



RESILIENCE IN DISPLACEMENT? BUILDING THE POTENTIAL OF AFGHAN DISPLACED WOMEN

Nassim Majidi¹ and Camille Hennion²

Abstract

Over 76% of Afghans have been displaced by conflict, natural or man-made disasters at some point during their lifetime. Among these, women are “the vulnerable within the vulnerable”, as shown in a recent report written by the authors for the Norwegian Refugee Council, calling for accrued attention to the needs of displaced women at a time of transition and rising insecurity. What do we know about the vulnerabilities and survival of Afghan displaced women? This article focuses on resilience in displacement, highlights specific gendered vulnerabilities of economic and social isolation, and the overall lack of coping mechanisms observed. In a situation of high vulnerabilities but low resilience, what is – and what can be – the response to Afghan women’s need for protection in displacement? This research will be based on a mix of quantitative and qualitative data collected through various research studies in 2012 and 2013 by the authors of this paper.

Keywords: Resilience, IDPs, women, Afghanistan, gender, conflict, humanitarian assistance

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Introduction

Afghanistan is marked in 2014 by a critical situation that combines increased conflict, a political transition and rapidly growing internal displacement – from 400,000 IDPs in 2012, UN data now reports over 600,000 conflict-induced IDPs nationwide¹. This complex situation has led humanitarian and development actors to question the most appropriate means to respond to one of Afghanistan's top humanitarian priorities – forced internal displacement.

Within the category of internally displaced persons, or IDPs, women are “the vulnerable within the vulnerable”². Yet, analysis on gendered vulnerabilities remains weak despite the fact that over 76% of Afghans have been displaced by conflict, natural or man-made disasters at some point during their lifetime³. Several studies account for displacement-related vulnerabilities such as access to employment, housing, land and property, and food⁴ and highlight higher poverty rates of urban IDPs compared to the rest of the urban poor⁵. Yet few emphasize the specific gendered vulnerabilities of Afghan displaced women.

This article addresses this gap by linking three key concepts: internal displacement, gendered vulnerabilities and resilience. We aim to understand the dynamics linking a humanitarian priority (internal displacement) to a specific group (Afghan displaced women), by looking at the means available to address their needs – whether internal resources available to the IDPs, or externally through assistance.

“It is crucial to understand IDPs as both victims and actors of change”⁶. The literature reports that displacement can lead to innovative survival tactics by the displaced (Brun & Lund 2005, Lund 2003, Shanmugaratnam et al. 2003, Skonhoft 1998); however, as we will note, these tactics can have adverse consequences specifically on women. Structural, economic and cultural barriers limit the decision-making of women in displacement.

Resilience has become a key buzzword among donors and practitioners in Afghanistan. On the eve of the 2014 transition and after a decade of external assistance, the objective is to switch focus from assisting vulnerable groups to building the capacity of Afghan households and communities to resist to adverse shocks on their own – whether conflict or natural disaster, both known drivers of forced migration. Adopting a gender focus, this paper takes on the debate on resilience to test how quickly women adapt to displacement in the Afghan context. How resilient are displaced women in Afghanistan?

What is resilience? This paper will use the working definition of the UK Department for International Development (DfID): “disaster resilience is the ability of countries, communities and households to manage change, by maintaining or transforming living standards in the face of shocks or stresses - such as earthquakes, drought or violent conflict - without compromising their long-term prospects.”⁷ In the situation of internal displacement, resilience becomes the ability of those – even the most vulnerable within the

¹ UNHCR (2013), *Conflict induced internal displacement monthly update*, September 2013.

² Samuel Hall/NRC/IDMC/JIPS (2012) *Challenges of IDP Protection: Research study on the protection of internally displaced persons in Afghanistan*.

³ ICRC (2009), *Our World: Views from Afghanistan, Opinion Survey*, p.6.

⁴ Samuel Hall/NRC/IDMC/JIPS (2012) *Challenges of IDP Protection: Research study on the protection of internally displaced persons in Afghanistan*.

⁵ WB/UNHCR (2011), *Research study on IDPs in urban settings*

⁶ <http://www.forcedmigration.org/research-resources/expert-guides/internal-displacement/actor-oriented-perspectives-on-internal>

⁷ DfID, (2011), *Defining Disaster Resilience: a DfID Approach Paper*, London, (p.6).

vulnerable, in this case Afghan displaced women – to manage what are the reported changes and effects brought about by forced internal displacement – on economic wellbeing, social integration, and protection, and how they envision these effects in the long term.

What do we know about the vulnerabilities and resilience of Afghan displaced women?

This paper will:

- *First*, review the gendered vulnerabilities of internal displacement,
- *Second*, analyse the resilience of displaced women,
- *Third*, assess possible programming options to support the existing – or lack thereof – resilience among Afghan displaced women. In a situation of high vulnerabilities but low resilience, conclude on: what is – and what can be – the response to Afghan women’s need for protection in displacement?

