- Unsatisfactory delivery of women's chosen project: The majority of village women stated that the handicraft training course had been a complete waste of precious time and money due to the quality of the tutor. Women were forced to pledge some form of support for the female CDC leader to garner access to the sewing machines; resources which should have been distributed across the households of the community. Disappointingly, the economic empowerment anticipated by women through improved income prospects preceding the project failed to materialise. Community women stated that their one chance at running a project for their immediate benefit had been wasted due to corruption and incompetence.

While case specific, the above example illustrates well how the empowerment resources anticipated in project planning can be significantly compromised by social context and corruption (AREU, 2013). At the date of this report, a great variety in the formulation of CDCs in Afghanistan is evident (AREU, 2013). Precious few villages have installed mixed and proportional CDC functions (AREU, 2013). Where women have gained representation in a mixed CDC structure, most often female representation has not been proportional; with only one or two women invited to attend meetings (AREU, 2013). Though imperfect, such women's presence with men in a decision making forum is considered an achievement of empowerment given the dearth of opportunities historically open to women in this sphere (Estavez, 2010; Kabeer, 1999). However, it is apparent that in the cases where only a couple of women sit on a predominantly male CDC council; a very strong and uncommonly brave personality is required of these women to have their opinion equally considered and respected (Nixon, 2008).

The NZPRT development programme is presented by MFAT (2013) primarily as a security operation which has also sought to improve the general welfare of Bamyan citizens through development initiatives. These initiatives emphasise improved access to basic services and resources; appreciating and accommodating the different needs of men and boys, and women and girls in a post-conflict state as mandated by UNSC Resolution 1325 and the ISAF PRT Operational Handbook (ISAF, 2006).

These priorities align very much with the 'human rights' provisions outlined in the final sub-section of Chapter Two of this research report, and it should be remembered that MFAT does not claim to deliver a specific development programme for women's empowerment in Afghanistan. However, this does not preclude the development initiatives of the NZPRT from contributing to the political, economic, social or psychological empowerment of the women of Bamyan through the enhancement of resources and facilitation of women's agency. Additionally, it is noted that the New Zealand Government has granted a small sum to Bamyan CDC initiatives (MFAT, 2013 pg.15).

The NZPRT has placed particular emphasis on improving the educational infrastructure of Bamyan Province (Coxon, 2008). Funding has been provided to the Bamyan Teacher Training College (TTC) through the Aga Khan Foundation (AGF) to train upward of 1,200 unqualified male and female teachers per year (MFAT, 2013 pg.10). Additional funding has also been contributed for extra-curricular training for teachers already qualified and practising in the primary and secondary education system (MFAT, 2013 pg.10). Regarding the up-skilling of female teachers, MFAT (2013 pg. 10) states:

In addition, teacher training supported by New Zealand has emphasised the training and up-skilling of female teachers. This has resulted in better career pathways for female teachers and improved participation by girls in schooling as well as improved economic conditions.

The NZ PRT has also co-operated with the United States Commander's Emergency Response Program (CERP) to build several girls schools in the Province; as well as a purpose built female student's dormitory at the reopened Bamyan University site (MFAT, 2013 pg.19). This infrastructure project has helped Bamyan University lift the number of female tertiary students to 15 per cent of total attendance, or approximately 400 female tertiary students (MFAT, 2013).

While not targeted specifically at women's empowerment; these efforts to enhance the educational resources available to the women and girls of Bamyan lay a foundation for the increased political empowerment of female students in later life (Porter, 2013). Additionally, the broadening of girls education not only enhances the future economic prospects of students, but provides enhanced employment prospects for women who wish to be teachers, providing resources of economic empowerment to several hundred local women a year (MFAT, 2013).

The up-skilling and training of Afghani police recruits is also the substantial contribution of the NZPRT to regional efforts enhancing governance and justice (Carswell, 2009). These trainee recruits include a very small group of women (Carswell, 2009). From nil beginnings in 2006, by 2012 only 18 of the 721 actual police officers in Bamyan were women (MFAT, 2013 pg. 15). However, the NZ PRT training programme has made concrete efforts to expand the participation of women in regional policing (Carswell, 2009). Regarding the up-skilling of female police recruits, MFAT (2013, pg. 14-15) states:

In addition to encouragement and mentoring support, the New Zealand Police also implemented practical steps to help women succeed in policing. Examples include the introduction of mixed training, the hiring of a nanny for women with children and the establishment of a female dormitory.

