

THE FINNISH 1325 NETWORK

# Norden in Afghanistan

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The Implementation of UNSCR 1325 in Nordic  
engagement in Afghanistan

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13.9.2011

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## SUMMARY

This study was undertaken by The Finnish 1325 Network with the aim to examine how the Nordic countries have integrated the objectives of UNSCR 1325 into their policy and activities regarding Afghanistan. The report was conducted as a desk-study and draws on policy strategies, evaluations, and recent academic writings of relevant Nordic ministries, development agencies and research institutes.

Since 2001 there have been some improvements in the situation of women in Afghanistan, but the gender commitments of the Afghan government are still far from fulfilled. Many sources have expressed the legitimate fear that women's (re)gained rights will be traded off in the coming peace negotiations. The transition of security responsibilities to Afghan authorities is planned to take place in 2014. However, the country is highly dependent on international aid, and the international involvement in Afghanistan is likely to continue also after the military operations.

In the development policy of the Nordic countries gender is a cross-cutting consideration, and since 2009 Nordic embassies in Kabul have been developing a Joint Gender Action Initiative in order to strengthen their efforts to promote gender equality and women's rights. However, Nordic countries should devote more efforts to the planning, monitoring and reporting of different development programs, and require gender specific information from their partners. Due to the volatile situation in Afghanistan, military and security priorities affect the development work, and gender issues are easily compromised.

The integration of UNSCR 1325 into military and civilian crisis management varies between Nordic countries. Sweden is apparently a leading actor in this field, also in terms of providing training on gender issues. The gender mainstreaming was not as efficient among Norwegian and Finnish ISAF-troops. Working with UNSCR 1325 cannot be reduced to only concern the female representation in military and police missions, although the role of female staff is essential for reaching the Afghan women. The ability of ISAF-soldiers to protect Afghan women from the violence seems very limited, and investing in building up the police and justice sector forms an important means to fight against violence against women.

The key findings and recommendations include:

- There is a need for more critical research both on gender issues in Afghanistan and activities on gender by Nordic and other international donors. A joint Nordic research project could make use of the Nordic expertise in gender and Afghanistan of all the five countries.
- The expertise and knowledge of UNSCR 1325 in Nordic countries should be identified, covering all the institutions responsible for the implementation of UNSCR 1325 and the persons who have experience in working with the UNSCR 1325, e.g. Nordic gender advisers from international missions, civil servants, researchers, civil society activists etc.
- The progress of the Joint Gender Action Initiative of the Nordic embassies should be followed up by all the relevant Nordic actors involved with the implementation of UNSCR 1325.

- Afghanistan is a challenging environment for promoting gender equality and women's rights, but cultural relativism should not become an excuse for inaction. Ensuring women's participation in the peace process is one of the key objectives of UNSCR 1325.

## LIST OF ACRONYMS

AIHRC	Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission
ANDS	Afghanistan National Development Strategy
ARTF	Afghan Reconstruction Trust Fund
AWN	Afghan Women's Network
CDC	Community Development Council
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
CIMIC	Civil-Military Cooperation
CMC	Crisis Management Centre Finland
EVAW	Elimination of Violence Against Women
EUPOL	European Union Police Mission in Afghanistan
FOI	Swedish Defence Research Agency
FRU	Family Response Unit
HPC	High Peace Council
HQ	Head Quarters
ICRU	Icelandic Crisis Response Unit
JCBM	Joint Coordination and Monitoring Board
ISAF	International Security Assistance Force
MOT	Military/Mobile Observation Team
MoWA	Ministry of Women's Affairs
MP	Member of Parliament
NAP	National Action Plan (for the Implementation of UNSCR 1325)
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
Norad	Norwegian Agency for Development Coordination
Noref	Norwegian Peacebuilding Centre
NRC	Norwegian Refugee Council
NSP	National Solidarity Programme
PRIO	International Peace Research Institute in Oslo
PRT	Provincial Reconstruction Team
SCA	Swedish Committee for Afghanistan
SGVB	Sexualized and Gender Based Violence
Sida	Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
SRHR	Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNIFEM	United Nations Development Fund for Women (now part of the entity UN Women)

## INTRODUCTION

Among the larger international community, all the Nordic countries are currently contributing to the stabilization, peacebuilding and reconstruction process in Afghanistan. The Nordic countries are channeling their development and humanitarian assistance through several UN and World Bank agencies, and some Nordic NGOs have been active in Afghanistan since the 1980s. Nordic countries are also sending troops to the NATO-commanded International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) and taking part in the European Union Police Mission (EUPOL Afghanistan). In April 2008 a Plan of Action for Nordic Cooperation in Afghanistan was adopted at the meeting of Nordic Foreign Ministers in order to strengthen cooperation of Nordic countries in and with Afghanistan. Promoting gender equality and improving the situation of women are often mentioned as important goals in discussions and policy strategies concerning the future of Afghanistan, not least because the removed Taliban regime was notoriously famous for its oppression of women. Women's rights and gender equality have been identified as a possible sector of increased Nordic cooperation in the future, and the jointly created *Joint Nordic Gender Action Initiative* serves this purpose. The latest version of the initiative states that "the Nordic countries will take a leading role on gender in Afghanistan."

There have been some significant improvements in the situation of women in Afghanistan since 2001, but voices critical of foreign intervention have claimed that the international community has forgotten the Afghan women and their rights despite the promises made at the beginning of the involvement in the country. On the other hand, the passing of the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 "Women, Peace, and Security"<sup>1</sup> has put women's role in peacebuilding and reconstruction processes high on the international agenda. At the time of writing, two dozens of countries have adopted a National Action Plan (NAP) for the implementation of UNSCR 1325, including all the Nordic countries. Denmark was the first country in the world to create a NAP in 2005, and Sweden, Norway, Iceland and Finland have since followed.<sup>2</sup> The adoption of UNSCR 1325 can be described as a groundbreaking step forward in the field of international conflict resolution and security, and NAPs are important policy tools providing specific guidelines for national governments. However, the implementation of the objectives of UNSCR 1325 is characterized by a tendency similar to promoting gender equality and women's rights in Afghanistan: Political commitment is high, but translating the rhetoric and good intentions into practice is rather slow. Now the international community faces a real challenge of ensuring Afghan women's participation in the forthcoming peace negotiations, and the transition of security responsibilities to the Afghan government within 2014 may also threaten women's newly-gained rights.

