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**Islamic Republic of Afghanistan**

**Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development**

# **Gender Policy**

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## **ACRONYMS**

ANDS	Afghanistan National Development Strategy
AIRD	Afghanistan Institute of Rural Development
AREDP	Afghanistan Rural Enterprise Development Programme
CDC	Community Development Council
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Violence against Women
DDA	District Development Assemblies
GDI	Gender Development Index
GEM	Gender Empowerment Measurement
HDI	Human Development Index
MDGs	Millennium Development Goals
MRRD	Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development
MoWA	Ministry of Women's Affairs
NAPWA	National Action Plan for Women of Afghanistan
NABDP	National Area Based Development Programme
NSP	National Solidarity Programme
UN	United Nations

## **GLOSSARY:**

**Gender:** Gender is a socially constructed concept which attributes specific roles, attributes, behaviours and activities that a particular society considers appropriate for men and women. Gender is different from the term 'sex' which is a biological feature.

**Gender Equity:** Gender Equity is the process by which planning, implementation and strategies are designed while acknowledging that social and historical disadvantages prevent women and men from otherwise operating on a level playing field. It is a measure that leads to gender equality.

**Gender Equality:** Gender *equality*, equality between men and women, entails the concept that all human beings, both men and women, are free to develop their personal abilities and make choices without the limitations set by stereotypes, rigid gender roles and prejudices. Gender equality means that the different behaviour, aspirations and needs of women and men are considered, valued and favoured equally. It does not mean that women and men have to become the same, but that their rights, responsibilities and opportunities will not depend on whether they are born male or female<sup>1</sup>.

**Gender Development Index:** The Gender related Development Index is one of five indicators used by the United Nations Development Programme in its annual Human Development Report to illustrate the inequalities between men and women in specific areas which are; long and healthy life (life expectancy), knowledge (education) and a decent standard of living (income).

**Gender Empowerment Measure:** The Gender Empowerment Measure analyses inequalities in three major areas; political participation and decision making, economic participation and decision making and control over economic resources. Through these standards it measures inequalities between men and women's opportunities in a country.

**Gender Mainstreaming:** Gender mainstreaming is the process of assessing the different impact of any planned activity, policy and legislation, action or programme on men and women separately. This approach to any activity ensures that a pluralistic approach is used

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<sup>1</sup>ABC of Women Worker's Rights and Gender Equality, ILO, Geneva, 2000, p.48.

to take into consideration the reality that the experiences of men and women are diverse. It takes this understanding into the creation of policy, legislation and programmes and seeks to benefit women and men in an equitable manner.

**Gender Audit:** Gender audits analyse the income and expenditures of the government from a gender perspective. The basic assumption of gender audits is that public policy impacts differently on men and women. The purpose of gender audits is to lead to changes in public policy that contribute to an increase in gender equality.

**Human Development Index:** Human development index is a comparative measure to understand the level of well-being of people in different nations. It is based on indices of life expectancy, literacy, education and standards of living, worldwide. It is also the measure that is used to distinguish if a country is under-developed, developing or developed.

## 1. COMPONENT 1:

### 1.1. INTRODUCTION

The Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development (MRRD) focuses on the key provision of rural infrastructure and economic development for men and women of Afghanistan. Its primary aim is to reduce poverty amongst the approximately 80% of Afghans who live in rural areas. This is being done through a multi-pronged approach that has its foundation in creating community empowerment through strategies building on creation of efficient governance, infrastructure, human capital development, access to income and economic development. These strategies will focus on equitable development and livelihood improvement. It is in line with the Afghanistan National Development Strategy (ANDS), the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDG's) and the Afghan Compact goals. The main vision of the MRRD is to reduce poverty in rural areas by addressing, holistically, the complex causes of poverty and establishing poverty reduction strategies that are informed by this reality. The 1389 – 1393 Strategic Intent of the MRRD has stated the key vision of MRRD is:

*To alleviate poverty in rural areas by empowering communities and fostering economic and social development.*

The identified objectives of the Ministry are (i) *to contribute to poverty alleviation through the delivery of a comprehensive package of services and (ii) to create an enabling environment for sustainable rural development.*

The MRRD has initiated a change management process aimed at creating efficient functioning institutional systems focused on achieving new ambitions, building MRRD sustainability and strengthening MRRD departments. This process is based on creating ownership and sustainability, achieving new ambitions and paving the way for a gradual handover of some functions from programmes to departments at the MRRD. One of its key focus areas is the development of capacity throughout the

Ministry. The changes that will be instituted, over a period of time, will ensure efficient and achievable deliveries of the MRRD's mandate.