New Zealand Police (NZP) lobbying was important to Bamyan securing a Family Response Unit (FRU) at Provincial Headquarters in 2008 (Carswell, 2009). Led by a female Afghani officer, the FRU

provides a safer avenue for women to report gender-based violence in the home (Carswell, 2009). For the small set of women who have graduated through this programme, the creation of female only positions in the police provides a measure of economic resource for empowerment. In the health sector, this theme is repeated with the funding of 46 women to attend specific courses in Community Midwifery Education (MFAT, 2013).

Interestingly, MFAT (2013) makes no mention of how efforts to enhance sustainable economic development in Bamyan through improved agricultural methodologies, tourism sector expansion and marketing, and renewable energy generation have been delivered with regard to gender considerations even though knowledge notes on gender in these sectors have been published by the NZAP (NZAP, 2012a). While it is probable that economic development initiatives in these sectors have accommodated gender in project planning; it appears unlikely that the NZPRT would deliver any initiatives specifically targeting women in these sectors without noting this fact in their documentation.

In comparing the resources for empowerment provided by the NZPRT and the CDC we can see a marked emphasis toward the provision of political access and skills at the local level in the CDC, with a lesser provision of resources for economic empowerment specifically related to the delivery of a handicraft or literacy training initiative for women (Estavez, 2010; Estavez, 2012b). Estavez (2012b) illustrates well how the local context can manipulate the final delivery of these resources to women, sometimes lessening the extent to which political and economic resource access is practically improved. The NZPRT does not provide a comparable emphasis on the improved access of Bamyan women to political and economic resources in the local context; however, the NZPRT has been heavily involved in improving the access of women and girls to resources which the author considers human rights such as quality education and healthcare (MFAT, 2013). Women and girl's improved access to these resources provides the basis of a measure of economic and political empowerment in their future lives (MFAT, 2013), yet the author considers the CDC to be a development initiative which provides a more specific vehicle for providing the resources for women's empowerment in the local Afghani context, especially in the public aspect of the political.

An examination of agency in the two chosen projects

Kabeer (1999) states that 'agency' refers to:

The ability to define one's goals and act upon them. Agency is more than about observable action; it also encompasses the meaning, motivation and purpose which individuals bring to their activity, their *sense* of agency, or 'the power within'. While agency tends to be operationalized as 'decision-making' in the social science literature, it can take a number of other forms. It can take the form of bargaining and negotiation, deception and manipulation, subversion and resistance as well as more intangible, cognitive processes of reflection and analysis. It can be exercised by individuals as well as by collectivities (Kabeer, 1999 pg. 438).

We can see that while intrinsic to empowerment, identifying and considering all aspects of women's agency is difficult (Kabeer, 1999). For the purposes of this critical consideration the author will substantially rely on an examination of decision-making and the exercising of choice created by the two chosen projects, as well as making comment on the less tangible aspects of women's agency.

The pre-conditions for agency created by the CDC programme can vary markedly between participating villages; largely depending on whether the CDC is formulated as a mixed or a segregated council (Nixon, 2008). In segregated CDC, it is apparent that women's agency is advanced in comparison to a 'control' village where no CDC has been initiated; yet curtailed in comparison to a village with a CDC which enshrines the proportional contribution of women (Nixon, 2008).

Among segregated CDC, there is an appreciable trend for women's influence to be restricted to the choosing of, and governance of the obligatory women's priority project (Kakar, 2005). In this situation, women are empowered to exercise agency by deciding:

- whether to seek election to the female CDC as a leader or councillor;
- which female candidates are best qualified to represent the community;
- how the female CDC should operate;
- which initiative would bring the greatest benefit to the women of the community; and,
- how the chosen initiative will be delivered.