The purpose of this report is twofold. Firstly, the aim is to find out how the Nordic countries have integrated the objectives of UNSCR 1325 into their policy and activities regarding Afghanistan. As the aims of UNSCR 1325 has been formulated in rather general terms, and Nordic NAPs do not

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<sup>1</sup> Henceforth, UNSCR 1325.

<sup>2</sup> Kvinna till Kvinna in Sweden has undertaken a comparative study of NAPs in Nordic countries. The study identified following weaknesses: The overall goals and measures to achieve them are not specific enough, there are no allocated budgets for enhancing UNSCR 1325, and follow-up and monitoring mechanisms are generally weak. (Danielsson 2010.)

include specific goals in relation to Afghanistan, I examine how considerations on gender and women's rights are taken into account in the fields of development cooperation, military and crisis management, and by the Nordic NGOs involved in Afghanistan. Secondly, I want to present an overview of the recent<sup>3</sup> Nordic research conducted on gender and Afghanistan. The report cannot be said to cover all the Nordic research on Afghanistan, as the gender perspective was valued as the most important criterion when selecting resources. There seems to be a vast interest in and a great deal of research on Afghanistan, but considerations on gender and UNSCR 1325 are absent in many current writings.

The study is based on a desk-study of policy strategies, evaluations and academic writings provided by relevant Nordic ministries, development agencies and research institutes. During the project I took part in the *Greetings from Afghanistan* seminar organized by The Population and Development Group of Finnish Parliament and The Family Federation of Finland, and had the opportunity to meet eight female Afghan journalists hosted by Women journalists in Finland. No in-depth interviews with actors currently involved in Afghanistan were conducted for this report, but some institutions and researchers were contacted in order to obtain information on the on-going research projects and to locate the expertise in gender issues and Afghanistan in Nordic countries. The study was funded by The Finnish 1325 Network and realized under the guidance of a three-member advisory group including Elina Hatakka (Coordinator for the Finnish 1325 Network), Pirjo Jukarainen (Senior Researcher at Tampere Peace Research Institute) and Marianne Laxén (Chairperson for The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom in Finland).

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<sup>3</sup> The report focuses on material created from the year 2005 onwards.

## THE AFGHAN CONTEXT AND SITUATION OF WOMEN

Many Nordic scholars have expressed the concern that international actors and donors operating in Afghanistan have very little contextual information on the country. The same criticism was echoed at the *Greetings from Afghanistan* seminar by Juhani Koponen, Professor of Development Studies at the University of Helsinki, who saw that there is a need for more critical research on Afghanistan in order to guide the foreign actors and donors with their work and to evaluate the existing programs. According to him the lack of basic information concerns the background of the conflict, daily life in Afghanistan and also gender relations. Without a proper contextual analysis even well-intentioned initiatives and programs to promote gender equality are in danger of failure. As many studies presented in this report provide updated data on the Afghan society and gender relations today (e.g. Bauck et al. 2011; Borchgrevink et al. 2008; Larsson 2009; Mäkinen 2010; Olsson et al. 2009), this chapter is intended to shed light on the current situation of women and the greatest challenges of advancing gender equality in Afghanistan. More detailed information on gender relations and the state of women's rights can be found in *Country Gender Profile* by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) (Larsson 2009).

Larsson (2009, 5) highlights that analyzing the situation in Afghanistan is challenging because of the often unreliable and contradictory data and statistics. Many areas in the country are very difficult to reach, population census is inaccurate, and the collected data might vary depending on who is providing it (Mäkinen 2010, 7). These factors should be kept in mind when looking at gender-related statistics on Afghanistan, which are to be read as indicating tendencies rather than absolute facts. Besides unreliable data, women's conditions vary greatly between different regions in Afghanistan and even between different tribes in the same region. The realities of middle class women in Kabul or in other urban areas and poor women in the rural areas are drastically different. Many of the achievements made during the past years do not reach the majority of women and men in the rural areas or in more conservative provinces. (Larsson 2009, 5-7.)

Historically, disputes about the roles of men and women in the Afghan society are not new. The disagreement over the status of women goes a long way back in the history of the country, and before 2001 Afghanistan had experienced several periods when women had rights, access to the public sphere and mobility far greater than during and also after the Taliban regime (Bauck et al. 2011, 15). According to Larsson (2009, 14-15) the restrictions against women introduced by the Taliban regime were unprecedented in Afghan history. In order to protect women's *namus*<sup>4</sup> they were not allowed to leave home without a male escort (*mehram*) and the education of girls – even at home – was made practically impossible. The constraints placed on women's employment had consequences for boys' education as well as most of the teachers before the Taliban rule were women. For Afghan women working was allowed only in the medical sector where they were needed to examine female patients. (Larsson 2009, 14-15.)

After the Taliban regime was ousted, women regained political representation in the country. The national assembly consists of two houses: The house of People (*Wolesi Jirga*), which is the more powerful house, and the house of Elders (*Meshrano Jirga*). In both houses the female representation

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<sup>4</sup> Probably the closest translation equivalent for *namus* would be 'honor'. The family's honor is understood as the ability of men to protect female family members' honor.

is guaranteed with a quota. In *Wolesi Jirga* at least 68 delegates of 249 (25%) need to be women, in the upper house 17%. Even though the quota system is a powerful instrument, it only guarantees the female presence, not true participation. In the future the government might also allow male representatives to take over the seats that are not filled by female MP's (Mäkinen 2010, 11). According to a development specialist interviewed by Sida's consultants, women in the national assembly can be divided into three groups. The first group consists of token candidates, who are controlled by men; the second of women from the intellectual elite in Kabul; and the third of women who are there for the remuneration. These equally large groups do not usually cooperate with each other, because their interest groups are stronger than their gender identity. However, in 2008 female MP's collectively managed to demand a specific budget line for gender equality. (Larsson 2009, 16.)