The Strategic Intent of the MRRD articulates women's empowerment as one of the cross cutting issues. The MRRD is committed to institutionalising the gender policy which will be positioned within the context of the ANDS and the National Action Plan for Women of Afghanistan (NAPWA). Through some MRRD programmes; there is already a vast representation of women in community forums as well as beneficiaries of different programme goals. To take this process further and strengthen it, there will be an effort to create a collaborative development of gender mainstreaming procedures and guidelines to be institutionalised across the MRRD departments and programmes and integrated into all practice areas.

Rural development is the key to reconstruction and peace building efforts in Afghanistan. Currently Afghanistan and specifically Afghan women fall at the bottom of global poverty indices with a Human Development Index (HDI) value of 0.346 and a Gender Development Index (GDI) value index of 0.300. This ranks Afghanistan as the fourth and third lowest in terms of standards of living and gender disparity<sup>2</sup>.

The MRRD recognises that there is a need, specifically, to increase the participation of women to ensure that rural development is informed by women's specific needs and challenges as well as to encourage their active participation in managing these initiatives as a means of building ownership and ultimately facilitating positive social change. It is committed towards the incorporation of equal opportunity principles for men and women with regard access to resources, equal participation and decision making to ensure positive rural development as an efficient mechanism of addressing poverty. The MRRD will also focus on ensuring that increased representation and participation of women, through the programmes and the departments, will also

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<sup>2</sup>Centre for Policy and Human Development Afghanistan, [www.cphd.af](http://www.cphd.af)  
([www.cphd.af/download/pdfs/eng/nhdr\\_04\\_complete.pdf](http://www.cphd.af/download/pdfs/eng/nhdr_04_complete.pdf))

impact positively in the application of development benefits and inclusive decision making processes for women.

## 2. COMPONENT 2:

### 2.1.CONTEXT: Overview of Gender and Rural Development Challenges in Afghanistan

In Afghanistan living conditions have not improved despite a decade of national and international efforts to fight poverty and conflict which have been the crucial roadblocks to achieving sustainable peace and development in the country. Continuing conflict, undemocratic development and unsustainable use of resources have exacerbated inequality and poverty in some regions. The most widespread of this discrimination is that of inequality between men and women. Historically women have been disadvantaged in comparison to men, but in a context where poverty and conflict are experienced by both men and women, women face fewer opportunities, lower status, lesser power and influence than men and boys, in every sphere of life.

The gender-disaggregated statistics confirms that:

- Approximately 30% of Afghan women constitute the national labour force of the country<sup>3</sup>.
- Only 18% of young Afghan women (15 – 24 years) are literate<sup>4</sup>.
- Afghanistan has the second highest maternal mortality rate in the world<sup>5</sup>.
- Globally of the world's one billion poorest people, three-fifths are women and girls<sup>6</sup>.
- On average, only 16 percent of parliamentarians worldwide are women<sup>7</sup>.
- Women spend about 70 percent of their unpaid time caring for family members, but that contribution to the global economy remains invisible<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup>World Bank reports

<sup>4</sup> [http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/afghanistan\\_statistics.html](http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/afghanistan_statistics.html)

<sup>5</sup>[www.unicef.org/media/media\\_27853.html](http://www.unicef.org/media/media_27853.html)

<sup>6</sup>[www.undp.org/women/docs/TakingGenderEqualitySeriously.pdf](http://www.undp.org/women/docs/TakingGenderEqualitySeriously.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> Ibid

<sup>8</sup> Ibid

- In the majority of countries women's unpaid labour activity is twice that of men and the economic value of women's unpaid labour is estimated to be from 10 to 35 per cent of the world's GNP (or \$ US 11 trillion)<sup>9</sup>.