In these circumstances the decision-making opportunities afforded women can take place largely in containment; removed from the more influential decision-making process undertaken by the male CDC. In many ways, a female CDC resembles a practice space where women are empowered to exercise a modicum of agency among their peers without challenging the power of male CDC participants. Male participants retain the power to decide how the majority of the village's development funds will be administered and spent. However, the value to women of participating in a female CDC should not be discounted on this basis alone.

Participant women upon interview have stated that they actually preferred learning leadership and governance skills away from the critical eye of men; and that they had garnered an appreciable gain in self-belief and self-esteem related to the worth of their own personal opinion in forming a group consensus on development (Estavez, 2012b). Some women stated that this new sense of self-belief had prompted them to contemplate undertaking new economic opportunities including starting their own business, even when the immediate economic benefits of a training course failed to materialise (Estavez, 2012b). Several participant women also stated that they had brought their new decision-making skills into the home and now felt that their husbands were more responsive to their opinions on household affairs (Estavez, 2012b). However, this finding is tempered by the conclusions of Beath *et al.* (2013) which state that across the CDC programme and especially in villages with segregated CDCs there does not appear to be an observable increase in women's agency in the private sphere regarding political or economic decisions.

Mixed CDC where women are able to participate proportionally present a broader and strong stage for the exercise of women's agency; expanding the space for the political, economic, social and psychological empowerment of women in the local context (Estavez, 2010; Estavez, 2012b). In this model, participant women tend not only to govern their own prioritised project but also enter a forum where their decisions impact the development agenda of their entire community (Nixon, 2008). The placing of women with men in a decision-making body is a strong challenge to the state of social relations (Kandiyoti, 2005; Coleman, 2004). However, it should be noted that in this model many male power-holders have specifically decreed that CDC decisions must not stray beyond development issues into other political realms of power because of women's substantial participation (Kakar, 2005). These traditional realms of power include village liaison with the state,

religious advice or judicial resolution (Emadi, 2005). The substantial participation of women within these local realms of power would represent a significant shift in the equity of social relations in the Afghani local context; and would also represent a significant achievement for women's political empowerment (Kandiyoti, 2005). The mixed CDC model makes a strong first step in demonstrating the value of women's agency to male holders of power (Nixon, 2008). However, the suggested extension of the mixed CDC model into the governance of these traditional realms of power has already raised appreciable male backlash in conservative areas and is in no way assured through future initiatives (Kakar, 2005).

Upon interview, female participants in mixed CDC at interview have highlighted how tense and difficult the initial stages of their involvement in CDC could be (Kakar, 2005). Women detailed how they were not told of spontaneous CDC meetings where important decisions were made in their absence; male participants talked over their opinions; and, male participants thought female CDC members should be silent in their attendance to fulfil their duties to tradition (Kakar, 2005). Despite these difficulties, many participating women said they took a great deal of pride in the value and quality of the decision-making they were empowered to undertake on behalf of their community (Estavez, 2012b). Participation in mixed CDC had prompted many women to form a strong belief in the worth of their opinion when compared to powerful men, and in some cases had initiated self-reflection by men about the value of women's voice in the community and at home (Estavez, 2010 & 2012b). Several women stated that this experience had provided the self-belief in their own abilities to contemplate entering the political sphere at a regional or national level; while some women stated that they hoped that the soul-searching of men might lead to more respect for women's contribution to decision-making in the home, especially surrounding economic agency (Estavez, 2010 & 2012b). Again, with regard to the private sphere, the conclusions of Beath *et al.* (2013) articulate that the practical status of women's agency in the private sphere remains severely constrained regardless of CDC initiatives; however there is no evidence to suggest that mixed CDC initiatives have had a disempowering impact on women's agency in the private sphere (Beath *et al.*, 2013).

NZPRT development initiatives provide a degree of decision-making agency to a more select group of Bamyan women; largely avoiding the concentration on women's political empowerment observed in the CDC. The emphasis of the NZPRT on the further training of women as teachers, policewomen and health professionals provides broader opportunities for women who decide to pursue a career in these sectors of the public service (MFAT, 2013). The expansion of female representation in these public service sectors also serves to redefine non-traditional professions as appropriate in modern Afghani society; including the normalisation of women's participation in the Afghani police force (Carswell, 2009). Coxon (2008) relates that the professional training efforts of the NZPRT did much to improve the self-esteem and self-belief of many female participants, especially where training ended with the award of a nationally recognised qualification. MFAT (2013) also relates that as the proportion of women in these visible public service roles increases, more women will consider a career in these areas as possible and appropriate in the evolving Afghani context.