Theoretical Framework

Internal displacement in conflict settings like Afghanistan has been historically linked to competition for political power, natural disasters, and high poverty rates. Whether as a result of an economic downturn or transition, the economic, social and cultural components of displacement-related vulnerabilities are all present.

In many ways, women bear the brunt of conflict and displacement situations, whether new or protracted⁸. Displaced women struggle to re-establish sustainable livelihoods, with their families or on their own, with conflict resulting in the destruction of productive capital or their capacity to contribute to productive capital, leading to significant economic losses that directly impact women – either through increased domestic tensions, domestic violence, forced marriage or early marriages. Whether directly or indirectly, women suffer from the consequences of displacement as they see their economic, social and cultural roles limited and defined by their new environment – over which they have limited control. This research underlines the importance of understanding the gender dimensions of IDP livelihoods, economic and social practices, as well as cultural practices, and their impact on women during displacement. While displaced women – especially in protracted situations – may assume new roles as heads of their households, their ability to develop coping strategies, through sustainable livelihoods, is highly constrained and depends in part on the geographic setting in which they evolve.

This article addresses four common themes in the secondary literature on war and displacement – focusing on 1) the geographical setting of displacement, 2) possibilities for durable solution, 3) relationships with local populations and host communities and 4) the impact of displacement on socio-cultural roles within displaced households.

In the Afghan case study, this article will show that four factors limit the resilience of Afghan women in displacement:

1. **The urbanization of IDP flows– a common outcome of displacement worldwide – has meant less rather than more resilience for Afghan displaced women.** This is aggravated by the fact that Afghan IDPs do not live in camps, but often in informal settlements on the outskirts of major cities, or in ‘invisible’ settings as they move within relatives’ homes in cities – hence harder for them to be identified and reached by external assistance. Many women cut off from their previous livelihood experiences, agrarian roles and social networks encounter difficulties re-establishing a viable economic and social role in the new urban settings. War and displacement are known to cause permanent transformations in people’s lives and livelihoods, notably

⁸ Levron, E. (2013) *Livelihoods, Gender and Displacement in Côte d’Ivoire*, Brookings-LSE Project on Internal Displacement, Washington DC.

through rural to urban migration. Scott (1998) illustrated this transition through a case study of Liberia where disruption of food production and market structures led to the inability of an overwhelming majority of a rural and agrarian-based population to return to farming. This trend will be discussed in this article with a review of the specific consequences for women in Afghanistan.

2. *The impossibility of return and the very limited opportunities for local integration are an overarching challenge to Afghan displaced women's resilience.* There is often a clear 'before and after displacement' rhetoric among displaced women interviewed in Afghanistan, as in the rest of the literature. But unlike other settings, return is the least preferred option for Afghan IDPs and often not a possibility given continuing and resurging trends of conflict in most of the country. The structural environment, and the fact that decisions do not rest with Afghan women but with their husbands, fathers, and brothers, means that displaced women have little control over their fate – limiting one step further their resilience in displacement. Although they feel like strangers in their host communities, return is not a possibility, nor is local integration.
3. *The limited local interaction with host populations means that Afghan displaced women's lives are curtailed to their homes, thereby limiting resiliency due to a lack of social networks beyond their homes.* The most successful support programs are those that take place within the boundaries of their homes – as there is little contact with local communities. However, a positive assessment is the low degree of tensions with local host communities and Afghan displaced women. Yet, there are no networks of Afghan displaced women or of women irrespective of their status in the areas and provinces surveyed in Afghanistan, thus limiting women's resilience to one network only – their families and other vulnerable displaced populations. They remain hidden, unorganized and dependent on their immediate – and vulnerable – surroundings, preventing a transition out of displacement and out of poverty.
4. **Forced displacement can lead to a process of reification of social relations detrimental to women.** A large segment of the literature insists on the impact of displacement on internal family relations and the potential opportunity it represents for women to negotiate new roles or increased spaces of independence⁹. Such contributions highlight the opportunity that displacement offers in favor of a redistribution of social roles and a greater role for women within their households. Field observations in Afghanistan showed that, if these dynamics may exist amongst Afghan IDPs, forced displacement rather triggers a process of reification of social relations. In reaction to the necessity to adapt to a completely new urban environment, IDP communities tend to reaffirm the importance of their specific customs and traditions as keys of their identity to be preserved against the novelty of urban social relations.