Moreover, female MP's need support for their work because they lack access to forums where the decisions concerning important national issues are really made. Both the Afghan and the international community tend to reduce women's political participation to 'women's issues', but women should also get heard on other national issues, such as public finance, counter-narcotics, security, and terrorism. (Borchgrevink et al. 2008, 7-8.) In accordance with the Bonn Agreement in 2001, a new Ministry of Women's Affairs (MoWA) has been established. MoWA does still not enjoy general domestic support and is highly dependent on international donors, such as on UNIFEM<sup>5</sup> (Andresen & Bauck 2009, 19-20). In addition the turnover of personnel is high and the ministry is facing serious difficulties making the line ministries more responsible for promoting gender equality (Larsson 2009, 29). In general, women with powerful positions (e.g. MP's, activists, journalists) are vulnerable to threats and abuse and thus in need for protection.

Afghanistan is divided into 34 provinces, which are governed by provincial councils. The councils do not possess legislative authority, but according to the Afghan law, they should *inter alia* participate actively in the elimination of forced marriages and exchange of women for settlements of disputes (a practice called *baadal*). In the provincial councils there are 420 seats, 124 of them earmarked for women. As indicated above, gender balance in the different provinces varies greatly depending on the ethnic, religious and cultural fabric. The Bayman Province (the main area of Hazaras) at the centre of the country is arguably the most gender-equal one, and the only one having a female governor. At the community level, The National Solidarity Programme (NSP) has introduced Community Development Councils (CDC) with elected representatives. In the NSP there is a minimum baseline for 30% women in CDCs, but in 2007 only nine of 34 provinces met the baseline – even when the elections of CDCs had a relatively high participation of women. (Larsson 2009, 15-18.)

The justice system in Afghanistan consists of secular law, Sharia and local traditions, and is in many respects disadvantageous for women. The new Afghan constitution in 2003 granted equal rights for men and women, but has limitations in terms of both international law and women's rights, as no law shall contravene the holy religion of Islam as it is interpreted in Afghanistan.

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<sup>5</sup> In 2010 a new institution of UN Women was created and the formerly distinct parts of the UN system were merged together, including United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW), International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW) and Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women (OSAGI).

Islamic law is discriminatory against women, especially in terms of family and property matters. The important feature in the Afghan justice system is that it relies on compensatory rather than punitive outcomes, meaning that murders, rapes, thefts etc. are often settled by compensating the victim, and there is also a practice of giving one or several young girls in compensation for crimes committed by family members (*baadal*). (Larsson 2009, 19-21.) The rights guaranteed for women in the constitution have not effectively been translated into practice so far, and many Afghan women activists and the international community consider some newly passed laws to be in contradiction to the Afghan constitution, such as the Shiite Personal Status Law (Bauck et al. 2011, 16.). The law in question regulates marriage, divorce and inheritance for the Shiite population in the country (ca. 6 million people), and prohibits the female members of the community from leaving the house, going to school or employing themselves without a permission of family's men, and restricts women's sexual autonomy (Mäkinen 2010, 39).

The Afghan government has established formalized court systems throughout the country, but the public confidence in formal justice system remains low. At the community level, traditional councils known as *Shuras* and *Jirgas* have had an important role and function in the Afghan society for a respectable time in resolving local political issues and community disputes. *Shuras* and *Jirgas* are usually made up of honorable, elderly men, while women have hardly any say in these institutions. The international community has initiated and supported women's *Shuras*, but women's interests are still represented by an entrusted man at the male *Shura* – usually the only decision-making body at the community level. (Larsson 2009, 17-18.) Organizations such as the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) have criticized some international actors of supporting the informal justice system because it provides no justice for women, and recommend that they should help to strengthen the formal state structures. On the other hand, the issue is not that simple, as the informal system has also its role in the current societal situation. (Lexow et al. 2011, 21-22.)

In general, Afghan women lack access to justice institutions and knowledge about their social, economic and political rights. Trained legal professionals (judges, prosecutors, legal aids etc.), particularly women, are needed but the number of women in legal education continues to be very minimal. The efforts of the international community would be in the right place here, because in the field of justice only little progress has been made. (Borchgrevink et al. 2008, 9-11.) The number of women in the police force has increased slowly over the last few years, but it is still not sufficient. As a consequence, many female victims of abuse do not want to report their experiences. However, some positive achievements within the police force can be mentioned, as the establishment of the Family Response Unit (FRU) in Kabul dealing with violence against women. (Larsson 2009, 20.)

Afghanistan ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) without reservations in 2003, but the national reporting process is stalled. Violence against women such as rape, 'honor killings', early and forced marriage, sexual abuse, and slavery are widespread in Afghanistan. Larsson (2009, 22-23) stresses that while surveys concerning violence against women and girls are too limited to get a reliable picture of the frequency of the phenomenon, there are enough indicators to prove that the problem is serious in the country. Violence occurs mainly within families, the husband being the most common violator, but female family members are also using violence against other women in the family. (Larsson

2009, 22-23.) Ending violence against women means not only changing the formal and informal justice system because violence is commonly tolerated at the family, community and religious leadership level, and the rights guaranteed in the Afghan constitution are far from fulfilled in this respect (Olsson et al. 2009, 28). Self-immolation is reported to be frequent in some parts of the country among women who are suffering from long-lasting violence; it is estimated that several hundreds of women commit suicide in this way every year (Larsson 2009, 23).

The criminal law offers no real protection for rape victims who are often seen to have committed adultery. Rape is very hard to prove, as the victim usually needs four men to provide a witness statement, otherwise she can be accused of false accusation. The majority of female prisoners in Afghanistan are sentenced for adultery-related crimes. In addition, in adultery matters the perpetrators of ‘honor killings’ usually go without a punishment. It should be noted that men and boys fall also frequently victims to rape and abuse, for example warlords are known to hold boys as sexual slaves. (Larsson 2009, 21-24.)

