

Operationalizing Gender in Provincial Reconstruction Teams in Afghanistan

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Founded in 1995, Afghan Women's Network is a non-partisan network of women and women's NGOs working in Pakistan and Afghanistan to empower Afghan women and ensure their equal participation in society. The members of the Network also recognize the value and role of children as the future of Afghanistan and, as such, regard the empowerment and protection of children as fundamental to their work. The Network seeks to enhance the effectiveness of its members by fostering partnerships and collaboration between members, undertaking advocacy and lobbying, networking, training and capacity building.

As written by Wazhma Frogh, Gender and Youth Advisor, Initiative to Promote Afghan Civil Society (I-PACS), Counterpart International. “it’s hard to engage women in such ... military efforts but it isn’t impossible. ... Pakistani and Afghan delegations in last weeks’ [9 August 2007] Peace Jirga supported women’s participation in the Jirga and peace processes in the country. ... I was amazed on the thorough analysis of many men in this Peace Jirga on how women have been affected by war and instability and how in most instances it’s the women who pay the higher price of war and turmoil in the country.”

Introduction

At the beginning of 2007, the Afghan Women’s Network entered into a dialogue with NATO-ISAF – a dialogue that has been ongoing from multiple fronts with multiple actors for years – to address the frequent exclusion of issues of gender, women’s participation and gendered insecurities perspectives in Provincial Reconstruction Teams’ strategies and operations.¹ In this paper we set out to do just this by outlining the importance and utility of unremittingly integrating gender issues, introducing some points of discussion and providing some recommendations – some more abstract than others – and practical examples of how AWN might help this process – as we represent a network of stakeholders and a partner.²

AWN, unlike many members of civil society, believes it is important to engage with NATO ISAF’s PRTs so PRT operations first and foremost make contributions to Afghanistan that are in the maximum interest of the Afghan people, with that interest being defined by the Afghan people, and, in so doing, enhancing PRT operational effectiveness.

Why is this Important for PRTs?

- PRTs will make well-informed, judicious, balanced decisions;
- Enhance situational awareness;³
- Better effectiveness in CIMIC activities;

¹ ISAF’s role is to assist the Afghan government in extending its authority across the country; conduct stability and security operations in co-ordination with the Afghan national security forces; assist the Afghan government with the security sector reform process; mentor and support the Afghan National Army; and support Afghan government programs to disarm illegally armed groups.

In practice these operations take the form of conducting patrols, embedding advisors within the Afghan National Army units and overseeing the operation of 25 Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) located throughout Afghanistan. Described as the “leading edge” of NATO efforts in Afghanistan, PRTs combine civilian and military personnel to coordinate and enable security and reconstruction efforts for the surrounding area, in so doing assisting the government of Afghanistan to extend its authority across the country. <http://www.nato.int/issues/isaf/practice.html>

² Policy Note 1 – “PRT Engagement in Provincial Development,” Development of Provincial Development Plan (PDP), “PDPs should capture all stakeholder delivery through GoA, IO, NGO, private investment and PRT. PRT projects should attempt to fill some of the gaps between stakeholder intervention.” (PRT Handbook, B42)

³ CIMIC Centre of Excellence, 2007.

- Better access to local population.
- Enhance overall Civil-military relations.

Obstacles

- This conversation has been ongoing since the first PRT was established in Gardez. PRTs are constantly reinventing the wheel;
- Perceived and real cultural and religious obstacles;
- The role and mandate of PRTs are frequently not understood by the communities or aid communities;
- It is either unclear who is undertaking which development project, or women are not informed who is undertaking which development project;
- Afghan NGOs and individuals often do not want to engage with PRTs

The Multiple Fronts of AWN's Advocacy Campaign

- We are advocating NATO-ISAF for a Policy Note on Gender, preferably under the frame of Gender Mainstreaming and not Gender Equity;
- NATO PRT personnel;
- NATO-Brussels;
- The Civil-Military Working Group developing the new CIMIC Guidelines for AFG to incorporate a gender component, which there has been incorporated in the newest Draft version at least partially due to AWN's advocacy campaign.