This is not to say that female IDPs in Afghanistan are victims. Vincent and Sørensen (2001) argue against the perception of IDPs as helpless victims, an important contribution to the discourse on resilience and on supporting community and household-based coping strategies. Their book shows that cultural continuity and resilience are key factors of survival in displacement. This acknowledgement serves a very important purpose on which this article

⁹See Mahler, S.J & Pessar, P, 2006, 'Gender Matters : Ethnographers Bring Gender from the Periphery toward the Core of Migration Studies' in *International Migration Review*, vol 40, n°1, 27-63 (p.34).

will conclude: conflict and displacement do not lead to a total disruption of communities – they create tensions, new forms of violence and compromises, often for short term economic benefits, which can have more adverse consequences on women and children than other household members. These can be addressed by humanitarian and development actors as long as they grasp the prior social structures and cultural traditions of the displaced in order to implement more effective assistance. This will be the key to supporting resilience in displacement for female IDPs in Afghanistan in a context of increasing internal displacement.

Methodology and Design

The quantitative data presented in this paper stems from a 1,000 IDP survey in five provinces of Afghanistan for the Norwegian Refugee Council in 2012 – the provinces are Kabul, Nangarhar, Herat, Faryab and Kandahar, covering the five regions of Afghanistan. For this study, the survey was based on a stratified then random sampling. Within each of the 5 provinces, urban, semi-rural and rural areas were selected. Within those, the main pockets of IDP populations were identified. Finally, at the household level, a random mix of IDPs and non-IDPs was surveyed in each of the location for a total of 1,015 households surveyed.

Yet, on a topic as specific and sensitive as women's resilience, extensive qualitative data will be used to frame the analysis. Qualitative methods, including focus groups and individual case studies with women, help to inform the specific situation of Afghan displaced women. The qualitative data has been completed by observations from previous IDP studies conducted by the authors and publicly available, including:

- 2013 NRC/Samuel Hall *Displaced women's housing, land and property rights*
- 2012 NRC/IDMC/JIPS/Samuel Hall *Challenges of IDP Protection*
- 2012 Solidarités/Samuel Hall *Sustaining the Working Poor in the Kabul Informal settlements*
- 2011 WB/UNHCR *Research study on IDPs in urban settings*

The collection of the data used as a basis for this article respected strict ethical considerations, including the informed consent of every respondent for both qualitative and quantitative interviews. All participants were informed of their right not to participate in any investigation, as well as their right to withdraw from any of the interviews, and their right to have their identity anonymously protected. As a result none of the real names of our human participants was subsequently used in the reports or analysis. Experienced female interviewers were hired to speak with female participants, in order to respect local norms.

Gendered vulnerabilities of displaced women in Afghanistan

Economic isolation

The economic isolation of female IDPs was most noticeable in urban areas. On average, displacement impacts the economic wellbeing of IDP households with income decreasing by 21 per cent. Although a problem for all IDPs, women are at a unique disadvantage: women from rural origins, no longer with the opportunity to do farming work and denied jobs in male-dominated sectors (such as the construction or other daily-wage sectors), are forced into insecure employment and difficult work conditions – in irregular tailoring, sewing or begging – when allowed to work at all. The study showed that the proportion of women involved in agricultural activities plummets with displacement, from 30.7 per cent to 5.1 per cent after displacement. Unemployment of women, on the other hand, rises from 38.2 per cent to 48 per cent with displacement, illustrating the impact of displacement on women's access to livelihood and economic independence. Agriculture is

one of the main sectors for women's employment in Afghanistan¹⁰ and one of the only sectors where they would be allowed to work by their husbands and fathers.

Being cut from the land of their family, IDP women lose this economic opportunity but usually lack the specific skills to adapt to the urban markets, which they could potentially access. For example, IDP women show a strikingly high level of illiteracy, even for Afghan standards, with 97.6 per cent of women IDP respondents reporting being completely illiterate, against a national rate of illiteracy of 88 per cent for women in the country. Perhaps even more interestingly, whilst the national rate of illiteracy of women decreases significantly within urban settings (77 per cent), this is not true for women IDPs, of whom 95 per cent are still illiterate. Literacy would be one of the most basic skills necessary to enter an urban labour market dominated by services. This therefore indicates that women IDPs are poorly equipped to adapt to the requirements of the urban labour markets that they enter upon displacement.

This economic isolation hits hardest widows in Afghan IDP households. In this survey, widows made up a fifth of our total female respondents. The limited employment opportunities are an immediate concern for widows and female heads of household. Widows reported the lowest income during displacement: 71 per cent earned only 588 Afghanis (\$12) a month (53 per cent below the poverty line).

Though many IDPs – and even women amongst them – seek to diversify income, they often lack means to purchase equipment or access capital. Trapped in the informal economy, IDPs become more dependent than the non-displaced on daily labour that is usually poorly paid, temporary and insecure. Within this group, women are more vulnerable to hazardous forms of labour.

Employed male IDPs earn, on average, 4.3 times more than females. When one considers the lower rate of female economic participation, it is apparent that surveyed IDP males earned between 23 and 47 times more than female IDPs. In turn, and as we will see through the next two sub-sections on social isolation and forced marriage practices, displaced women and girls' increased economic vulnerabilities place them at a higher risk of prostitution and forced marriages.

