



USAID | AFGHANISTAN

Request for Information Number: RFI-306-19-OG-01

Date of Issue: July 3, 2019

Closing Date and Time for Submissions: July 24, 2019 at 5:00pm Kabul Local Time

Notice Type: Request for Information

Subject: Input into Planning for USAID/Afghanistan Office of Gender Programs

To: All Interested Respondents/Parties:

The United States Government, represented by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) through the Mission in Afghanistan, is publishing this Request for Information in order to obtain information and input from all interested entities on three potential gender programs in Afghanistan. The information will be used to help make planning decisions and influence activity design to improve future development outcomes, and is published in accordance with Federal Acquisition Regulation (FAR) Part 10 and FAR 15.201(e).

This announcement is a Request for Information (RFI), issued solely for information and planning purposes, and does not constitute a Request for Applications (RFA) or a Request for Proposals (RFP). Responses to this RFI are not applications or official proposals and will in no way be deemed to form any binding agreement with the RFI issuing authority. Please do not submit applications, proposals, or resumes as they will be discarded. Proprietary information should not be sent. USAID may use any information provided without incurring any obligation. USAID reserves the right to, or not to, incorporate any, some, or none of the comments received from this RFI into any subsequent solicitations or design documents.

This RFI will not be construed as a commitment by the U.S. Government to issue any solicitation, award any grant, or pay for any information submitted as a result of this request. Responders are solely responsible for bearing all expenses associated with preparation and submission of the response to this RFI.

It is the potential responder's responsibility to monitor the site for the release of any further information. It should be noted that responding to this RFI will not give any advantage to any organization in any subsequent procurement. All types of organizations and firms are strongly encouraged to provide information/comments. Any information submitted in response to this notice is voluntary.

All responses must be submitted electronically in Annex 1 in English to Contracting Officer Amy McQuade at kblaidooaog@usaid.gov. Responses to this RFI will be accepted through July 23, 2019 at 5:00 PM Kabul local time. No basis for claims against the U.S. Government shall arise as a result of a response to this request for information or from the U.S. Government's use of such information. FAR Clause 52.215-3 REQUEST FOR INFORMATION OR

SOLICITATION FOR PLANNING PURPOSES (OCT 1997) is attached and made part of this RFI. USAID is not responsible for any costs incurred in responding to this RFI.

Thank you for your interest in USAID/Afghanistan gender programs and we look forward to your comments.

Best,

Amy McQuade
Contracting/Agreement Officer

52.215-3 Request for Information or Solicitation for Planning Purposes (Oct 1997)

(a) The Government does not intend to award a contract on the basis of this solicitation or to otherwise pay for the information solicited except as an allowable cost under other contracts as provided in subsection 31.205-18, Bid and proposal costs, of the Federal Acquisition Regulation.

(b) Although “proposal” and “offeror” are used in this Request for Information, your response will be treated as information only. It shall not be used as a proposal.

(c) This solicitation is issued for the purpose of: “Requesting Comments” to the concept for a new program.

**Request for Information
USAID/Afghanistan Office of Gender
Gender Programs**

Program 1: Women in Economy II

Background

Despite significant progress realized through donor investment and Afghan support, Afghanistan remains one of the most difficult countries in the world to be a woman. Opportunities are extremely limited for women's and girl's participation in the Afghan economy, depriving Afghanistan of half the population's economic and leadership potential. Offering female specific job-readiness and high skills trainings, permanent job placement, comprehensive business services and creating an enabling environment for women in the workplace has chipped away at some of the barriers for women such as inadequate education, lack of experience in working outside the home, limited access to credit or financing and a shortage of culturally acceptable programs for women. However, many cultural, skills, financial, and security based challenges remain for women.

Preliminary Theory of Change:

By providing training in hard technical skills for sectors with employment potential, internships/apprenticeships, and job placement services, women will gain the skills and experience they need to be employed in the Afghan economy. Through increased access to markets, including participation in regional trade shows, and access to finance, women-owned businesses will become more competitive and grow. Advocacy for legislative reform and behavior change communication will help create a more enabling environment for women to enter the formal economy. Together, these lines of effort are expected to grow women-owned businesses and increase women's employment. If an enabling environment for women's self-reliance is improved and women's participation in the formal economy increased, then gender equality and female empowerment will improve.

Preliminary Activity Purpose and Sub-Results

Women in the Economy II is intended to build upon lessons learned to provide a comprehensive approach to women's entry into the formal Afghan economy and create the necessary conditions for achieving and maintaining peace. This requires extensive job readiness and technical skills training, internships, apprenticeships and job placement, access to finance, along with providing a comprehensive system of support services for women business owners, to improve their knowledge and skills, develop greater access to broader markets and networks. Part of the activity intends to work with women who work from home. Additionally, Women in the Economy II seeks to create a more hospitable and enabling work environment for women to enter into the formal economy through legislative reform and extensive/innovative communications strategies including utilization of media and social media.