Unfortunately, the NZPRT does not provide any review of how the women trained for these public service positions might be empowered to exercise agency over how their earnings are spent. In this regard, I consider it likely that the conclusions of Beath *et al.* (2013) would extend to the overall trend of women in Afghanistan: presently in most cases men reserve the right to exercise agency

over the spending of the families combined income, even when his partner retains a level of income and education where she may be regarded better resourced to exercise this agency.

The concentration of the NZPRT on facilitating the greatly increased education of girls is laudable; and there is little doubt that the building of quality educational resources for girls makes a substantial contribution to the measure of agency an Afghani woman will be empowered to exercise in her future as well as her present (Porter, 2013). In general, it is considered that any measure of women's agency will increase with the number of years she is able to access a quality education (Stark, 2013). MFAT (2013) notes that, as well as a programme of teacher training, the NZPRT has worked with the Aga Khan Foundation (AKF) to guide the drafting of better educational programmes and resources in Bamyan, yet it appears more could be done to lift the quality of teaching in girl's schools (Stark, 2013). The quality of teaching texts and certain curriculum remains sub-standard and technologically obsolete (MOE, 2012). The author concludes that the agency of Bamyan women would be greatly reinforced if sub-standard texts were to be redrafted in a gender sensitive manner; communicating the message to girls that there is great value to the individual and the community if she chooses to stay in school as long as possible, and that no profession should be closed to her because of her biological sex.

The establishment of a Family Response Unit (FRU) in Bamyan, with the co-operation of the NZPRT has empowered more women to act with regard to the reporting of gender violence and the future prevention of domestic violence (Carswell, 2009; MFAT, 2013). Traditionally women in Afghanistan have had little choice in seeking justice for gender based violence and sexual crime perpetrated by men, including partners, relatives and combatants (HRW, 2013). The state justice system remains woefully inadequate regarding such crime; however, the FRU represents a step forward for Bamyan women (Carswell, 2009). Women affected by violence are now able to discuss their case in private with a female Afghani police officer and, in this environment are unlikely to face 'morality' charges such as adultery when reporting cases of rape (HRW, 2013). By instituting the FRU, the NZPRT has lessened the danger of female victims of crime falling victim to 'honour' killings from male relatives and has contributed to educational material on gender based and sexual violence which may stigmatise the committing of such crimes among Afghani men (Carswell, 2009).

In comparing the agency for empowerment provided by the NZPRT and the CDC, as with resources for empowerment, we see an appreciably stronger emphasis on the exercise of women's political and economic agency in CDC initiatives (AREU, 2013). The CDC provides a forum for women to exercise decision-making agency in a more pervasive form than the educational initiatives of the NZPRT, as NZPRT efforts have broadened the economic choices of some Afghani women but to a far more limited number of individuals, outside of a local governance context. Beath *et al* (2013) illustrate how the successes of the CDC in the public sphere of the community have unfortunately not translated into a discernible increase of women's agency in the private sphere. Unfortunately, it is concluded that both the CDC and NZPRT have only made limited advancements for the political and economic agency of the great majority of Afghani women regarding their life choices of consequence.

An examination of achievements in the two chosen projects: are the CDC and NZPRT gender accommodating or gender transformative?

Kabeer (1999 pg. 452) states that:

It is...difficult to judge the validity of an 'achievement' measure unless we have evidence, or can make a reasonable guess, as to whose agency was involved and the extent to which the achievement in question transformed prevailing inequalities in resources and agency rather than reinforcing them or leaving them unchallenged.

In the above, Kabeer (1999) references several of the difficulties faced by development actors when seeking to quantify how participant women have been empowered due to a gender-focussed initiative or project. Firstly, Kabeer reminds us that any measure of achievement is intrinsically linked to aspects of resource and agency, and can-not be considered without referencing these aspects of empowerment. Secondly, Kabeer directs us to concentrate on whose agency was involved in the project as a fundamental consideration of empowerment and achievement. Finally, Kabeer ties the entire consideration of empowerment and achievement back to one vital cornerstone: the transformation of social relations between men and women.