Social isolation and violence

The economic deficit leads to a renegotiation of space for households, which disadvantages women disproportionately as they are physically moved to settings that are not in line with their traditional environment. The new physical settings lead to women's social isolation. IDPs' new dwellings present structural shortcomings: lack of space and construction materials, small overcrowded rooms housing multiple families, and lack of proper sanitation facilities – all of which adversely impact women, more than men.

Privacy is limited, and girls and boys – sometimes distant relatives – often sleep in the same room, violating traditional social mores. The data shows that 13.4 per cent of respondents share their house or flat with other households. It is unsurprising that, when asked about the main assistance needed to improve their living conditions, IDPs request more space (26.7 per cent). Lack of space and living in such cramped circumstances can increase the risks of violence against women (VAW). Furthermore, the change in traditional housing conditions, especially from rural to urban environment, means that women see their freedom of movement greatly constrained, as they cannot benefit from the relative protection of their courtyard, gardens and villages. Because the city imposes the co-existence with other communities, it is sometimes more difficult for IDP women to negotiate the right to go out of their family compound. This leads to situations of social isolation that limit women's ability

¹⁰ See for example, Samuel Hall (2012) : *Time to move to sustainable jobs: Study on the state of employment*, commissioned by ILO. p. 31.

to adapt to their new environment.

Sanitation facilities were also limited with most IDPs using traditional covered latrines (62.3 per cent), designated toilet facilities lacking a pit (24.5 per cent), or resorting to open fields or bushes (11.5 per cent). Overcrowded conditions, the lack of adequate sanitation facilities and open defecation, can produce serious health concerns. A mother unable to wash her hands before cooking can spread bacterial infections to entire households. Women's gendered vulnerabilities can easily produce child protection risks.

Although the study does not identify a direct link between Violence against Women and displacement, findings suggest that displacement itself can greatly increase women's vulnerabilities to VAW. Displaced women are more likely to be socially isolated and to lack traditional protective mechanisms. Analysis of qualitative data revealed that displaced women and girls' increased economic vulnerabilities not only places them at a higher risk of, for instance, prostitution and forced marriages, but also typically leaves them without the resources to seek assistance.

Almost two thirds (64.1 per cent) of female respondents reported domestic violence during displacement, with nearly a third (32.4 per cent) reporting that it occurred often, very often or every day. Of these women, 12.6 per cent noted that domestic violence occurred more often during displacement than before. Women indicated that their husbands were "more stressed" during displacement, and this could lead to either increased or decreased domestic violence. An IDP who was displaced in 2010, for instance, explained that the men of the community were put under greater pressure by displacement.

Other types of violence rate high as well: 55.4 per cent recount having directly suffered from verbal harassment and 42.9 per cent from physical beatings. Our findings further suggest low levels of sexual violence, though this trend is inconclusive given various social limitations that may discourage reporting of sexual harassment, abuse or exploitation. Women were asked both if they had personally experienced VAW and if they knew it existed in their community. When the question was generalised to the community women were more likely to report a higher prevalence of VAW perhaps due to an inhibition against speaking to strangers about personal events.

Forced and Early Marriages

Overall, 27 per cent of female children were reportedly forced to marry against their will. At the other end of the spectrum, widows are also frequently forced to marry one of the relatives of their late husband. As noted above, IDP populations are characterised by higher proportions of widows (19.3 per cent), increasing the risk for women IDPs to be forced into a marriage.

Several IDP women noted they felt their daughters were targeted for low-cost marriage by outsiders who had heard that poor IDPs would accept low levels of dowry. This is linked to two phenomena. Firstly, IDPs, typically more impoverished and vulnerable than non-displaced populations, may rely on dowries as a source of household income to meet their basic needs. The survey showed that at least one child had been forced to marry in 26.9 per cent of surveyed IDP households. This is especially the case for female-headed households. Secondly, the absence of an adult male significantly increases their economic vulnerability, and therefore the need to rely on other sources of revenues such as early marriages.

How do displaced women then cope with these three-fold protection challenges? The next section will review how they are more likely to be socially isolated and to lack traditional protective mechanisms – hence questioning their levels of resilience in the face of displacement-related shocks.

Resilience Among Displaced Women

The concept of resilience has been increasingly used to describe the abilities of IDP communities to adapt to their new environment after the shock of displacement, based on the development of specific coping mechanisms.

Yet, our research with displaced populations in Afghanistan showed that, in the case of women, access to traditional coping mechanisms is limited, reducing the resilience of women IDPs. They are more than often in a situation of social isolation, cut from their traditional main protection mechanisms, including first and foremost their own families. Somehow paradoxically, displacement towards urban areas decreases women's chances of accessing assistance and does not necessarily increase their opportunities to gain more power or freedom within their own households. Finally, the lack of durable solutions available to women IDP is a final blow for IDP women. The impossibility for IDPs to return and the precarious situations they live in their place of displacement mean that women IDPs are stuck in a situation of in-between, a 'no woman's land', with few chances to reach any type of social or economic integration, leading to psychological problems.