RFI Questions

1. What jobs do you think women can do from home in Afghanistan, at different education levels? Are there particular industries that could benefit from women working from home? What technical skills do women lack to meet employment demands in these industries?
2. What job opportunities for women exist in urban, rural, and peri-urban areas in Afghanistan?
3. Does the proposed approach address the challenges facing women's participation in the economy? What is missing?
4. What security/social and cultural issues does the activity need to consider when implementing this activity, particularly in rural areas? How do you suggest addressing these issues?
5. Micro, small, and medium enterprises face significant challenges (including high collateral requirements) accessing finance, despite loan guarantees and other efforts aimed to mitigate risk. What do you think this activity could do to increase women-owned businesses' access to finance?

Program 2: Women in Civil Society

Background

According to the Afghanistan Human Development Report, Afghanistan ranks near the bottom of almost every gender equality and empowerment index. Women struggle for basic rights, including access to health care, education, economic opportunities, social inclusion, and political participation. Despite the barriers Afghan women face, progress has been achieved, including three million girls in school, a law ensuring 20% women's representation in Parliament, and laws protecting women against gender-based violence.¹ Unfortunately, the socio-cultural core of the country remains discriminatory and policy implementation is limited. Many women lack agency to obtain employment and face structural barriers to participate in economic and political activities. Women continue to be under-represented and marginalized across Afghan society. Nascent women's movements and advocacy groups have enabled Afghan women to coalesce and better organize for their rights. However, more work is needed to strengthen their networks, improve their advocacy skills, and give them a voice in a society that has historically silenced them.

Preliminary Theory of Change

If Afghan women are provided with organizational, advocacy, and negotiating skills at both the local and national levels, and behavior change communication around women's rights, including positive masculinity is implemented, then women will be able to persuade/influence their communities, including men and the government, to support gender equality and female empowerment. Further, by creating safe spaces for women to organize, particularly hard to reach women in rural areas, and building issues-based coalitions, including supporting their

¹ Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission, 2018

coordination and collaboration, women will be able to more effectively use their strengthened skills to advocate for their rights. If connections between these advocacy groups and decision makers at the local and national levels are made and strengthened, then advocacy efforts will be more likely to turn into concrete gains for women's rights and their integration into Afghan society, including areas like access to healthcare, education, and employment.

Preliminary Activity Purpose and Results

The new civil society activity will work with CSOs and activists across all 34 provinces to choose, prioritize, and address the most critical issues limiting women's ability to exercise their rights and fully participate in society. Led by women, the activity will engage with a wide range of stakeholders—interested citizens, government, community/religious leaders, and media—to advance collective advocacy campaigns and interventions designed to strengthen women's rights. The activity will have a significant focus on 1) facilitating the participation of women in Afghan society, including their participation in a potential negotiated settlement, and 2) preserving women's rights if a negotiated settlement between the Government of Afghanistan and the Taliban is reached. The activity will achieve the following objectives:

- Build constituencies among national, provincial and local-level activists and groups focused on promoting women's equality and empowerment;
- Increase awareness of and support for women's rights in all 34 provinces in Afghanistan;
- Facilitate women's engagement in a negotiated settlement and prepare women to protect their rights and gains in a post-settlement scenario;
- Support prevention of, and response to, gender based violence;
- Strengthen the communication and collaboration between civil society and GOA in development and implementation of gender policies.

RFI Questions

1. Does the proposed approach address the challenges facing women's participation in civil society and advancement of women's rights? What is missing? Are there other challenges not identified that could be addressed?
2. How can the activity best help women's organizations represent their constituencies?
3. How can the activity facilitate policy implementation aimed to advance/preserve women's rights at the provincial and district levels?
4. Given potential security/safety concerns and mobility limitations, how can the activity facilitate safe spaces for women to organize, and for women's organizations to connect with each other? How does this differ for urban vs. more rural areas?
5. What access do women have to both formal and informal legal services?