The most promising achievements have been made in the area of basic education. During the last ten years the number of children enrolled in schools has increased from one million to seven million, including around 2,5 million girls. There is a significant number of schools designated for females only, although the number of female students is much lower at secondary and high school level compared to elementary schools. (Bauck et al. 2011, 16-17.) Unfortunately girls’ schools have become a target for political attacks, especially in the southern and eastern provinces in the country. The low level of education and illiteracy pose a major development challenge for Afghanistan. The long distances to schools, the impaired security situation and lack of female teachers are major obstacles to get more girls attending schools, and families also prefer the boys’ education as males stay in the family after marriage and produce income for the family. The enrolment of girls to schools is not only important because of the value of education itself, but also as a means of reducing the likelihood of girls being married off at an early age (Olsson et al. 2009, 93). In Afghanistan a girl is considered to be a woman once she gets married – in the civil law the minimum marrying age is 16, but UNICEF estimates that over 50% marriages involve girls under the age of 16. UNICEF and MoWA also claim that 60 to 80% of all marriages are forced marriages. (Larsson 2009, 43.)

As expressed in the PRIO conference report, “disease kills more Afghans than both terrorism and the Taliban combined” (Borchgrevink et al. 2008, 9). The World Bank estimates that around 40% of all health facilities are missing female personnel, which reduces women’s access to health services. The fertility rate is high across the whole country, ranging from 5 to 8 births per women. The high fertility rate contributes to many development problems, such as a biased population structure, and prevents women from educating and employing themselves. Also infant and maternal mortality rates are among the highest in the world, although the differences between urban and rural areas remain once again huge. For example in the northern Badakhshan province giving birth poses a serious security threat to women, as maternal mortality rate is as high as 6,400 per 100,000 births (Bauck et al. 2011, 14). The use of contraceptives has increased slightly during the last decades, but the majority of deliveries are still carried out at home without trained personnel.

The overall security situation has a negative effect on both men and women, but women are also targeted because of their gender. Hence, the deterioration of the security situation restricts women's movement and their ability to practice professions and engage themselves politically. (Olsson et al. 2009, 27.) Still, the greatest obstacles for women's empowerment are conservative attitudes and practices; this is why creating space for diverse views and education as a tool for changing attitudes are crucial. Warlords, drug lords and insurgent groups are still influential and pose a threat to groups that are open to gender equality. Despite the improvements in the situation of women, women's rights and political participation do not enjoy general support, and gender equality is easily compromised and labeled as a 'Western' concept. (Borchgrevink et al. 2008, 9-10.) However, the cultural relativism or the infected nature of gender issues in Afghanistan should not become an excuse for inaction.

These days it is generally agreed that a military solution will not bring lasting peace to Afghanistan, and negotiations also with the Taliban at some point seem inevitable. Many sources (e.g. Bauck et al. 2011; Olsson et. al 2009; Pykälä 2011) point out to the legitimate fear that the peace process is advanced at the expense of women's rights and the new constitution. This fear was also shared by Afghan female journalists visiting The Finnish 1325 Network in August 2011. In addition they expressed the concern that even when the Afghan women will be represented in the peace negotiations, the government will only send female representatives who are not well-informed of political matters and can easily be made quiet. For example, in 2010 at the Consultative Peace Jirga women gained 20% representation only after hard lobbying, and just one woman was allowed to speak at the Jirga. At the High Peace Council (HPC) 10 of the 70 members are women, but their role is uncertain. Another crucial body in the peace process, the Provincial Peace and Reconciliation Councils, have no female representation at all. (Bauck et al. 2011, 18.)

## DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION AND HUMANITARIAN AID

Afghanistan is one of the most impoverished countries in the world and highly dependent on international aid and trade with the neighboring countries. The planned transition of security responsibilities to Afghan authorities within 2014 will not change the fact that the country will be needing foreign aid and assistance long after the soldiers of ISAF have left Afghanistan. Due to the volatile situation in the country, working for women's rights is extremely challenging, and security and military priorities affect development work at the expense of the sustainability and human rights perspective (Bauck et al. 2011, 6). However, Nordic countries are considered fairly likeminded in regard to the priority of women's rights and gender equality, and all of them have included promoting women's rights in their development strategies for Afghanistan (Bauck et al. 2011, 21). This chapter focuses on development cooperation, humanitarian aid and support for international organizations and trust funds provided by Nordic countries. The work of the Nordic NGOs currently present in Afghanistan and the support for Afghan NGOs is described in a separate chapter below.

The Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (Norad) has conducted a study to identify the differences and similarities in the development strategies of the Nordic countries for Afghanistan in order to look for possibilities of more concerted cooperation in the forthcoming years (Bauck & Strand 2009). The study gives a good overview of the development cooperation and funding provided by all the five Nordic countries, and includes compact country profiles for both development and humanitarian assistance. When it comes to the division of responsibilities for development and humanitarian assistance, there are some differences between Nordic countries. For example, in Sweden Sida executes full authority over decisions for development assistance. Denmark and Norway have delegated a strong decision making authority to their embassies in Kabul, while Finland and Sweden have allocated funding to their embassies to realize independent projects. All the Nordic countries stress the need for a geographical distribution of assistance, at the same time supporting the areas of their military presence (see next chapter). (Bauck & Strand 2009, 5-6.)

In the interviews conducted for Norad's study, Afghan ministers expressed their concern about focusing the assistance on the provinces of the Nordic military presence and hope for a stronger national and regional focus (Bauck & Strand 2009, 14). This is a very important point, as favoring some provinces in development and reconstruction work can lead to inequality between different areas in the country where regional differences are high to begin with. At the *Greetings from Afghanistan* seminar Minna Sirnö, a former MP of the Finnish parliament, pointed out that the international assistance concentrates too often on the urban areas and trouble spots, not the regions of Afghanistan that are free from conflict.

Another recent and interesting study with a stronger focus on gender issues in the Nordic development cooperation is the *Gender Review Report* jointly undertaken by Norad and Sida (Bauck et al. 2011). In the framework of the project the development portfolios of Norwegian and Swedish embassies were reviewed, and the research team also organized two learning seminars for the staff of Nordic embassies in Kabul with the topics of gender policy framework and gender mainstreaming. As Nordic countries are strongly channeling funds through the Afghan

Reconstruction Trust Fund (ARTF)<sup>6</sup>, holding the World Bank accountable for its gender commitments should be high on the Nordic agenda. In regard to policy dialogue, Nordic countries have raised gender issues in some high-level coordination arenas, such as the Joint Coordination and Monitoring Board (JCBM), the governing body with strategic coordination around the Afghanistan National Development Strategy (ANDS). However in the view of the review team the messages could still be strengthened. (Bauck et al. 2011, 7-9.)

