صداهای زنان برای صلح همه‌شمول و پایدار
د ټول‌شموله او ثباتي سولې لپاره د ښځو غږونه
Women's Voices for an Inclusive and Sustainable Peace

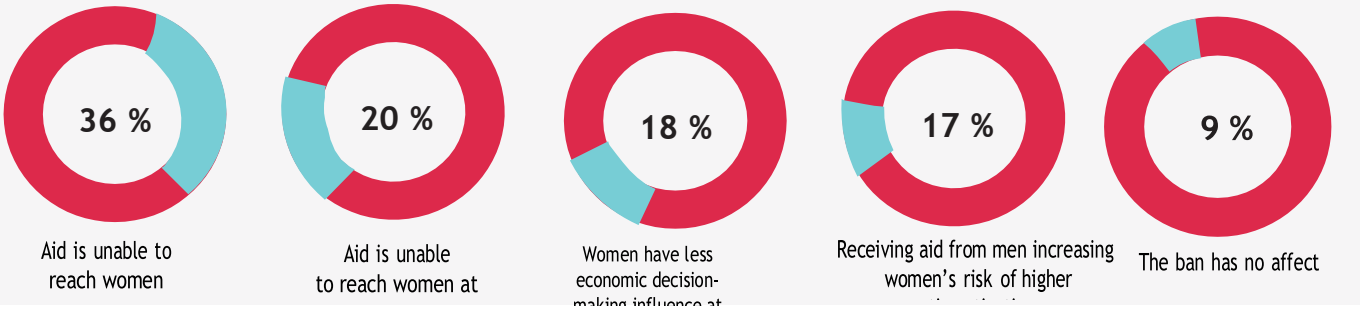
WOMEN'S PEACE BRIEF – JULY 2023

Afghan Women's Opinions regarding the impact of the Woman Aid Workers Ban

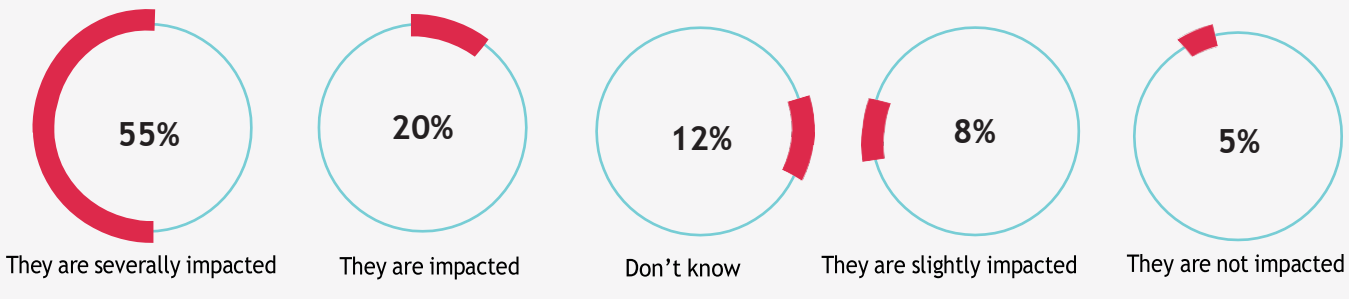
Summary:

- **2,108** women from the provinces of Herat, Nangarhar, Balkh, Badghis, Kabul, Takhar, Bamiyan, Kandahar, Daikundi, Panjshir, Kunar, Jawzjan, Farah, Faryab, Bamyan, Baghlan, Panjshir, and Paktia were polled on the impact of the ban on women aid workers and what the international community should do about it.
- When asked how the ban on women aid workers was affecting humanitarian aid distribution, the plurality **(36%)** said aid is now unable to reach women. A majority chose this answer in Nangarhar as did large pluralities in provinces like Bamyan, Faryab, Herat, and Daikundi.
- A huge majority of respondents say women-led households have been impacted by the ban on women aid workers **(83%)**, with **(55 %)** saying they are "severely impacted."
- **(60 %)** of respondents say the risk of male aid workers abusing their power has increased with half that number saying "strongly agree." Provinces like Jawzjan, Kandahar, Faryab, and Daikundi actually saw a strong majority choose "strongly agree."
- A majority **(62 %)** want the international community to place pressure on the Taliban to reverse the ban on women aid workers. This was the preference across age groups, professions, and almost all provinces except Jawzjan where the options of opting for just exemptions to the ban or cutting off humanitarian aid to apply diplomatic pressure are also popular.