Program 3: Countering Trafficking in Persons

Background

The 2018 U.S. Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Report improved Afghanistan's tier ranking from Tier 2 Watch List to Tier 2², which means that the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (GoIRA) does not fully comply with the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking, but has demonstrated significant efforts to do so. To improve its Tier ranking, the U.S. TIP report provided the following recommendations for Afghanistan: provide adequate victim protection and reintegration support, while respecting due process; increase investigations and prosecutions; cease the penalization of victims for offenses committed as a direct result of being trafficked; adopt and implement standard operating procedures for victim identification and referral; continue to increase the capacity of the Counter Trafficking (CT) coordinating body to direct and report on the government's CT efforts; continue to educate officials at national, provincial, and local levels on the definition of human trafficking, as well as identification, protection, and law enforcement strategies; improve efforts to collect, analyze, and accurately report counter-trafficking data; and dedicate resources to support long-term victim rehabilitation programs.³

Preliminary Theory of Change

If public officials and key actors in civil society are provided with training and awareness raising opportunities that will allow them to define trafficking within a local context, identify human trafficking gaps and resources, gain access to reliable data on trafficking and technical assistance and other resources, then they will be able to address this complex problem through coherently sequenced and coordinated activities by all relevant stakeholders. Also, if a regional approach to combating human trafficking is developed, then GoIRA and relevant stakeholders will be better positioned to prevent TIP, protect victims of trafficking, and prosecute traffickers. These efforts will lead to increased government credibility and decreased instances of trafficking in persons.

Preliminary Activity Purpose and Results

The proposed project will contribute to the prevention of human trafficking and the protection of victims of trafficking.

Result 1: Establish a strong protection mechanism, including a model for direct assistance

Result 2: Ensure ongoing dialogue and close cooperation & coordination with the TIP High Commission (HC) and its individual member agencies.

RFI Questions

1. What challenges impact enforcement of laws to prevent human trafficking in Afghanistan?

² Tier Placements: <https://www.state.gov/j/tip/rls/tiprpt/2018/282584.htm>

³ Ibidem

2. To what extent do trafficking survivors have access to services? What services can they access? What additional services do they need?
3. To what extent is the Afghan society aware of trafficking and what are the best ways to educate them and motivate them to report?
4. What can the activity do to strengthen the government capacity to address trafficking? (Asking this in the light of the recent State Department CTIP report rating and the continued challenges we face regarding government cooperation in the current activity)

Request for Information

Through this RFI, USAID/Afghanistan seeks ideas, comments, and information from the public on gender programming that will assist in developing a portfolio of programs that will most effectively achieve the objectives described above. USAID/Afghanistan asks that the public submit short (less than 10 pages) submissions that outline recommendations or other information pertinent to higher education partnerships to be developed through a co-creation process. Please also provide your name, title, organization, and contact information in the response.

USAID/Afghanistan requires the use of the response template (Annex 1). USAID reserves the right to potentially issue subsequent RFIs on this topic that target more specific questions or approaches.

RFI Submission Instructions

Respondents must use the response template at the end of this RFI (Annex 1). Respondents are encouraged to copy and paste Annex 1 into a new document, provide their responses in that document, and email that document with the file name saved as “Office of Gender Afghanistan - RFI-[Respondents last name]-[Respondent’s institution].” Please see Page 1 of this RFI for submission date and contact information.

Annex 1

USAID/Afghanistan/Office of Gender Request for Information (RFI) Response Template

The total length of the RFI submission cannot exceed ten pages and must be submitted using 12 point Arial font, 8.5 x 11-inch paper (letter-sized), single-spaced, with one-inch margins, no graphics, with each page numbered consecutively. If the submitter has produced relevant reports, those reports may be included, but only as embedded links.

Name:
Title:
Organization:
Email:

USAID/Afghanistan is interested in responses to the specific questions listed above in the RFI and below. Respondents are encouraged to review the questions and include responses to the most relevant questions in their submissions. Respondents do **not** need to respond to all the questions listed.

Program 1: Women in Economy II

RFI Questions

1. What jobs do you think women can do from home in Afghanistan, at different education levels? Are there particular industries that could benefit from women working from home?
2. What job opportunities for women exist in urban, rural, and peri-urban areas in Afghanistan?
3. Does the proposed approach address the challenges facing women's participation in the economy? What is missing?
4. What security/social and cultural issues does the activity need to consider when implementing this activity, particularly in rural areas? How do you suggest addressing these issues?
5. Micro, small, and medium enterprises face significant challenges (including high collateral requirements) accessing finance, despite loan guarantees and other efforts aimed to mitigate risk. What do you think this activity could do to increase women-owned businesses' access to finance?

Program 2: Women in Civil Society

RFI Questions

1. Does the proposed approach address the challenges facing women's participation in civil society and advancement of women's rights? What is missing?

2. How do you think the activity can best help women's organizations represent their constituencies?
3. How do you think the activity can facilitate policy implementation aimed to advance/preserve women's rights at the provincial and district levels?
4. Given potential security/safety concerns and mobility limitations, how can the activity facilitate safe spaces for women to organize, and for women's organizations to connect with each other? How does this differ for urban vs. more rural areas?
5. What access do women have to both formal and informal legal services?

Program 3: Countering Trafficking in Persons

RFI Questions

1. What challenges impact enforcement of laws to prevent human trafficking in Afghanistan?
2. To what extent do trafficking survivors have access to services?