Bauck et al. (2011, 7-9) note that especially the Norwegian and Swedish embassies seem to have a high level of development funds that have gender as a principal or significant objective. Still all Nordic donors face the challenge of ensuring that resources are equitably distributed between men and women in all development programs. More efforts should also be devoted to the planning, monitoring and reporting of different programs. In general terms the entire donor community in Afghanistan tends to favor quantitative results in development programs and not to “look into the qualitative dimensions behind the figures” (Bauck et al. 2011, 24).

Since 2009, the Nordic Embassies in Kabul have been developing a joint initiative for promoting women’s rights and gender equality (Bauck et al. 2011, 7). The *Joint Nordic Gender Action Initiative* forms a good foundation for more concerted efforts, and jointly the Nordic countries have a stronger voice. Bauck et al. (2011, 31) also confirm that many donors especially in Kabul see the Nordic countries as leaders in addressing gender issues. The latest version of the Gender Action Initiative defines four thematic areas where targeted activities should be prioritized: 1) women’s political empowerment, 2) women’s economic empowerment, 3) sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), and 4) women and security with a special emphasis on UNSCR 1325 and 1820, and gender based violence. The review team of Sida and Norad recommends that Nordic countries develop a concrete and measurable action plan and a joint reporting system for following up the progress of the initiative (Bauck et al. 2011, 9-11). Following up the progress of the Gender Action Initiative should be of interest to all the Nordic actors involved in the work for enhancing the implementation of UNSCR 1325, including not only governmental agencies, but also Nordic NGOs and research networks.

## DENMARK

The development budget of Denmark for the strategic period of 2009-2012 is 400 million DKK (ca. 53,93 million €) per year. In addition, Denmark provides separate funding for humanitarian aid and Danish NGOs in Afghanistan, which is independent of the development budget. (Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs & Ministry of Defence 2008, 1-2.) The Danish Embassy in Kabul executes the main decision making authority over development and humanitarian assistance. Information of the detailed development budget for programs with gender objectives was not obtained for this report, but the main receivers of Danish assistance are mentioned below.

Denmark contributes support for **The Elimination of Violence Against Women Trust Fund**, established in 2007. The fund offers grants to national NGOs and their projects for reducing violence against women and girls in Afghanistan and supports among other things women’s shelters. Denmark also held a joint seat with Norway in the EVAW Trust Fund until the end of

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<sup>6</sup> By September 2008 Nordic countries had provided 10,5% of ARTF’s total budget (Bauck & Strand 2009, 5).

2008 (Bauck & Strand 2009, 7.) Another supported program related to gender-based violence is the **CEDAW project** implemented by **UN Women**. The aim of the project is to assist the Afghan government to prepare its first report to the CEDAW and to create capacities for reporting to international human rights treaties in general (Bauck et al. 2011, 35). Denmark has also supported the micro-credit program, **MISFA (Microfinance Investment Support Facility in Afghanistan)** that has awarded more than 400,000 loans, 70% of the receivers being women (Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs & Ministry of Defence 2008, 8). In addition, Denmark is referred to as “the lead agency in regard to all donor support of **AIHRC**” (Bauck & Strand 2009, 7.)

## **FINLAND**

The Finnish development engagement totalled 19 million € in 2010, including civilian crisis management (EUPOL Afghanistan) and humanitarian aid. For the period of 2011-2014 the annual budget is approximately 20 million €.

Finland is funding **Marie Stopes International**, an organization working for the reduction of maternal and infant mortality in Afghanistan. The organization is the one of the key actors in the area of reproductive health, and offers services such as family planning, sterilization, vaccinations and laboratory tests. Marie Stopes International intends to involve men in their projects and works closely with religious leaders – the organization has been permitted to perform abortions in cases of emergencies. The organization helps around 200 000 Afghans yearly. (Mäkinen 2010, 54-55.) In 2010-2011 Finland supported the organization with 400 000 € per year, for the period 2012-2014 the allocated budget is 500 000 € annually. **UNIFEM**'s (now **UN Women**) Livelihood Development for Self-Employment and Job Creation project was supported with 170 000 € annually for the years 2009-2011. Finnish funding for **AIHRC** will be 400 000 € annually for the period 2011-2014.

The Embassy of Finland in Kabul has an annual budget of approximately 500 000 € to support small-scale development projects, and roughly one third of these funds are spent on projects aiming at improvements in the conditions of women and children. The Embassy has supported e.g. women's shelters and projects to help street children. (Finnish Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2011, 17.) Nordic countries have a joint seat in the JCBM (the governing body of the Afghanistan National Development Strategy, ANDS), and the Finnish Embassy has raised UNSCR 1325 as an issue at the one of JCBM's standing committees (Bauck et al. 2011, 20). In June 2011 Afghanistan and Finland signed an agreement on cooperation in implementing UNSCR 1325 and other UN resolutions concerning women, peace and security. The cooperation aims at developing a National Action Plan on UNSCR 1325 for Afghanistan, and the key partner on the Afghan side will be the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.<sup>7</sup>

## **ICELAND**

Iceland provides the smallest financial contribution among Nordic donors, the budget for development assistance being 294 million ISK (ca. 3,36 million €) in 2007, 217 million ISK (ca. 1,7 million €) in 2008 and 130 million ISK (ca. 480 000 €) in 2009. **UN Women** has been one of the

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<sup>7</sup> See “Finland increases input on behalf of equality in Afghanistan” at the website of Embassy of Finland, [www.finland.org.af](http://www.finland.org.af) (accessed on 2.9.2011).

main receivers of Icelandic funding. The development projects supported by Iceland have included seminars for midwives and birth attendants, support for legal aid and assistance for persons who are jailed or accused, and an NGO project that aims at developing childcare for orphans and fatherless children. (Bauck & Strand 2009, 9.)