Specific challenges with regard to the context in Afghanistan are:

1. **Gender relations:** Afghanistan is in a process of transition and one of the key challenges is the transformation of gender relations to ensure greater equality between men and women, especially in the pursuit of reduction of rural poverty. The aim is to institutionalize the transformation of gender relations within the broader institutional change management process.
2. **Poverty:** Afghanistan is one of the poorest nations in the world. Poverty is systemic and the socially engineered location of women has been responsible for the poor conditions in which a majority of the rural communities live within. The current disempowerment of women will take generations to reverse and the democratic Government through its institutions must move towards effective delivery of services aimed at alleviating poverty.
3. **Access:** Access to basic needs such as education, housing, welfare, energy and water has been influenced by unequal gender relations. The inequality of power between women and men has inevitably led to unequal sharing and distribution of resources such as information, time, livelihood opportunities and income. Women's access to basic resources is still not satisfactory. The lack of infrastructure in the rural areas still acts as a barrier for women to gain easy access to basic resources. Differential access to employment opportunities exists and women are often impeded by socio cultural restraints from accessing any such initiative.
4. **Economic empowerment of women:** Women are amongst the most vulnerable group in Afghanistan and are more likely to be unemployed or underemployed. The challenge is to ensure that Afghanistan's macro-economic strategy promotes

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<sup>9</sup><http://archive.idea.int/women/parl/ch2c.htm>

economic growth and sufficiently addresses the differential impact of growth policy and strategy on women.

## **2.2. GENDER AND POLICY ENVIRONMENT IN AFGHANISTAN**

Afghanistan has made vast progress in including gender related concerns within the policy and legislative frameworks governing the country. Commitments to gender equality have been enshrined in the Afghan Constitution, the Afghanistan Compact, and the National Action Plan for Women in Afghanistan (NAPWA) and the Afghanistan National Development Strategy (ANDS). Afghanistan has also signed and ratified the Convention for the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). Below are the relevant national and international frameworks that guide MRRD's Gender Policy:

- Bonn Agreement

The Bonn agreement laid the foundation for the national Constitution and the establishment of democratic governance in the country. It set the platform for increasing women participation in Government and the establishment of the Ministry of Women's Affairs (MoWA) to act as a lead ministry for the advancement of Afghan women.

- The Constitution (2003 [1382])

Article 3 of the Constitution guarantees equal rights for men and women in Afghanistan, under the context that no law can be contrary to the beliefs and provisions of the sacred religion of Islam. Under Article 22, the Constitution enshrines the policy of non-discrimination and equality in rights and duties between women and men.<sup>10</sup>

- The Afghanistan Compact (2006)

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The Afghanistan Compact noted the need to address gender concerns and stated that by end-2010 the National Action Plan for Women in Afghanistan (NAPWA) will be fully implemented in line with Afghanistan's MDGs. Female participation in all Afghan governance institutions, including elected and appointed bodies and the civil service, will be strengthened.

- National Action Plan for Women in Afghanistan (NAPWA 2007-2017)  
The NAPWA is a central component of Afghanistan's effort to implement its commitments to women in an organized, systematic, coordinated and sustainable way.<sup>11</sup> NAPWA's main aim is to ensure all Government agencies, sectors, institutions and individuals have a responsibility in mainstreaming women or gender concerns. NAPWA will pursue the twin goals of *women's empowerment and gender equality*.

NAPWA's third pillar on Economic and Social Development focuses on Government's responsibility in creating an enabling social and economic environment conducive to advancing Afghan women's ability to participate and contribute in the social and economic fields, thereby fulfilling women's economic potential. Adoption of a comprehensive economic assistance programme for women to include essential assistance for self – employment, income generation and entrepreneurship have been listed as a MRRD responsibility. MRRD's Afghanistan Rural Enterprise Development Programme (AREDP) has been working at enhancing the participation of rural men and women in economic activities which have proven beneficial for women in the provinces that they work in, especially in terms of access to credit.

- The Afghanistan National Development Strategy (ANDS 2008 – 2013)  
The ANDS positioned gender as a cross cutting theme within the national development agenda and adopted a three-pronged goal for promoting gender equity which included: (a) eliminating all forms of discrimination against women; (b) developing women's human capital; and (c) ensuring women's full participation and leadership in all aspects of life in Afghanistan. This cross cutting strategy looks at institutionalizing gender

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<sup>11</sup>NAPWA, Pg 12

responsive development aimed at economic growth, poverty reduction and reconstruction. The ANDS places responsibility on Government entities for ensuring i) the fostering of a work environment that supports egalitarian relationships between women and men; (ii) establish internal enabling mechanisms for gender equity; and (iii) support women's shuras.