In other words, Afghan displaced women become, socially, the outcast among the outcast; geographically, the remote among the remote; and ultimately, the unsustainable among the unsustainable, due to the lack of durable solutions. The difficult context of displacement in Afghanistan shows the limits of the concept of resilience for the most vulnerable segments of displaced groups. Whilst as communities, IDPs have proven their ability to develop efficient coping mechanisms, this article shows individually the risks present for sub-groups of this population, namely for Afghan displaced women.

Coping mechanisms? Lacking traditional social protective mechanisms in displacement

- At the family level

Afghan society emphasises traditional, family-based structures. Afghan women and girls rely on close male relatives to act in their best interest, including protection from unwanted and early marriages and abusive relationships. Decades of conflict have taken a toll on the Afghan family, with many families left without fathers or brothers. As noted above, our sample included a higher number of widows (19.3 per cent of all female IDPs interviewed) than the national average, suggesting that such families often lacked traditional protection. Such households can leave women vulnerable to VAW, as shown in the following case studies:

Roya, aged 19, lost her father in childhood as conflict spilled over into her village in Faryab Province. Her mother soon remarried, leaving Roya and her three brothers under the care of an unrelated friend in Maimana city. Roya's new caretaker soon arranged a marriage for her. "It was not forced, but it was also not my choice. I did not know what was happening. I was not involved. When I got older, I decided that I did not want to marry him." Roya has since broken off the engagement, but consistently suffers reprisal sexual and physical harassment and regular beatings from her caretaker. Roya is constantly being pressurised into marrying one of her caretaker's nephews and cannot count on protection from her brothers as they have become opium addicts. "I'm scared. My aunts come and tell my [caretaker] that, if I don't get engaged soon, someone will kill me."

When I was seven years old, I was sold for 30,000 Afghanis (\$600). No one called it being 'sold,' but that is what it was." 17-year-old Shazia was engaged against her will to a man who regularly beats her. Two of his brothers beat their fiancés, but both women managed to break off the engagement. "Their fathers broke off the engagement without a big problem, but my father is dead and can't give me that protection." After approaching her fiancé with her desire to break off the engagement, Shazia has since run away to a women's shelter. "He still calls ... and I am afraid of going back [home] in case he finds out and then tries to take me away so I don't leave again."

- At the city level

Beyond their homes, *local social networks – of extended families and community support – are limited for IDPs, and in particular for women. Whilst family networks are crucial for protection purposes, larger networks or the lack thereof play an important role for socio-economic integration.* The IDP settlements around the Afghan capital for example are characterized by the coexistence of IDP communities, which are organized based on their province of origin and ethnicity. They are also characterized by the lack of interactions – or sometimes antagonistic relationships – between IDPs and the rest of the Kabul population. The camp of Chahari Qambar for example is inhabited by 900 families coming from Helmand, Kandahar and Uruzgan provinces. The Helmandis control the camp and do not let anyone – including the police – intervene in their internal affairs. Interestingly, they interact with the IDP camp of Bagrami where other Helmandi IDPs live. Some intermarriages happen between the two camps, with relatives living in both camps. On the other hand, relations with Kabulis are very limited. The main interaction happens when IDP men go to the city centre to look for daily labour. In that case, they complain about the discriminations that they face: *‘Kabuli employers do not hire us because we are Helmandis and because we speak Pashto. They think we are all Taliban.’*¹¹

This lack of social networks beyond the direct IDP community has a direct impact on men and women’s economic integration. As shown in past research on the Afghan labour market, social networks (*wasita*) are crucial to finding employment: a labour market survey in 5 provinces of Afghanistan showed that employers would mostly rely on social networks to hire staff. This survey found that in 62.6 per cent of cases they would rely on ‘friends’ and in 57.9 per cent on ‘relatives’¹². In this context, the seclusion from local social networks hinders access to employment, hence the resilience of IDP households. As IDP women have very few opportunities to build up their own networks, their chances of benefiting from local social networks are even more limited.

- At the society level

Whilst women in displacement tend to lack the familial and close social networks, which could help them set up effective coping strategies, research also proved their lack of access to political representation and to institutions that could protect them, confirming their high level of social isolation. IDPs’ preferred use of informal justice systems and their lack of political representation can leave the most vulnerable – such as women and members of ethnic minorities – beholden to the more powerful. In the study, a minority of women only (18 per cent) held a national identity card, as against 83 per cent of IDP men surveyed during the same study, reducing women’s access to vote and political representation. As a result, their decision-making power and influence was more limited in their new settings.