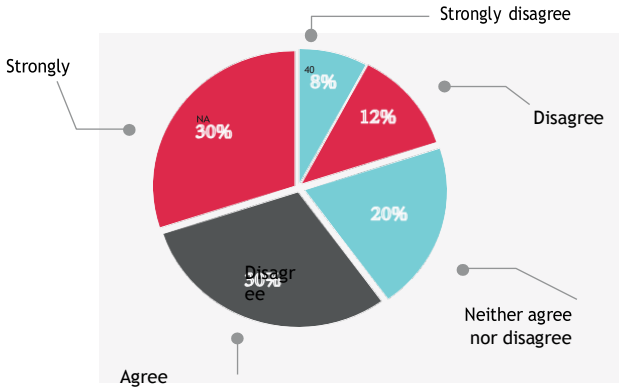
Question 1 How is the ban on women aid workers affecting humanitarian aiddistribution?



Question 2 How is the ban on women aid workers affecting humanitarian aid

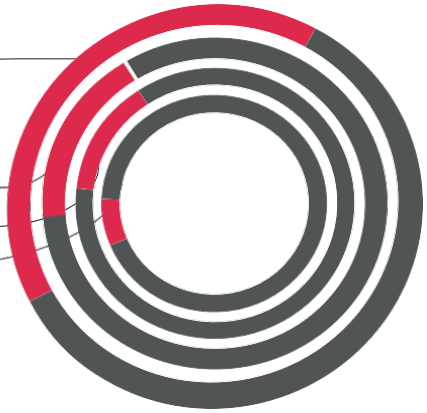


Question 3 In the absence of women aid workers, do you think the risk of abuse ofpower by male aid workers towards women recipients have increased?



Question 4 How do you think the international community should respond to theban women aid workers?

- 62% Place pressure on Taliban to reverse the ban
- 17% Place pressure on Taliban to make exemption to the ban
- 14% Suspend all humanitarian aid to the country
- 7% No action, continue business as usual



Focus Groups Discussions (FGDs) were held in 11 provinces

Herat, Baghlan, Balkh, Bamyan, Daikundi, Farah, Faryab, Jawzjan, Kandahar, Nangarhar, and Paktia

Each FGD lasted 90 minutes; and participants were asked the following questions:

1. Have women and girls in your community been able to access aid or visit cash distribution centers since the ban on women humanitarian workers? If yes, how do they feel about interacting directly with male humanitarian workers? The majority of our June survey respondents told us that the absence of women aid workers has increased the risk of abuse of power by male aid workers. Can you tell us if this has happened to women recipients in your community and what forms does this abuse take?
2. Our survey in June also showed that women headed-households were impacted the most by the ban on women humanitarian workers, what steps are women headed-households in your community taking to cope? What alternative approaches can UN or local NGOs take to reach women headed-households?
3. Would you say that women who have access to aid are treated better in their household compared to those who do not have access to aid? Yes/No [explain] [for example: they have better decision-making authority they are consulted more on household decisions or maybe face less physical abuse in some cases].