- Convention on Elimination of all form of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW):  
Afghanistan is signatory to a number of relevant international treaties including the Platform of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development (1984), the Beijing Platform of Action from the Fourth World Conference on Women (1985) and the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW, 1979), which has also been ratified by the Government of Afghanistan (2003). The Government of Afghanistan is obligated through this Convention to endorse the principle of equality between men and women.
  
- Millennium Development Goals (MDG's)  
Nine major goals have been identified by the Afghan Government under the MDG framework. The third goal is that is promoting gender equality and empowering women. Afghanistan has defined its MDG contribution as targets for 2020. These include women-specific targets in the fields of education, economics, health, and political participation.

### **3. COMPONENT 3:**

#### **3.1. INVESTING IN GENDER EQUALITY AS A POVERTY ALLEVIATION STRATEGY**

Gender equality is essential for growth and poverty reduction. Failure to decrease gender disparities has hampered successful attainment of development goals, including those of reducing child mortality, improving safe motherhood and decreasing malnutrition rates. In Afghan society women hold much of the responsibility of running the household, for nutritional care and health protection of children as well as for the family. Messages to mothers and their networks spread effectively across households and communities because of the role that women play within their families and communities. Women are therefore key agents in extending services and the achievement of economic development will not be possible without the inclusion of women priorities, development of their leadership and full participation in the process of planning and economic development.

The relationship between economy and gender is complicated and is informed by the cultural, social and political context from region to region. Some of the basic recognised impacts are:

- Economic inequalities and discrimination between men and women harm the development of women and girls, who form almost half the population. When half of a nation gets left behind in the development process, it will impact negatively on economic development and consequently contribute to exacerbating poverty. It will lower productivity and contributions of women. It will also eventually impact the level of education within a community, nutrition and health, which are significant factors in ensuring productivity within a community<sup>12</sup>.
- Investing in gender equality practices that fosters human development promotes economic growth, social development and policy effectiveness. This is evident in the high-performing Asian economies (HPAEs), which were amongst the first in the region to

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<sup>12</sup>UNDP, Investing in Gender Equality: Global Evidence and the Asia-Pacific Setting, 2008

close the gender gap in primary education and to improve girls' access to secondary education<sup>13</sup>.

Several key areas of intervention are required to ensure that there is adequate investment in gender equality. This includes strengthening opportunities and infrastructure for education, investing in infrastructure that reduces the time burden on women and girls, providing facilities such as hospitals and clinics which are accessible to women, providing increased livelihoods opportunities and making the provision of small scale rural credit accessible to women.

The MRRD is currently conducting several of these activities through its programmatic outputs. The aim of the MRRD Gender Policy is to integrate these efforts throughout the institution and increase the scale required to close the gender gap in relation to economic development and sustainable poverty alleviation.

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<sup>13</sup>World Bank 1993: 47

## 4. COMPONENT 4:

### GENDER POLICY FRAMEWORK

#### 4.1. Policy Rationale

Rural development requires the full and meaningful participation of a population to ensure its successful impact. The MRRD has a wide outreach and extends to cover all 34 provinces and 397 districts across the country. It has mobilised vast communities through district and village level mechanisms such as the community development councils (CDC's) and the district development assemblies (DDA's). Through the MRRD programmes and key departments (the National Solidarity Programme (NSP), The National Area Based Development Programme (NABDP), AREDP; Rural Water Sanitation Programme (RuWatSip); the National Rural Access Programme (NRAP) and the Afghanistan Institute of Rural Development (AIRD) several initiatives are being carried out and are planned for the future to increase representation and the meaningful participation of women to ensure that they included in the poverty alleviation process. Of the labour force in the country, women represent approximately 30 percent of agricultural workers and have traditionally been engaged in livestock, micro enterprises, and home industries<sup>14</sup>. While there has been some progress noted in women's participation, the reality is that there is a vast improvement to be sought. Women's participation is currently curtailed by limited access to capital, information, innovation, technology, markets and most importantly the inability to be viewed as a significant economically productive part of the population. They continue to be marginalised in policy and decision making, especially in those areas which will impact their lives deeply<sup>15</sup>.