In 2001, the Icelandic Crisis Response Unit (ICRU) was established as part of the country's official development assistance policy. ICRU is involved in peacebuilding and reconstruction in Afghanistan, and according to the Embassy of Afghanistan in Oslo there are currently 15 ICRU staff members deployed in the country.<sup>8</sup> Björnsdóttir and Loftsdóttir (2010), two Icelandic researchers in the field of anthropology, have focused on Icelandic development assistance policy and the establishment of ICRU in their recent article, and offer an interesting view on the current debate on international development.

Björnsdóttir and Loftsdóttir (2010, 28-32) claim that there is a shift in the Icelandic development policy towards peacekeeping, thus towards militarized projects, which they interpret as a more current trend in international development assistance. In their view the international landscape of development has changed in a way that a stronger emphasis on security is added to the discussion on development, and peacekeeping (combining both civilian and military agencies) is legitimized as an important contribution to development. This has led not only to the merging of peacekeeping and humanitarian aid, but also to the justification of military invasions. Moreover, the new discourse of development that is tied to security refers explicitly to women but often constructs them as in need of protection and reproduce ethnocentric notions of 'other' women as victims – for example, the liberation of women has been used to legitimize the military operation in Afghanistan.

According to Björnsdóttir and Loftsdóttir (2010) ICRU's assignment has been controversial in Iceland because of its military character, as the country has always been proud of having no army of its own, although it is a member of NATO. When ICRU was established, especially women were encouraged to apply for positions in it. However, the authors claim that ICRU is lacking an official gender mainstreaming policy and state that "government policy on ICRU's tasks has up till now placed huge emphasis on assignments that require professional skills and training that women generally do not have – such as trained police, air traffic controller, engineers, paramedics etc." (Björnsdóttir and Loftsdóttir 2010, 30).

ICRU receives a significant part of the total Icelandic budget devoted to development. Icelandic feminists in particular have criticized the involvement of ICRU in military assignments, which makes the unit a masculine space. The authors claim that the unit's appearance was deliberately "softened up" by shifting the focus from military oriented projects to civilian assignments which women could take part in, e.g. two health workers were sent to Afghanistan to teach local women the basics in midwifery and healthcare, while Iceland earlier contributed to the ISAF's observation team. The authors speculate whether the changes in ICRU's character are aimed to prevent criticism concerning the unit's militarized appearance, where adding women and the discourse of 'saving women' serve as a better image for the unit. They conclude that peace and security surely are necessary for development, but militarized actions change the whole ideological dimension of development. Indeed, the fact that development assistance is a political matter is often forgotten – in

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<sup>8</sup> See [www.afghanistanembassy.no/the-nordic-countries/iceland](http://www.afghanistanembassy.no/the-nordic-countries/iceland) (accessed on 2.9.2011).

this regard more self-reflexivity is needed also in the Nordic countries. (Björnsdóttir and Loftsdóttir 2010, 30-34.)

## **NORWAY**

Of all the Nordic countries, Norway contributes the largest financial support for development work in Afghanistan. The development budget was doubled in 2008 to 750 million NOK (ca. 94,1 million €) in total, and the annual amount is expected to be similar for the years 2009-2012. The budget for additional humanitarian assistance reached 309 million NOK (ca. 38,79 million €) in 2008, but was decreased as the development spending correspondingly increased. (Bauck & Strand 2009, 10; 28)

Norway is the main Nordic donor for the different programs of **UN Women**.<sup>9</sup> Norway also supports the **CEDAW project** of UN Women, which was mentioned above in the context of Denmark. It should be noted that UN Women is currently challenged by the strict United Nations security measures and the internal restructuring process, which seem to limit also the strategic discussions between the Nordic embassies and UN Women. The review team of Norad and Sida refer to the difficulties the organization is having with providing adequate reports and requests for further funds. Despite these problems, fruitful cooperation between the Embassy and UN Women has taken place in regard to the London Conference in January 2010. (Bauck et. al 2011, 8.) Moreover, good knowledge of the challenges facing the Afghan women today and contacts with relevant stakeholders and partners in tackling gender issues are considered to be strengths of the organization (Andresen and Bauck 2009, 5-6).<sup>10</sup> Like Denmark, Norway contributes to the **EVAW Trust Fund** and **AIHCR**.

Among the Nordic countries Norway has the largest embassy in Kabul in terms of number of diplomatic staff, meaning that Norway possesses probably the best capacities for taking on coordination and support responsibilities on behalf of the other Nordic countries (Bauck & Strand 2009, 10). The Norwegian embassy has created gender focal points, but promoting gender equality is only a part of their job description. Hence, more emphasis should be put on institutionalizing gender focal points, and reporting on gender issues should be demanded more strongly from the partners. (Bauck et al. 2011, 7).

There are also some academic research projects that are worth mentioning here. The Norwegian Peacebuilding Center (Noref) has financed a qualitative mapping study of the Norwegian capacities to combat sexualized and gender-based violence (SGBV) in war and conflict situations, including an up-to-date list of relevant Norwegian actors and agencies in the field (Solhjell 2010). Solhjell (2010, 12) notes that in Norway a vast knowledge and experience in regard to fighting against SGBV is available, but this should be more efficiently put to use. Chr. Michelsen Institute in Bergen is currently running two large projects on gender in Afghanistan, including one PhD project on gender-based violence in Afghanistan and a project on gender and political representation at the local level. The latter project involves an Afghan PhD student and an Afghan research organization.

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<sup>9</sup> The four programs include: 1) The strengthening of the Afghan government's capacity to implement its gender commitments, including NAPWA, 2) Women as peacebuilders, 3) Elimination of violence against women, and 4) Strengthening of women's livelihood opportunities.

<sup>10</sup> For more information of UN Women's work in Afghanistan and cooperation with Nordic countries, see the assessment undertaken by Norad, *Assesment of Unifem Afghanistan* (Andresen & Bauck 2009).

Both projects are expected to generate publications over the next few years. A group of Norwegian researchers forms a 1325 research network, which is coordinated by Torunn Tryggestad at PRIO.