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and Gender

NATO is constantly transforming. As the NATO ISAF-PRT Handbook notes, "The current situation in Afghanistan presents unique challenges and opportunities for civil-military cooperation".⁴ One of these challenges and opportunities is the incorporation of gender into PRT strategies and operations. A Development Officer from one PRT told me that gender was discussed at a PRT Conference two years ago, yet he had seen no changes to ISAF or PRT approaches to gender.

The time is ripe for change for a variety of reasons. First, as stated by General Ramon Sanjose, NATO ISAF Chief of CIMIC, at the 27-28 August 2007 quarterly PRT Conference, "ISAF's security and stability pillar is advancing much more than the long-term pillars, such as good governance and development. This imbalance is dangerous." Incorporation of a gender perspective is key to good governance and sustainable development. Second, we see lead nations for their PRTs requesting gender training, such as the newest batch of Dutch PRTs CIMIC personnel who will be deployed soon who

⁴ PRT Handbook, ii

requested specialized training from the CIMIC Center of Excellence.⁵ This was based on a political demand and an operations requirement to focus on gender issues, based on recent experiences in the their area of responsibility. Third, in June 2007, NATO was supposed to adopt an official definition of gender, which is:

The term “gender refers to the social differences and social relations between men and women. It therefore refers not to women and men, but the relationship between them, and the way this is socially constructed. A person’s gender is learned through socialization and is heavily influenced by the culture of the society concerned. The gender of a person: Is socially constructed and therefore learned and can be changed (but this does not mean it is easy or uncomplicated); differs and varies within and across cultures and over time; and results in different roles, responsibilities, opportunities, needs and constraints for women, men, girls and boys.”

Finally, the time is ripe for this discussion because there are ongoing, cross-sector discussions about how UN Security Council Resolution 1325 can be implemented on the ground in peace and stability operations.

As the NATO Secretary- General said recently, “If we embed a good standard of gender awareness, in policy, training and operations, it will influence and enhance effectiveness.” Gender is an issue that never stands alone. It is a cross cutting issue in peace and stability operations that affects everything from building a bridge or well; delivering humanitarian relief; security sector reform; demining; rule of law; decision making processes; how priorities are developed for development activities; and so on. A gendered perspective can help identify different vulnerabilities, needs, interests of men and women; to mainstream gender into planning and decision making processes; and to maximize their contribution to the stabilization process.

Gender is often only seen in light of gender equality. The predominant frame being used to discuss gender and peace and stability operations is that of gender mainstreaming. This concept was mentioned multiple times at the August 27-28 quarterly PRT Conference held in Kabul, but never defined. “Mainstreaming entails moving beyond increasing women’s participation and consultation; it means incorporating the experiences, knowledge and interests of women and men into the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation phases of policies and programmes in all spheres”, according to UN Security Council Resolution 1325. It is about gender informing policy, implementation/operations and evaluation processes. Most importantly, it is about operationalizing gender. A gender perspective will contribute to the achievement of the objectives and the effectiveness of PRT operations.

As they are operating under UN mandate, ISAF PRTs are obligated under United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 to do just this. The PRT Handbook mentions the SCR 1325 – “Women, Peace and Security” but not in terms of its relevance for PRTs.⁶

⁵ CIMIC Centre of Excellence, 2007.

⁶ PRT Handbook, F41

That said. Within the NATO system, UN SCR 1325 is recognized as an important Resolution. The Committee on Women in the NATO Forces NATO POLICY ON GENDER RELATED ISSUES IN DEPLOYMENT was developed by NATO, in consultation with its member states: “NATO member states re-affirm their commitment to ratification, acceptance or approval of UNSC 1325 and agree: ... (c) that this policy is aimed at securing gender awareness to improve operational effectiveness.”