Feminization of poverty in rural Afghanistan is deepening and is facilitated by the unequal access of men and women to resources and limited meaningful participation of women in development activities. A primary reason for this has been the failure to take the gender dimension into account in the rural development sector policies and programming. Most significantly, it has led to the under exploitation of huge potential to

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<sup>14</sup>World Bank Reports

<sup>15</sup>[http://www.unifem.org/afghanistan/docs/pubs/06/UNIFEM\\_UNAMA\\_factsheet\\_EN.pdf](http://www.unifem.org/afghanistan/docs/pubs/06/UNIFEM_UNAMA_factsheet_EN.pdf)

contribute to the rural economy. It is necessary to optimise the resource base presented by women and invest in their development to produce a successful and sustainable impact of rural development initiatives. It is equally important, that where women's representation has increased based on the need to include women's voices from the communities, mechanisms be put in place to ensure that this increased representation has a positive impact in terms of bringing women's voices, requirements and decisions into the development process. Women's representatives are conduits between women's communities and the development process, their active role is therefore critical in ensuring development benefits accrue to women.

Rural development initiatives impact men and women in a similar as well as different manner. Women are informed by their own realities and experiences which are closely tied to household economies and small scale economies. Development initiatives should be informed by this accumulated knowledge and experience women possess to ensure benefits are enjoyed by women as well as men. Through the MRRD programmes, there is an attempt to address this. Strengthening this investment in women will have a sustainable impact not only on the family unit, but the community and economy eventually.

#### **4.2. POLICY STATEMENT**

The MRRD is committed to promoting gender integration into all areas of rural development initiatives undertaken in Afghanistan. It aims at ensuring equitable growth amongst men and women and will work towards securing increased and meaningful participation of women in development initiatives aimed at sustainable poverty reduction.

#### **4.3. POLICY OBJECTIVES**

- Increased participation of women in decision making and implementation processes, institutionally and programmatically, within the MRRD
- Identifying and developing capacity requirements for women and men within MRRD
- Equitable distribution of rural development and reconstruction benefits for women and men in all provinces of Afghanistan
- Engendering all steps of project cycle management within the MRRD

## 4.4. MRRD Gender Policy Approach

### 4.4.1. Gender Policy Priorities:

The MRRD's gender policy priorities will address two areas significantly. These will be:

- **Institutional Level:**

The MRRD commits to engendering the institution through the systemic institutionalisation of gender concerns within the organisation. This will be addressed through the change management process underway at the Ministry. It will take into account the creation and sustainability of gender equality in administrative, financial, staffing and recruitment and other organisational procedures which will contribute towards facilitating a transformative process institutionally, in terms of procedures, attitudes and culture.

- **Programmatic Level:**

At the programmatic level, the MRRD strives to create sustainable development initiatives while creating ownership and increased meaningful participation of women in all phases of project cycles. The focus is on strengthening existing initiatives within the MRRD and establishing an enabling environment promoting true empowerment amongst women and communities. This is being done through and will be carried out through strategies focusing on equitable resource allocation, capacity development and affirmative action's where necessary.

- **Thematic implications for the MRRD:**

The institutional and programmatic commitments towards institutionalising gender concerns throughout MRRD's programmes and initiatives will be possible through the MRRD leadership support, change management process, on-going capacity development and gender mainstreaming efforts that steer clear of tokenism and donor driven requirements and are informed by a need to ensure development benefits have an equitable and sustainable impact. It will seek to strengthen and

build upon initiatives that exist within the MRRD that focus on building representation of women and ensuring women benefit from development projects aimed at poverty alleviation.

## **5. COMPONENT 5:**

### **STRATEGIC IMPLEMENTATION OF MRRD GENDER POLICY**

#### **5.1. Institutional Level**

##### **5.1.1. MRRD Leadership Commitment**

To ensure a successful engendering of the institution and programmes within the MRRD and to create a culture of gender sensitivity and ownership, the MRRD leadership will proactively support gender mainstreaming initiatives throughout all project cycles and within the MRRD itself.

##### **5.1.2. Strategic Implementation**

As the second phase of engendering the institution and subsequently the programmes, a strategic implementation plan will be drawn and approved by the MRRD leadership. It will be a collaborative process created in line with the gender policy. The implementation phase of the gender policy will be aimed at realising the goals of the policy which are primarily to engender the institution and the programmes.