On-the-ground realities – The geography of displacement and limitations on women’s influence and power

While in other country settings IDPs may live in camps, the urban challenge remains an obstacle to both women’s protection and women’s resilience in displacement in Afghanistan. IDPs move to urban areas to have a greater access to employment and services, and more peaceful surroundings, at the same time these urban settings add challenges that are specifically difficult for women to adjust to – hence examples of coping strategies (i.e. urban displacement) that can lead to unfavorable conditions for women’s resilience in displacement. One of these challenges is linked to the fact that the impact of displacement on intra-familial relations is not straightforward. In particular, when facing the new environment

¹¹Qualitative interviews with community leaders in the Kabul Informal Settlement of Chahari Qambar, Spring 2012.

¹²Samuel Hall, (2011), *Economic Assessment and Labour Market Survey of Balkh, Baghlan, Kandahar, and Kunduz.*

offered by a city like Kabul, IDPs living in the informal settlements surrounding the capital tend to cling to the customs from their place of origin as a reaction to the multiple cultural challenges and social evolutions offered by the city. For example, one community leader from Paktia who had been displaced to the outskirts of Kabul by the insecurity in his province of origin illustrated this tendency:

In Paktia, if a married woman runs away with another man, we kill the woman. We also kill 7 male members of her family. We apply the same rules in Paktia than here in Kabul. In Paktia, we also apply these rules across the border with Pakistan: if someone kills someone else and then tries to run away to the Pakistan side of the border, we have enough relationships with the other side of the border, we get back the offender and take revenge. (Head of Shura, Karte Naw)

Although it is very unlikely that such a revenge mechanism would still be applied within the Afghan capital, the necessity for a community leader to assert that these traditions are still vivid despite displacement shows some of the identity processes at stake upon displacement. As the place of women within the Afghan society is the object of constant and intense renegotiation in urban contexts, IDP men are likely to assert their authority and contested identities by re-affirming their control over their wives and daughters' social relations and movements. Following this, rather than opening a space for negotiations over gender-specific roles and behaviours, forced displacement from rural areas to Afghan cities can have the opposite effect of reifying these relations, decreasing women's opportunities to build up their own coping mechanisms.

Areas of settlement – especially in urban areas but also in rural areas – often include mixed, unrelated IDP communities or local 'host' communities. This can give rise to ethnic tensions within informal settlements, or with local communities. For instance, in Kabul's Bagrami settlement, the Pashtuns marginalised the Tajik minority by not only forcing them to move to the outskirts of the IDP settlement adjacent to the host community but also by impeding aid delivery to them.

Women IDPs complained that aid deliveries were not reaching them. This is a direct consequence of the economic and social isolation, as well as ethnic tensions, previously discussed. Nadia, a 37-year old Tajik IDP residing in Bagrami, reported that the control of aid rested in the hands of local leaders – who did not always distribute aid fairly among IDPs or according to the vulnerability guidelines set by NGO. This was even the case when local leaders were women. Whether male or female, the position of power in such vulnerable settings can lead to misuse of power that most severely impacts those that lack connections and social standing – notably women.

What could lead to more resilience? The unlikelihood of return and psychosocial needs of female IDPs

Internal displacement leads to shocks that induce stress in the lives of all IDPs – men and women alike. In a country with over 30 years of continued war and conflict, post-traumatic stress disorder is a known reality. However, we argue that female IDPs in Afghanistan live under even higher pressure than the rest of their compatriots. The mental health disadvantage experienced by Afghan displaced women is a key obstacle to their ability to be resilient. This is further constrained by the fact that return is not an option for the vast majority – whether due to on-going conflict, destruction of assets and homes, or the inability to cope with another migration experience, 77 per cent of respondents in our 1,000-sample declared no intention to return.

Lacking the possibility of returning to what they knew and to their prior coping

mechanisms, survival and resilience techniques, women have to adapt to an uncertain duration of displacement, and the uncertainty of ever fulfilling other durable solutions. In addition, lacking the traditional protective measures of their networks, being constrained by structural factors such as their geographic environment and the lack of aid delivery, displaced women in Afghanistan live under immense pressure.

In addition, our data suggests a stronger pressure on conflict, rather than natural disaster-induced, IDPs. The research shows that conflict-induced IDPs have often directly witnessed or experienced violence in addition to the potential trauma of displacement itself. Overall, 35.2 per cent of respondents indicated that they themselves or members of their households needed some kind of psychological assistance. It is generally believed that accounts of mental illness in Afghanistan are under-reported. When disaggregated by gender, our findings indicate more willingness on the part of female respondents to receive psychological support for both themselves (76.7 per cent) and their family members. Despite the apparent need for psychological support, less than five per cent of IDPs reported receiving any counseling after displacement.