According to the FGD participants. Reasons given include that aid is not available in their specific area or that the women simply would not or could not approach the male aid workers for factors that ranged from their safety and privacy to laws and social taboos against women approaching the men. Areas like Paktia and Jawzjan had the distribution of aid but the barriers against women interacting with men made the aid unavailable to women in practical terms. But in other regions the story is more sinister. Herat participants mentioned corrupt networks siphoning aid. Baghlan participants mentioned aid workers collecting contact info to harass and extort women This is observed of male aid workers and community leaders in many provinces – one participant in Faryab described how community elders exploited their role in delivering aid: *"The community elders, just like the male workers, used to ask women to given them some cash if women received aid in cash or food items such as oil; wheat, and flour and other items."* Participants from Nangarhar even observed the physical abuse of women trying to get aid. Participants from areas like Daikundi and Faryab state they mainly just no longer have access to aid at all. Overall, this corresponds to the survey responses to question three around abuse of power by male aid workers – many of the FGD participants agree as they either directly witnessed or heard from other women about such abuses taking place. The tone of the answers to the question around how women-headed households are coping is overall quite dark. There does not seem to be much that such households can do to cope, most suffering in poverty. Participants in areas like Balkh and Bamyan mentioned that women may at one point have tried to stay afloat with handicrafts though such projects did not last.

Many provinces mentioned women reduced to the indignity of the begging mat, selling off property, or families marrying off their children. This tracks with the survey responses, of which the majority said women-led households were “severely impacted” by the bans.

There does not seem to be much that such households can do to cope, most suffering in poverty. Participants in areas like Balkh and Bamyan mentioned that women may at one point have tried to stay afloat with handicrafts though such projects did not last. Many provinces mentioned women reduced to the indignity of the begging mat, selling off property, or families marrying off their children. This tracks with the survey responses, of which the majority said women-led households were “severely impacted” by the bans. It’s clear from responses across the provinces that their first choice of what to ask the UN and the world is to force the Taliban to end the restrictive bans. Short of that, providing job opportunities and trainings topped the demands of the participants. It should be noted however that only a few participants per province thought up these types of suggestions; many others were dwelling primarily on the hopelessness of the status quo. Daikundi was especially remarkable for a lack of any ideas of how to improve the situation and the overwhelming misery at the forefront of their answers. The third question provoked a near-unanimous if not completely unanimous response: yes, women without access to aid are obviously more exposed to physical and psychological abuse, loss of authority and respect, and economic degradation.

A significant amount said access to aid did lead to some increase in authority. One participant put it bluntly: “*As is stated in a proverb: “who gives bread gives commands.”* Other participants seemed to indicate that access to aid was a financial good but did not clearly guarantee other benefits for the women. What came across was that the men of the family were less likely to be abusive if the family was less steeped in poverty.

Methodology:

BISHNAW is a digital initiative that operates in 19 provinces in Afghanistan with reach to 26 provinces. The project combines a community-based approach with digital survey tools to capture the experiences and opinions of women at the sub-national level in Afghanistan in ‘real-time.’ The methodology takes into consideration the Afghan context and was designed to allow for a more diverse range of women to participate in the research than in traditional research undertaken in Afghanistan. Women who are not able to travel or face mobility restrictions tend to be left out of community feedback processes. As a result, their experiences are often not considered in the policy discussions. BISHNAW employs three research tools: a tele-survey system, face-to-face shorthand surveys and focus groups. Its digital research tools were created to facilitate the participation of excluded and vulnerable women and to bring these voices to the forefront of policy processes. The findings from the data collected are made available in a timely, systematic, and standardized manner to a range of official stakeholders and the public in an endeavor to ensure women’s views can inform international policy process and decisions.

About Bishnaw:

Created in 2020 by the Organization for Policy Research and Development Studies (DROPS) in Kabul, Afghanistan, BISH- NAW-WAWRA is a digital platform that captures the voices of women in real-time and on a diversity of issues. Reflected in its name, BISHNAW which means ‘listen’ in Dari and WAWRA in Pashto, was developed with the goal of ensuring that the process of ‘listening’ to Afghan women is not seen as a one-off event but as an integral part of all national and international discussions on peace, securityand development in Afghanistan.