##### **5.1.3. Recruitment and Affirmative Actions**

The number of women civil servants at the MRRD is low, especially in comparison to the number of women staff at the programmatic level in MRRD as well as in comparison to the number of women civil servants in other ministries. The representative percentage of women civil servants at the MRRD grows lesser as the service grades grow higher in terms of responsibility and decision making. It is important this trend be reversed and a strong number of women civil servants join the workforce at MRRD. To establish this, it will be necessary to understand and analyse the reasons for the low representation of women civil servants. This will lead to the creation of an enabling environment for women to join the MRRD workforce both at the national and provincial level. While appointments will follow a merit based system it is important to institute affirmative actions to ensure recruitment of qualified women and reduce the disparity in staffing. The aim should be to create an equitable representation of qualified men and women who are able to contribute

effectively in all cycles of project management, decision making and implementation. Opportunities must be made available for existing female staff at the MRRD to increase and develop their capacity. This will be done, and not limited to, through internships, apprenticeships, scholarships, development of English language and computer skills amongst other initiatives.

To fulfil its commitment to equitable and fair representation, the MRRD will undertake to ensure female staff and male staff falling within the same employment scale, both within the civil servant and contracted staff cadres are paid the same wages. Female staff will not be discriminated against if they have equal qualifications and work experience as male staff and will be provided the same resources and wages as male counterparts.

#### **5.1.4. Gender Implementing Structure**

A gender implementing structure will be created for the MRRD and will translate down to the provincial level. This structure which will be coordinated and supported by the Gender Unit based out of the Ministers office. It will seek, primarily, to integrate and establish linkages between all levels of gender units and focal points as they exist currently and as they will be established in the MRRD departments and programmes. It will focus on creating a comprehensive and collaborative implementing mechanism which focuses on strengthening gender mainstreaming initiatives across the institutional and programmatic levels, while allowing for exchange of information over programmes and departments. This implementing structure will consist of:

- **Gender Unit, Ministers Office:**

Sub-unit of the Policy Unit based out of the Ministers Office. This body will be responsible for ensuring linkages and collaborations between different departments and programmes on gender mainstreaming and gender concerns across the MRRD's activities. It will function as the 'gender hub' for the Ministry and will promote its mandate with the support of the MRRD leadership. The primary function of the gender unit will be to extend the implementation of the gender policy across the MRRD and through the programmes, ensure implementation of identified strategies,

assist programmes on their own gender policies and strategies, identify gender mainstreaming avenues, develop and contextualise tools for gender mainstreaming within the MRRD, create linkages between regional gender focal points to ensure information sharing and realistic understanding of women's experiences at the provincial level. This unit will also be an integral part of the management structure at the MRRD and will be staffed by a gender specialist and two gender focal points responsible for the abovementioned.

- **Gender focal points/Gender Units/Regional Gender Focal Points at the Programme, Departmental and Provincial Level :**

- Each department and programme of the MRRD will have gender focal points and/or gender units of their own to facilitate the development and implementation of programming addressing gender mainstreaming requirements as well as with the aim of engendering the programme or department. These gender focal points and gender units will be linked to the Gender Unit at the Ministers Office to ensure that there is information sharing, best practise documentation and the identification of opportunities to cross fertilize programme and department output. This group will also be responsible for carrying out gender audits in collaboration with the Gender Unit. These gender focal points, programmatic and directorate level gender units and gender regional focal points will be a collaborative network which will share information and conduct joint programming where it is possible and relevant.
  
- **Women's Shura:** This body will be a representative body that will work on addressing specific concerns and challenges that female staff at the MRRD and the PRRD has. It will be part of the gender working group will focus on advocacy and lobbying for women's benefits within the MRRD. It will also be responsible for marking significant events such as women's day celebrations in a meaningful manner.

- **Gender Working Group:** The Gender Working Group (GWG) will be the collaborative network that is comprised of all members from the above mentioned bodies. This will include representatives from the Gender Unit at the Ministers Office, gender focal points, representatives of gender units from programmes. This group will be led and administered by the Gender Unit based out of the Minister's Office. The purpose of this group will be to come together to determine gender mainstreaming activities, collaborating on joint programmes, sharing information amongst others.

The GWG will also be responsible for conducting gender audits. This committee will be administered by the Gender Unit and the decisions from gender audits will be validated by the Steering Committee that will be set up to implement and review the MRRD Strategic Intent. Gender audit is a participatory process and tool for identifying challenges to integrating gender into the institutions systems and operations and into programmes and projects. The purpose of this committee would be to ensure that the strategic implementation plan to mainstream gender and the efforts of the gender unit and gender focal points to build a culture within the MRRD that is proactively seeking empowerment of women across the country through development initiatives to reduce poverty, are being met. It will work towards conducting internally led gender audits of the MRRDs programmes and departments. It will identify key challenges and with the support of the leadership within the MRRD strive to overcome these obstacles through the gender unit.