Women and children reported higher demands for mental and psychological support than male IDPs. They recognize this need and are open to receiving such assistance – a blessing for practitioners who can at least count on target beneficiary realization of their needs. The next step can then be to ensure community buy-in, male acceptance of such support and training of teachers to identify trauma and deliver in-school psychological support to help mitigate psychological traumas suffered by IDP children. Mechanisms to provide psychosocial support to IDPs are urgently required, which we will develop in the next section focusing on responses to Afghan women's protection needs in displacement. Our own research did not put emphasis on the psychological aspect of displacement. Yet, the qualitative interviews that we conducted in the field showed that it was a specific area that requires further research as the psychological consequences of displacement in Afghanistan remain more or less unknown for the moment.

Responding to Afghan women's protection in displacement: Matching needs with interventions to build resilience

Vocational training for IDP women: re-building livelihoods

Resilience requires a focus on living standards and re-building livelihoods. To encourage survival and promote the resilience of IDP women, and ultimately of their households, the first step to resilience needs to happen through economic capacity building and vocational training.

Our research shows that women bear unfavourable economic conditions after displacement and hence their household's livelihoods suffers from their inability to contribute to the household income, creating tensions and leading to situations of forced and early marriage. However, our previous research¹³ also shows that female IDPs in Kabul informal settlements, for instance, have skills in handicrafts manufacturing and tailoring, which can be applied to the labour market in Kabul.

A market assessment and skills assessment of female IDPs in Kabul showed possibilities to match skills with informal domestic activities that could generate income. Although barriers still include family and cultural norms, lack of support from men and personal motivation, vocational training programmes set-up by NGOs can address these obstacles and implement solutions for IDP women's economic integration in the main urban hubs of Afghanistan, as a

¹³ Samuel Hall (2012). *Sustaining the working poor in the Kabul Informal Settlements, A study of IDPs in Kabul city*. Commissioned by Solidarités Afghanistan, Kabul.

first pilot, then extending it beyond these urban centres. IDP women's past activities can inform programmes to support an active economic role.

It is necessary to include *social awareness programs for IDP households as part of any vocational training program for IDP women*. This should include awareness on the social implications of living in informal settlements, and on skills development as a tool to reach one of the durable solutions – local integration. Given their living conditions on the margin of the local society, with limited interactions with the host community, IDP men and women need this initial impetus to come from outside – to support them in efforts to build their resilience, especially in urban settings.

Matching food with vocational training support is one of the ways to get access – and community buy-in – to building the resilience of IDP women in Afghanistan. As the 2012 Samuel Hall/Solidarités report shows, “food is often the only incentive that encourages men (head of families) to allow women to participate in the vocational training. If the food content is excluded, this may have a disproportionate impact on women.” The report also highlights key criteria that, if met, can lead to effective vocational training:

- Give awareness to the head of the family on how they can earn income from the domestic activities by women,
- Include the head of the family in the early or final stages of training,
- Men should get trained on how to sell the products of women in the local market,
- Provide active support to households on the post-training phase, by marketing women's products in the market, finding potential customers and clients, providing households with grants and support women in post-training activities¹⁴.

Follow-up: IDPs reported a lack of opportunities to apply skills learned and lack of post-training assistance and follow-up. An IDP in Chaman Babrak in Kabul noted that while a recent tailoring course for women had begun he did “not know how the women will be able to work...We do not have any equipment for machines for them to use.” Organisations which provide necessary equipment or business start-up funds present much more sustainable options for IDPs.

In Nasaji Bagrami settlement in Kabul, female IDP / vocational training beneficiaries explained that, “*some women could not participate because their men didn't want them to... [But now] our families are happy because we earn money.*” This indicates that if households' awareness is raised, men can support women's income generating potential which will in turn ease tensions, and violence, at home.

Access to information & justice for displaced women victims of VAW

This article showed the social and economic isolation in which IDP women live, even – or maybe especially – in urban settings. One direct consequence of this isolation is the lack of access to legal and social protection mechanisms in situation of distress. In cases of domestic violence or early marriages for example, displaced women have very few channel – if any at all – to report the violence and to get appropriate treatment. That means that some displaced women are entrapped in situations of acute psychological or physical violence with no perspective and very few information on the potential solutions to make that stop.

The level of awareness of Afghan women about their rights is low. Given the illiteracy and the social exclusion of IDP women, their level of awareness is even lower. Whilst there have been a lot of awareness-raising programmes implemented in Afghanistan, most have targeted women in general and few programmes address the specific obstacles that

¹⁴ Ibid. p. 51.

prevent displaced women to access their rights. The Information, Counselling and Legal Assistance (ICLA) programme of NRC is one of the welcome exceptions. Yet, as exposed in the two last sections, displacement induces some particular forms of vulnerabilities that should be specifically addressed by external interventions.

It is therefore important to bridge that gap to ensure that women IDPs as well get access to the programmes of awareness-raising, counseling, treatment and psychological support that are implemented in Afghanistan. As developed in the section above, the specific geographies of displacement in the country render most of these women invisible and often inaccessible to interventions. Ensuring a more systematic response to violence against women through programmes of prevention, counseling and support specifically tailored for IDP women is also one of the ways to building their resilience, by giving IDP women the means to react to the violence they suffer from. A particular focus should be put on psychological and mental support as it is a need that has been identified by the women themselves but that is only very rarely addressed.