## **SWEDEN**

In 2009 Sweden contributed 450 million SEK (ca. 40,81 million €) to development assistance, including support for Swedish NGOs. Additional 130 million SEK (ca. 11,79 million €) was spent on humanitarian operations and 200 million SEK (ca. 18,14 million €) on aid to multilateral organizations (Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2010, 3). For the strategic period of 2011-2013 the development budget will be gradually increased to 500 million SEK per year (ca. 55,9 million €) (Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2009). All decisions concerning development projects are made by Sida, with the exception of the special fund allocated to northern Afghanistan where Swedish ISAF-troops are located (Bauck & Strand 2009, 12).

Sweden supports **UN Women**, the **EVAW Trust Fund** and **AIHRC**. Swedish funds are also allocated to **UNICEF**'s Basic Education and Gender Equality programs. The goals that UNICEF is striving for are that 1,8 million girls will have opportunity for education and literacy rate among women aged 15-49 years will be improved. (Bauck et al. 2011, 35.) Currently Sweden is funding **Marie Stopes International**, but during the writing of this report mixed information was gained on whether Sweden will continue its support for the organization.

In regard to the gender focal points designated by the Swedish embassy, partly the same criticism applies as in the case of Norway; a clearer mandate for focal points would make their work more efficient (Bauck et al. 2011, 23).

## MILITARY AND CIVILIAN CRISIS MANAGEMENT

The UN-mandated ISAF was created following the Bonn Conference in December 2001, after the Taliban regime was removed from power. ISAF is not an UN force but a coalition of the willing with a peace-enforcement mandate under the chapter VII of the UN Charter. At the time of writing, the total strength of ISAF is 132,457 troops from 48 countries. ISAF's tasks include assisting the Afghan government in extending its authority and influence across the country and creating secure and stable conditions for reconstruction and development work and effective governance. Today ISAF covers the whole territory of the country and has 28 Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs). PRTs usually combine military and civilian personnel in their work and are intended to provide security, to strengthen governmental structures, and to contribute to development and reconstruction. The civilian components are leading the political, economic and humanitarian work done by PRTs. (Olsson et al. 2009, 28-30.)

All the Nordic countries are providing military (and to a much lesser extent also civilian) staff to the ISAF, the biggest contributor being Denmark with 750 soldiers. Norway has currently around 400 troops in the northwestern Faryab province and PRT Meymaneh under its command. Swedish PRT Mazar-e Sharif covers the area of northern provinces Balkh, Jowzjan, Samangan and Sar-e Pol and has approximately 500 Swedish and 150 Finnish troops.<sup>11</sup> The level of security in the north of Afghanistan is relatively good, which cannot be said of the southern province of Helmand where the Danish troops are located. Due to the unstable security situation in the south, more than 40 Danish soldiers have lost their lives in Afghanistan. Compared to the Nordic spending on development and humanitarian assistance, military activities demand far greater budgets. To provide an illustrative example, the costs of military presence for Sweden reached almost 1,5 billion SEK (ca. 136,05 million €) in 2009 while the total development and humanitarian support amounted to 750 million SEK (ca. 68 million €) (Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2010, 3).

International military operations and the Nordic involvement in them have received a lot of scholarly attention in the Nordic research on international politics and gender in the last ten years. Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden supported an extensive study of the integration of UNSCR 1325 in ISAF and its five PRTs, which was conducted with the input of several Nordic gender experts (Olsson et al. 2009).<sup>12</sup> NATO's BI-Sc Directive recognizes UNSCR 1325 as an integral part of its military operations and states that gender should be a cross-cutting issue in the organization, not just a separate matter. Still NATO's ability to integrate UNSCR 1325 into its work has been regarded as limited, and one aim of the study was to identify best practices and lessons learned in the Afghan context in order to assist future NATO operations. The value of the study remains in policy-relevant applications, and empirical examples of day-to-day work in the ISAF. The research material was collected through field work in five PRTs in Afghanistan,<sup>13</sup> and Afghan women also were interviewed by the research team. According to the study, the level of the integration of UNSCR 1325 as well as circumstances and the level of security varied greatly between different

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<sup>11</sup> <http://www.isaf.nato.int/troop-numbers-and-contributions/index.php> (accessed 3.8.2011).

<sup>12</sup> The study was also supported by the Netherlands, Italy and New Zealand.

<sup>13</sup> PRT Tarin Kowt (the Netherlands), PRT Heart (Italy), PRT Bamyán (New Zealand), PRT Meymaneh (Norway) and PRT Mazar-e Sharif (Sweden). For the purposes of this report, emphasis is put on the case-studies in PRTs where Finnish, Norwegian and Swedish troops operate.

PRTs. At the ISAF Head Quarters in Kabul, which has PRTs under its operational command, gender awareness and understanding of UNSCR 1325 were found to be quite low. The authors stress that the engagement of operation leadership and the establishment of expert functions, such as gender advisers and gender focal points, play a crucial role in the successful integration of UNSCR 1325. (Olsson et al. 2009, 22-32.)

EUPOL Afghanistan is the police mission of European Union, headed by Finnish Brigadier General Jukka Savolainen. EUPOL contributes *inter alia* to the training of Afghan police forces and prosecutors, and gender mainstreaming and human rights perspective are recognized as strategic objectives to achieve the mission's goals. The current mandate runs until 31 May 2013. In June 2011 the strength of the mission was 175 local staff members and 300 persons from EU member states and Norway, Canada, Croatia and New Zealand, including gender and human rights experts. Women accounted for 14 % of EUPOL's personnel in 2010 (Pykälä 2011, 19).

## **DENMARK**

Denmark supported the research project *Operational Effectiveness and UN Resolution 1325 – Practices and Lessons from Afghanistan* (Olsson et al. 2009), but the study did not include the PRT area with Danish military presence, assumingly because of the dangerous circumstances in Helmand. The Danish Institute for International Studies (DIIS) has apparently produced several recent publications on Afghanistan, with civil-military cooperation as one of the main topics, but considerations on gender or UNSCR 1325 were generally absent in the current research. According to the latest annual report on the implementation of UNSCR 1325 Danish troops have had positive experiences with deploying female soldiers in Afghanistan in regard to the operational effectiveness, especially in obtaining intelligence. (Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2011, 2).