As part of the effort to build the information base at the MRRD, the Gender Unit will work towards collecting gender based resources and information to be housed at the existing resource centre at the AIRD. The purpose will be to collate information available on gender concerns, specifically to rural development, from across the country to be made available at the MRRD.

### **5.1.5. Creating a gender sensitive workplace**

The MRRD will commit to creating a workplace which is gender sensitive. It will proactively encourage an environment that seeks to build respect for women and their contribution to the reduction of poverty at the national and provincial levels. Any form of sexual harassment at the workplace is forbidden and will be addressed through complaints mechanism created in collaboration with Human Resource Department. A separate policy against sexual harassment at the workplace will be drawn up in line with the Elimination of Violence Against Women legislation in Afghanistan. This policy will be widely disseminated throughout the institution, nationally and provincially. Awareness raising sessions will be held on a regular basis to ensure that there is familiarity with the policy and understanding that sexual harassment at the workplace is a human rights violation.

### **5.1.6. Management and Information Systems:**

Currently, at the MRRD there is a practise of wide data collection throughout its activities. Some of this data is sex disaggregated. The aim will be to increase the level of sex disaggregated data which will allow for a continual review of gaps and challenges and feed into more effective development initiatives. The constant collection and analysis of sex disaggregated data will add value to the development process. A lack of this information leads to a lack of understanding of women’s challenges and experiences. It also leads to a cycle that assumes that women cannot participate due to socio-cultural norms, while not investigating and exploring areas and initiatives that could focus on delivering development benefits to women in a manner that is in harmony with acceptable socio cultural norms. Basing development initiatives on assumptions rather than the genuine analysis of sex disaggregated data is a harmful practise. The MRRD will lead in ensuring the gathering of engendered data will be strengthened to identify challenges and gaps and subsequently design and implement strategies that are informed by a thorough gender analysis that will truly benefit women across the country.

### **5.1.7. Monitoring and Evaluation System**

It is envisaged that the gender policy framework when implemented will institutionalise a process of development which seeks to benefit women and men equitably. It will be vital, therefore, that the implementation and impact of the policy be monitored and evaluated through a variety of mechanisms and guidelines.

The policy proposes key approaches to monitoring and evaluation, which will be a part of the larger results framework being developed for the MRRD as part of the change management process. The developed indicators, which will be open to review periodically, will serve as key performance indicators which will ensure the MRRD's movement towards gender equality. This framework will also provide the guidelines against which evaluation will take place. Indicators will be drawn from international sources and contextualised to ensure that concepts of Gender Development Index (GDI) and Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) are applied as a standard of measurement.

### **5.1.8. Resource Allocation and Financing**

In order to achieve its optimal potential, it is necessary that the MRRD contribute in terms of resource allocation and budgets to be able to effectively implement the MRRD gender policy. For this purpose, it would be necessary to apply the following premises:

- Allocation of resources and budget by the MRRD programmes and finance department, in approval with the MRRD leadership to be able to pursue effective implementation activities.
- The provision of regular technical advisory services to be made available at the national and provincial levels to promote gender equitable development through the application of gender mainstreaming tools.
- Strategic interventions and support from the MRRD leadership and institution to ensure adequate staff support, capacity development support, infrastructure and technology requirements are met.

### **5.1.9. Policy Review**

This policy will be reviewed two years from approval of the MRRD Leadership. The purpose of reviewing the policy will be to assess progress made, analyse challenges and facilitate required changes in strategy and implementation if required.

## **5.2. PROGRAMME LEVEL**

### **5.2.1. Programmatic and Department level Commitment:**

To be able to carry out the strategic implementation of the gender policy, it is crucial that commitment in terms of will, intent and resources be dedicated to the successful implementation of the MRRD gender policy. From the leadership downwards, there will be encouraging and proactive measures taken to facilitate the process of equitable development through implementation strategies of the programmes and departments.