Economic isolation and dependence strongly impede women IDPs to adjust to their new environment. One practical way to address this problem is to take pro-active measures to ensure inclusion of women's housing, land and property rights in all land and shelter programmes. Helping women IDPs accessing their rights to inheritance or to their *mahr* are ways to increase their economic independence and stability, a crucial component in women's ability to adapt to displacement.

Finally, this article shows that there are several avenues of research that have not been explored to analyse the linkages and interrelations between displacement and gender in the Afghan context. The connection between displacement and various forms of gender-based violence in particular requires further in-depth qualitative research so as to inform improved GBV programming for IDPs.

Linking resilience with durable solutions

A durable solution is achieved when internally displaced persons no longer have any specific assistance and protection needs that are linked to their displacement and can enjoy their human rights without discrimination on account of their displacement."

IASC Framework for Durable Solutions for Internally Displaced Persons

Resilience is linked to building more positive *long-term* prospects for IDPs – and can be made sustainable only through the achievement of durable solutions. The government's emphasis on return as the durable solutions counters efforts of resilience building for IDPs.

Whether resettlement, local integration or return, IDP populations have rights to durable solutions – and in Afghanistan have voiced their preference for local integration for the most part¹⁵. This is a contentious issue in Afghanistan, especially in urban settings, where the value of land, a rare commodity, and struggles for land tenure have led to local integration to be seen by policy makers and stakeholders as the least possible option for vulnerable households. Forced eviction remains a threat well-known to IDP households – most recently acted upon in October 2013 in Kabul city's Parwani 3 site in district 4.

In addition, large numbers of IDPs have fallen into lengthy displacement – or 'protracted displacement' over 15, 20 or more years – with no immediate prospect for durable solutions, in a country where the resurgence of conflict may render talks of durable solutions contradictory. "The fact that 92 per cent of those wishing to return would only consider it when peaceful conditions prevail underscores the urgency of considering other possible

¹⁵ Samuel Hall/NRC/IDMC/JIPS (2012) *Challenges of IDP Protection: Research study on the protection of internally displaced persons in Afghanistan*. p.45

durable solutions”¹⁶.

Conclusion

Without denying the fact that IDPs can be agents of their own change, this article promotes the view that resilience needs to be supported both within and from outside IDP communities if women are to reach higher living and protection standards in displacement. The current state of research on displacement in Afghanistan shows a situation of high gendered vulnerabilities but low resilience – with obstacles ranging from urban environments that limit coping mechanisms to the lack of durable solutions.

One of the ways to better support resilience for IDP women is to understand the categories of challenges and protection risks they are confronted with. One important angle in understanding IDP women’s needs in Afghanistan is to dissociate between those living in rural and urban areas’ informal settlements. The urban challenge has been highlighted in Afghanistan since the release of the 2011 WB/UNHCR study on IDPs in urban settings, and subsequent support by donors and practitioners on urban programming. This interest has however waned. Donor support for urban IDP programming has decreased and for some people in need, stopped entirely – while NGOs such as Solidarités International, the Danish Refugee Council and Welt Hunger Hilfe, among others, seek to keep up efforts for urban programming for the displaced. The urban challenge remains a priority at a time of transition: increasing economic and physical insecurity will contribute to an over-crowding of urban areas, testing of absorption capacities, and competition over scarce resources such as land, housing, employment, and food. Addressing the urban challenge, with specific programmes that can support women’s economic worth, rebuilding their livelihoods and social networks beyond their homes, can in turn increase IDP women’s protection in Afghanistan and ultimately, their resilience. Faced with violence, threats of early and forced marriage, displacement has induced specific shocks that leave IDP women an extremely vulnerable category in Afghanistan. With internal displacement being a humanitarian priority in Afghanistan in the wake of transition, focus needs to be redirected to practical ways to support the resilience of Afghan displaced women – thus far lacking.

Moreover, this article argues for a pragmatic approach to gender programming in Afghanistan. Women need to be considered as actors in their environment, by considering not only their social and cultural environment, but their economic and structural, even geographical, environment. First, the entire household has to be considered as actors of gender-sensitive programming: it is the opposite of the strict and narrow “gender” definition: the goal is not to help women only, but to help women in their environment, to contribute to their resilience, and to their ability to become actors of their own change. This article highlights men’s and women’s trauma, which in turn act as obstacles to resilience mechanisms. There is a contextual lesson to be learned: at a moment of heightened fragility for IDP women, the international community is reducing its assistance; while it is now, in the wake of transition, that Afghan displaced women, the vulnerable among the vulnerable, need support to build their resilience and long-term quality of life.

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¹⁶ Ibid.

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