Regarding any conclusions on the empowerment achievements of the CDC and the NZPRT I am drawn to the labels utilised by AREU (2013, pg. 8) which reference Kabeer (1999) and Okali (2011). AREU (2013, pg. 8) categorises the nature of gender-focussed projects as either:

- Gender accommodating: accommodating projects invest in understanding the social context of women's position. This understanding is then utilised to craft projects which "tend to focus on women and delivering improved access to resources and services to enable individual achievement and security" (AREU, 2013 pg. 8). These projects are not formulated to "change the underlying reasons why gender inequality exists and persists." (AREU, 2013 pg. 8)

Or

- Gender transformative: transformative projects "see the institutional context as a key barrier to gender equality and seek to change it, not work with it" (AREU, 2013 pg. 8). Gender transformative projects "are composed of actions which engage with both men and women; enhance individual capabilities, resources and confidence; challenge oppressive gender norms, attitudes and practices that shape opportunities in communities, local and national governance structures, markets, aid institutions and beyond; and address unequal power dynamics" (AREU, 2013 pg. 8). Transformative projects are crafted to identify and change the underlying causes of gender inequality in a community.

When addressing the prospective empowerment achievements of the NZPRT the author asserts that the NZPRT bares the hallmarks of a gender accommodating development programme and should not be considered substantially transformative, as outlined above (AREU, 2013). The analysis of resource and agency previous show that the NZPRT has taken the specific social context of gender into consideration when formulating projects addressing education, governance and health in Afghanistan (MFAT, 2013). Furthermore, the NZAP has published documentation displaying a commitment to understanding the social context of gender in the sectors of agriculture, tourism

management and renewable energy generation in development projects undertaken by the New Zealand government, though specific documentation concerning work in Afghanistan in these sectors was not located by the author. As consistent with a 'gender accommodating' development project or programme, the NZPRT has then used this understanding to formulate specific projects for women, such as targeted training courses for female teachers, police officers and midwives, which advance (some) women's status (AREU, 2013). Therefore, the NZPRT has increased access for women to "resources and services to enable individual achievement or security" (AREU, 2013 pg. 8), achievements consistent with a gender accommodating programme.

It is certain that the empowerment achievements of a successful gender accommodating programme would be lesser than those of a successful gender transformative one (AREU, 2013; Kabeer, 1999; Okali, 2011). While the NZPRT has broadened (some) women's access to political and economic resources, especially through the provision of professional education, there is little to suggest that the NZPRT has brought women and men together to address the underlying causations of women's disempowerment in Afghanistan. Female participants in NZPRT professional programmes have stated that they have gained self-confidence and self-belief through targeted development projects (MFAT, 2013). However, these achievements do not translate to substantial changes to the political and economic agency Afghani women may exercise in both the public, but especially the private sphere, as the underlying causes of women's disempowerment have not been addressed (Kabeer, 1999; AREU, 2013).

In comparison the author asserts that the CDC demonstrates more achievements of empowerment than the NZPRT, and mixed CDC can often display facets of a gender transformative project (AREU, 2013). However, the author concludes that the CDC programme should still be considered substantially as gender accommodating rather than gender transformative, while the initiative may provide an important stepping stone towards delivering more gender transformative political empowerment projects in Afghanistan's future (Kakar, 2005; Estavez 2012b). Estavez (2010, 2012b) and (AREU, 2013) relate that on the whole the CDC has been successful in politically empowering women in the context of local governance, especially in mixed CDC where women are able to participate meaningfully in decisions regarding development across the entire community; enabling women a voice in village politics among men for the first time (Nixon, 2008). It is the renegotiated space between the power relations of men and women in the community through mixed CDC which portray a gender transformative aspect (Estavez, 2010). However, these achievements of political empowerment have not translated into women participating in traditional avenues of local power such as *shura* or taking the position of village head (*malik*); while Beath *et al.* (2013) reiterate that women's political and economic agency has not appreciably increased in the private sphere where the greatest decisions of life consequence are made. In this context, therefore, we could consider the CDC as a pioneering effort which provides a template for the future expansion of women's political empowerment in the local governance structures of Afghanistan (Kakar, 2005). It is also noted that in areas which instigated segregated CDC, most women's CDC have been disbanded following the end of the NSP three-year funding cycle (AREU, 2013). This fact does not bode well for the sustainability of women's increased political empowerment in areas which have not instigated a mixed CDC (Nixon, 2008).