### **5.2.2. Creating leadership**

A primary area of focus at the implementation level will be the identification and creation of leaders amongst women's communities as well as male advocates who will lead the process of facilitating participation of women in development processes. Much of this work is already on-going through some of the MRRDs programmes. This will be strengthened to ensure that there is a positive outcome on women in communities as a result of investing in the development of leadership. It is not enough to just have an increased representation of women in leadership positions, capacity development initiatives with these stakeholders will be carried out and strengthened to ensure that they function as the forerunners for gender mainstreaming activities. This process of leadership building will assist in transforming communities over a period of time and bringing in positive social and economic change which stems from empowerment of women in terms of knowledge accumulation, opportunities and involvement in advocacy and lobbying related to reduction of poverty.

### **5.2.3. Increased representation of women in community based forums**

One of the primary contributions to the successful implementation of the MRRD's gender policy will be increased meaningful representation and active participation of women in community based forums. Specific attention will be paid to conservative provinces where it is difficult to ensure female participation. This would require the development of realistic and feasible practices and duplication of best practices, where possible. This is also critical to ensuring that the development approach at the MRRD maintains a bottom up philosophy and is driven by the information and experiences of women and men from the villages, districts and provinces of Afghanistan.

### **5.2.4. Cross fertilization between MRRD programmes and departments**

Given the varied and significant experience that different MRRD programmes and departments have had over the years, it is important that through the MRRD gender unit a facilitation process is established whereby information sharing and best practises are shared. While some of the programmes and departments have significant experience in implementing a gender approach, some others do not possess this information. By having an information sharing platform, the potential of studying and seeking a combined and strong impact of programming inputs on gender mainstreaming is achievable.

### **5.2.5. Specific Opportunities**

Through the MRRD programmes and departments, it is necessary that specific opportunities be made available for women, with due attention being paid to their diverse situations and requirements. The need is to steer clear from initiatives assuming homogeneity of experiences amongst women across the country. Due diligence will be paid to diverse requirements and this will be tailored into development initiatives.

The MRRD will support specific opportunities such as internships and scholarships to encourage the representation and participation of women throughout the programmes and the directorates as well as at the national and provincial levels.

### **5.2.6. Partnering with Men**

The strategic implementation of the MRRD gender policy will draw upon successful partnerships with men. Paying heed to the existing socio – cultural context, it is important that men be including in creating an enabling environment for the participation of women in development initiatives. Men are seen, predominantly, as productive agents in the economy and this determines access to resources and subsequently power. The strategic investment in creating male advocates to support the process of engendering development initiatives will lead to a transformative community viewing of women’s role in the economy as that of capable and productive agents of change. This process also offers men the opportunity to reflect on their own roles and experiences, question gender attitudes and recognise how these attitudes bring harm to women, communities and economies.

## **5.3.THEMATIC AREAS**

### **5.3.1. Capacity Development**

A capacity development plan has been drawn up for the MRRD as part of the change management process. The MRRD will build on this plan with the aim of further engendering the institution as well as the programmes. This process will be led by the MRRD’s gender unit in collaboration with the representative gender network established at the MRRD. The process will include an identification and prioritisation of capacity needs across the institution. It will not be limited only to staff at the MRRD but will also identify priorities at the provincial level. Capacity development will happen at two levels. The first level will be with the aim at changing attitude and culture within the MRRD which challenge existing gender stereotypes and attitudes and create awareness on the necessity for a gendered approach to development initiatives seeking to reduce poverty. Secondly, capacity development will be conducted to build technical capacity across the MRRD programmes and directorates to ensure practical knowledge of gender analysis tools, gender budgeting requirements and gender mainstreaming techniques to be implemented across range of activities produced by the MRRD.

Given the support extended to affirmative action principles by the MRRD, capacity development will be extended to women staff to improve their ability to contribute to the MRRD.

### **5.3.2. Gender Mainstreaming**

Globally gender mainstreaming has been accepted as a strategy to promote gender equality. Mainstreaming would not be limited to adding a 'women's component' to existing activities. It will aim at ensuring that women and men are involved in setting goals and planning initiatives to ensure that development priorities meet the requirements of both women and men. It will allow a gendered analysis of policies, implementation strategies, project management cycles and institutional practises that will set the overall condition for development. Tools will be developed and contextualised to MRRD mandate. These tools will be disseminated widely and trainings will be carried out on a sustained basis. Gender mainstreaming is critical to ensuring all development decisions and interventions are engendered. It will concern staffing, procedures, planning and implementation conditions.