PRTs aren't trained to "do development", but they undertake development activities. PRTs play a small part relative to the overall international development scheme in Afghanistan; however, it is not insignificant. As of 26 May 2007, there were over 7,500 PRT development projects worth over \$630 million.⁷

The ISAF PRT Handbook mentions the importance of PRTs “to endeavor to have a gender component” because PRT development activities are to support local priorities within the national development framework, such as ANDS. The “gender component” remains undefined”. AWN can assist in providing context and Afghan voices to help NATO-ISAF’s PRTs define this “gender component”.⁸

Although PRTs are meant to have a finite life span, with plans for PRT expansion in 2008, PRTs will be on the ground for quite some time. Operational effectiveness for PRT is measured for each rotation, which last between 4 months and 1 year, with development indicators. As Ritchie writes about the current state of Afghanistan, “NGOs remain a massively underutilized resource that could assist cost effectiveness and sustainability in meeting basic needs, building up local service provision and providing support to civil society, especially during this critical period of transition”.⁹

There are fundamental differences in the way the civilian assistance community and military communities conceive of a secure environment, but they share a common purpose – ensuring security and stability and promoting the Afghan National Development Strategy (ANDS).¹⁰ Through dialogue and cooperation it is possible to identify common aims, just like we did to bring us all together today, and to devise strategies for the joint achievement of these objectives.

⁷ Figures derived from a presentation by Commander Carol Shivers, PRT Chief, on AWN premises in July 2007.

⁸ <http://www.reliefweb.int/library/documents/2006/acbar-afg-01nov.pdf>

⁹ Ritchie, Holly. (2006) ‘Aid effectiveness in Afghanistan: At a Crossroads’, ACBAR Briefing Paper, No. 6

¹⁰ <http://www.ands.gov.af/>

Recommendations from AWN

- PRTs should always promote Afghan women’s attendance at all provincial and district level meetings where possible;¹¹
- PRT Guiding Principles: Lay the foundation for long-term sustainable changes”.¹² Part of this is carried out through Security Sector Reform (SSR): Police reform, Defense reform, and Justice reform, DDR ECT. (with the ANA, ANP and local justice system). Gender must be incorporated into all reform processes. Being that PRTs assist with or “enable” the SSR process, gender is an important issue for them to consider in this context in order to make the reform process more representative, participatory and inclusive. It is important to remember that SSR, which occurs after conflict, can also be an opportunity to foster increased levels of gender equality and inclusiveness with the sector’s structures and processes. It can fundamentally broaden the debate further on what security within a state looks like.
 - This also begs the question: Can a gender component be added after transition to Afghan ownership and still be effective? It should be part of the process before, during and after the transition to Afghan ownership;
- Make use of female operators to assure better access to women;
- Be aware of the vulnerable groups in your area of responsibility;
- Include organizations who are familiar and experienced in Gender into your CIMIC activities;
- Women’s civil society organizations are too often an untapped resource. AWN would like to reinforce the fact that PRTs consulting solely with the government is insufficient.” – as stated in the PRT Handbook. The Handbook states, “PRTs should engage in a consultative process with duty bearers as well as rights bearers.”¹³ In saying this, I also understand that many NGOs are hesitant to work with PRTs and other parts of the international military presence, but we – a network of over 57 NGOs – are willing to do so – as it is stated in the PRT Handbook. AWN members can be engaged by PRTs through AWN;

¹¹ Lesson Learned by US PRT, as reported by US DoS, Afghanistan Desk, August 2007

¹² PRT Handbook, 4.

¹³ PRT Handbook, C35

- PRTs need community buy-in for engagement with Afghan women;
- Use dialogue and communication as primary tools to address gender issues;¹⁴
- The international community can work for women's rights and talk about gender within an Islamic context that is culturally appropriate, without feeling like they are trying to fundamentally change a culture;
- The Executive Steering Committee (which develops policies for PRTs) should consult with civil society during the development of these policies;
- Affirmative policies such as Policy Notes, must be matched by action and resources, in addition to implementation, monitoring and evaluation;
- Develop the Policy Note on Gender Equity/Mainstreaming;
- The presence, participation and progress of women in governance structures should be a key indicator by which NATO-ISAF measures mission success because these are indicators of stability, development and good democratic governance;
- Raise public awareness of the mandate, role and activities of PRTs;
- Gender perspectives should be included in humanitarian relief operations;
- Issue Gender guidelines or checklist, which should be developed through consultative processes with civil society and MoWA. You can develop 6 or so key points and put them something the size of a credit card and have them distributed to all PRT personnel. AWN can help with developing this if you will distribute it;
- A mechanism must be developed to ensure an enduring institutional memory. Best practices should be collected, catalogued and discussed as part of the ISAF, and more generally, NATO, institutional knowledge base. It would be helpful to being collecting case studies from both the PRT and civilian humanitarian actors to provide a body of evidence on what works, where, how and with what impact. After they are collected, they should be cataloged and accessible to all PRT personnel to enhance reach-back capacity;¹⁵
- Unless there is a particularly focused effort, such as through the appointment of a gender adviser (as happened in the EUFOR Congo mission¹⁶), there have been

¹⁴ CIMIC Centre of Excellence, July 2007.