It is noted that Estavez (2010; 2012b) encountered no particular economic empowerment of women in CDC test villages in Parwan and Kabul Provinces, substantially due to the non-existence of substantial work opportunities in the Parwan region for both men and women, and in the Kabul

village example outlined earlier, the alleged mismanagement of the women's priority project. AREU (2013) and Beath *et al.* (2013) note that the achievements of women's economic empowerment through prioritised development initiatives governed by CDC have been diverse and appear dependant on a range of localised factors; factors often outside considerations of social relationships and gender. While on the whole it appears that many participant women have been empowered with skills which might instigate their economic empowerment, the prevailing weaknesses of the Afghan economy and the insecurity of the environment conspire to limit the ability of both Afghani women and men to earn a substantial wage safely and fairly (Cordesman, 2013). Hence, the possible achievements for women's economic empowerment do not only rest with the transformation of social relations, they also rest with the transformation of the Afghani economy; a point of note also to the limited achievements of economic empowerment discernible in the NZPRT programme (AREU, 2013).

As a final point regarding the empowerment achievements of the CDC and NZPRT, Estavez (2012b) finds that though the CDC can be viewed primarily as a vehicle for the political empowerment of women, one of the empowerment achievements of the CDC had in-fact been the social empowerment of participant women both inside, and between communities. Within communities, the requirements of convening CDC meetings with women attendees, co-ordinated forums and attending training courses had brought community women together in new ways and sometimes required women to be mobile without an attending male relative. Estavez (2012b) notes that this increased mobility had, in some cases, stretched to women travelling independently to neighbouring communities to discuss and facilitate training or new CDC initiatives working with NGO FPs. In the Afghani context, this advancement in some participant women's independent mobility is significant (AREU, 2013). This point is also of relevance for sections of NZPRT training for teachers, midwives and especially policewomen; participant women were often required to travel to these courses independent of relative males, and in the case of Afghani policewomen they are expected to travel through the region independently to fulfil their duties (Carswell, 2009). This demonstrated independence of mobility for training or employment may be regarded an achievement of social empowerment (MFAT, 2013).

CHAPTER 4: SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Quantitative measures of women's circumstances in Afghanistan show a state where the status of women is slowly advancing from a situation of severe disempowerment (UN, 2013). The empowerment of women in post-conflict states, such as Afghanistan, is now recognised as a vital instrument for the securing of long-term peace and security as well as an agent of economic growth and more efficient reconstruction (Porter, 2013). However, as foreign forces presently transition stronger security control to the Afghani government, the sustainability of women's advancements appear tenuous (Lough *et al.* 2012). While the empowerment of women has been codified in the Afghani National Development Strategy as a priority cross-cutting theme (IROA, 2007), the commitment of the Afghani nation to the permanent transformation of social relations toward equality between men and women is severely complicated by societal context (Kandiyoti, 2005).

There is little doubt that many women, especially in urban areas, have been empowered politically, economically, socially and psychologically through participating in gender focussed development programmes including empowerment projects where available (AREU, 2013). This conclusion is buoyed by the very deliberate disempowerment of women purposefully practised by the former Taliban regime as the starting point for consideration (Kandiyoti, 2005).

In essence, this report has sought to illustrate not 'if' but 'how' women have been empowered by gender-focussed development projects in Afghanistan since the fall of the Taliban in 2001. After an examination of how empowerment has been nominally conceptualised and practised in the development literature, the author settled upon the work of Naila Kabeer (1999) on the intricacies and difficulties of meaningfully measuring women's empowerment as persuasive. As such, the critical consideration of women's empowerment in the New Zealand-led Provincial Reconstruction Team (NZPRT), and the Community Development Council (CDC) initiative of the National Solidarity Programme was undertaken with reference to women's increased access to resources and exercise of individual and collective agency toward 'achievements of empowerment'.