¹⁵ As stated by General Ramon Sanjose, Chief Civilio-military cooperation (CIMIC), at the 27-28 August quarterly PRT Conference in Kabul, "SHAPE [Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe] has a hard time getting data and metrics to measure effects of PRTs. It's hard to develop a baseline without data."

¹⁶ Final Report on Gender Work for EUFOR RD Congo Mission. EU Operations Headquarters. Chief of

difficulties operationalizing gender mainstreaming within stability and security operations. Below is an adaptation of the successful incorporation of gender focal points into the EUFOR operation in the DRC:

- Appoint and work with gender focal points in different PRTs. Similar to the gender adviser the Lithuanian PRT had at one point or this could be part of the CIMIC officers role, which is the approach that the CIMIC Center of Excellence takes when developing CIMIC trainings;
 - The Gender Focal Point can be the CIMIC/ Development Officer and/or other civilian experts that have preexisting experience working with human rights and gender mainstreaming or that have received training in these sectors. Gender is an vital part of the environment of the CIMIC officer;
 - Or, due to the fact that one of the key capacities of the Military Observation Teams or Military Observation and Liaison Teams” is to interact with the local population and disseminate information, conduct mediation and identify needs and priorities, a Gender Focal Point should accompany these teams or the teams should receive focused training on gender.
- One lesson learned from a US PRT, as reported during a meeting someone from AWN had with the US Department of State, PRTs should always promote Afghan women’s attendance at all provincial and district level meetings where possible;¹⁷
 - Another lesson learned was reported from the same meeting but describing the actions of a Canadian PRT. They hired local women to make the winter uniforms for Afghan road workers working on a PRT road project;¹⁸
 - When performing assessments, collect sex-disaggregated data. This can help determine how various forms of insecurity are improving for men and women;
 - Need a safe space for engagement between women, women’s organizations and PRTs. AWN can help facilitate this.
 - For example, NGOs agreed to participate because it was held at UNAMA’s office;¹⁹
 - The Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission could facilitate the contact between national NGOs and the PRT;²⁰
 - Provincial Councils are described in law as linking the people and civil society with the state administration at the provincial level. Provincial Councils might be also be considered a safe space for engagement;

Staff. 2 February 2007.

¹⁷ Lesson Learned by US PRT, as reported by US DoS, Afghanistan Desk, August 2007

¹⁸ Lesson Learned by Canadian PRT, as reported by US DoS, Afghanistan Desk, August 2007

¹⁹ PRT Handbook, C36

²⁰ PRT Handbook, C35

- The role of men in any gender equity/mainstreaming efforts is extremely important.
- Develop up an institutional understanding of gender mainstreaming. This point was reinforced by Wazhma Frogh during the August PRT Conference

Recommendations from the 27-28 August quarterly PRT Conference

- Question asked by the US DoS representative from the PRT-Paktika: In Paktika, 75 women were invited to the subnational consultations, which was based at the Governor's compound. None of them showed up. Why? Answer provided by Wazhma Frogh, Counterpart International: Afghan women don't go to the Governor's office, especially not in insecure environments. Wazhma explained that it was a matter of honor.
- Encourage the Provincial Governor to work with the Department of Women's Affairs. – PRT Kunduz
- Consult with Dowlas and Provincial Councils to make sure there is no project overlap. – PRT Bamiyan
- Contextualizing is very important. There is no such thing as an unique Afghan culture, every place has its own characteristics even in one province many different cultural behaviors can be found. – Wazhma Frogh, Counterpart International
- Work continuously with the people. – Wazhma Frogh, Counterpart International
- With PRTs, its only one-way coordination. When you ask for information and coordinate, be open to sharing information and outside efforts of coordination. – Wahidi, ANCB.