It is concluded that neither the CDC nor the NZPRT gender-focussed development projects could be substantially considered as 'gender transformative' projects. Rather, each is considered to be 'gender accommodating' in varying degrees.

When considering the CDC through the lens of Scheyvens' empowerment framework (1999) it is concluded that:

- the degree of political empowerment available to women in the CDC initiative is largely dependent on the formation of the CDC council as mixed and participatory or segregated and proportional, with greater political empowerment available to women participating on mixed CDC (Estavez 2010; 2012b).
- the level of economic empowerment expected by women of the CDC initiative are rarely realised (Estavez, 2010; 2012b)
- participant women were often socially empowered by their CDC responsibilities to travel more freely in their own village and to neighbouring communities (Estavez 2010; 2012b)
- many women stated that the CDC experience had empowered them psychologically to attempt to take more control over the strategic decisions in their own lives (Estavez 2010; 2012b)

Each of the above conclusions is tempered by the conclusions of Beath *et al.* (2013) whose empirical study found no evidence of women participating in the CDC initiative being significantly empowered politically or economically within the private sphere of the household.

In comparison, when considering the NZPRT through the same lens of Scheyvens' (1999) empowerment framework it is concluded that:

- a modicum of political and economic empowerment was appreciable for the relatively small numbers of Bamyani women who participated in professional training facilitated by the NZPRT
- a measure of social and psychological empowerment was also appreciable for women who participated in professional training facilitated by the NZPRT

Measures of empowerment for the wider female population of Bamyani directly related to the NZPRT development programme were less apparent. Though no specific research was located by the author regarding the extension of empowerment gains for these participant women into the private sphere, it is considered very likely that the findings of Beath *et al.* (2013) discussed previously remain applicable.

When further approached through the lens of Kabeer's framework (1999) for the measurement of empowerment, the CDC provides:

- women access to political resources previously unavailable to Afghani women, especially in the case of mixed CDC. The provision of resources for economic empowerment was curtailed by the dearth of opportunity in the Afghani economy.
- a forum for the exercise of greater agency in the public sphere. However, this change has been particularly slow to translate into the broadening of independent control and choice for women in the private sphere where the strategic choices which truly mould women's lives are made.

In comparison, when considering the NZPRT further through the same lens of Kabeer's (1999) framework for the measurement of empowerment, the NZPRT provides:

- a select group of women participating in professional training access to political and social resources, but especially economic resources
- broader opportunities for Bamyani women to exercise agency in joining sectors of the public service

Generally, the author concludes that more empowerment is apparent, for more women, through the CDC initiative than delivered by the NZPRT development programme.

As Afghanistan enters the transition to state administered security there is a real fear that the advancements so hard fought for by women in the past decade may be lost, a victim of backroom political deals, shrinking international commitment and policy repositioning by the state. Therefore, the author asserts that the following recommendations for the improvement of empowerment projects in Afghanistan drawn from this research report must be considered with the difficulties of the upcoming transitional period in mind.

The CDC initiative has shown that it is possible to politically empower women at the local level in Afghanistan. This, in itself, is no mean feat yet the CDC initiative requires significant funding and commitment from international donors and the state to extend its reach to all Afghani villages, and then to extend mixed CDC to the greatest number of participant villages as opposed to segregated councils. From this point, there is then the possibility of broadening the scope of successful mixed CDC to administering and adjudicating more of the community functions of power previously reserved exclusively for men. The meaningful participation of women in local power structures would be substantially transformative, signifying a real reconsideration of the social relations between women and men which may reach further into the private sphere.

For development programmes associated with provincial reconstruction teams, the author recommends that the ISAF reconsiders the importance of gender and women's empowerment, placing these considerations at the heart of future security initiatives rather than condemning gender considerations to a one page appendix. While many NZPRT projects have had a positive impact on the people of Bamyan, it is apparent that these projects have not sought to specifically empower large numbers of women. Therefore, the author considers that future projects directly referencing women's political, economic, social and psychological empowerment would be of greater benefit to Afghanistan than generic development programmes which simply accommodate considerations of gender.

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