Denmark plans a more withdrawn military role for the forthcoming years, and will increase the police training efforts at the same time (Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2008, 1). The National Danish Police has deployed female police trainers to the Regional Training Center in the city of Lashkar Gah in Helmand. The intention is to establish training for female Afghan police officers, and a pilot project for police training for 5-7 female police officers in Gereshk has also been planned. (Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2011, 4.)

## **FINLAND**

Finnish troops operate under Swedish command in PRT Mazar-e Sharif, and the PRT was included in the study by Olsson et al. (2009). However, the study focuses on Swedish military staff and does not reveal how effective Finland has been in implementing UNSCR 1325 in its military efforts in Afghanistan. It should be noted however, that in past years crisis management and the UNSCR 1325 have motivated a lot of research activity in Finland, e.g. at the Tampere Peace Research Institute (TAPRI) and University of Helsinki. The Crisis Management Center (CMC Finland) is responsible for the gender training of civilian personnel in international missions, and has also contributed to the research on UNSCR 1325. Finland has seconded a gender and human rights adviser to the Rule of Law Department of EUPOL.

In the light of recent studies, Finland still has a long way ahead in implementing UNSCR 1325 effectively in crisis management. For example, increasing the female participation in international missions forms one of the official goals in the Finnish NAP for UNSCR 1325, but Pykälä (2011, 19) points out that in 2010 there were only four Finnish female soldiers in Afghanistan, while Sweden had deployed 50 women. In interviews with the Finnish crisis management personnel, Terävä (2011, 27-39) observed that Sweden was perceived as an exemplary actor in regard to the activities on UNSCR 1325 in both military and civilian crisis management. Particularly the training on gender issues by Sweden was considered progressive, and Finland has cooperated with Sweden in this area.

## **NORWAY**

According to Olsson et al. (2009, 92-96) the Norwegian PRT had not effectively included UNSCR 1325 in its work. The PRT's mandate and activities were understood as gender-neutral, which in reality meant that they mostly involved men and did not consider the different security situations of men and women. For example, meetings with local partners and authorities arranged by PRT usually did not include women, because they were not specifically invited. Active requests for female participation are important to strengthen women's position at the provincial level. The research team underlines that none of the work to promote women's rights was seen to contribute to the supporting of the Afghan government's policy, but rather as advancing an independent agenda against the Afghan policy and traditions. The PRT personnel did not seem to be aware of the commitments that had been made to promote women's rights in terms of the new Afghan constitution or the signing of international conventions such as the CEDAW. At the time of the fieldwork, the Norwegian PRT had not introduced either gender advisers or gender focal points functions, but a gender adviser had already been trained and was expected to join the PRT in May 2009. (Olsson et al. 2009, 92-96.)

The Norwegian PRT model was characterized by a strict distinction of the tasks between military and civilian spheres. The military staff rotates every six months, but civilian advisers stay at least a year in their positions. One civilian adviser was criticizing the military element of favoring quick impact projects in order to 'win hearts and minds' with the host population; in her view development cooperation is long-term work, and the military should adapt to a slower pace. The female representation in the PRT Meymaneh remained at 7 % (28 women), but there were no women at the leadership level. Attitudes towards female soldiers could be described as positive in general both in the PRT and among the host population, and female soldiers were seen to facilitate contacts with Afghan society – not just with women, but also with men living in the area. Still many units like Military Observation Teams (MOT) consisted only of men, but this was not seen as a weakness as local women were perceived only to possess "humanitarian information", not knowledge of the security situation and possible attacks. (Olsson et al. 2009, 86-89.)

The male personnel in the PRT were also worried that they would create problems for local women if they interacted with them. However, when talking to the local women, the research team found that they were in fact willing to contact with the PRT staff and inform them of the situation in the area. They also welcomed more female soldiers, but suggested that military women should wear scarfs when in the field as it is sometimes difficult for the women to identify them. Only two female

interpreters worked for the PRT, which limits contacts with Afghan women considerably. The fact that the military staff operating in the field have to encounter violence against women (e.g. spousal or child abuse) was being discussed within some units of the PRT. They came to the conclusion that the physical intervention in the cases of violence is out of their mandate, but by stopping and watching they can at least show that they are aware of the situation. (Olsson et al. 2009, 89-94.)

The UNSCR 1820, with the goal of ending conflict-related sexual and gender based violence (SGBV), has further strengthened ‘the protection element’ of international police and peacekeeping operations. However, it seems still unclear how armed forces in international missions can prevent or respond to SGBV; it is also problematic that SGBV might be seen as a private matter, e.g. as domestic violence. Solhjell (2010, 4) notes that the police sector possesses a long-term potential to address the problem of SGBV also after the actual war. However, in her opinion ‘gender approach’ in peacekeeping operations is too often understood as simply increasing the number of women in the army and police instead of identifying the security threats for the population in the (post-)conflict area. As already stressed above in this report, more comprehensive and context-sensitive approaches are needed also in regard to SGBV in order to understand the problem of violence in a specific society. For example, to address the violence against women in Afghanistan, it is crucial to understand *why* targeting women is important for the Taliban (Olsson et al. 2009). According to Solhjell, context-sensitivity is often emphasized in policy documents, but in reality seldom applied. This does not mean cultural relativism towards SGBV, but among other things understanding which systems of justice work best in a given context. (Solhjell 2010, 8-11.)

Solhjell continues that the research conducted on SGBV is incomplete and unsystematic, and currently limited to a few cases where SGBV has been a massive or visible part of war strategy. Also the perpetrators of violence in war and conflict situations remain understudied. More attention should be paid to men in research, treatment, policy and empowerment projects, and they should be encouraged to get involved in the fight against SGBV. The focus on men’s disempowerment and alienation from society plays an essential role when fighting against SGBV. In post-conflict settings one concrete way is to build up networks for young men and boys (e.g. educational, musical and religious groups or community houses), to constitute a safety net and help the normalization of the daily life. Moreover, gender stereotypes constructing men as inherently violent and SGBV as a ‘women’s issue’ should be avoided. (Solhjell 2010, 6-8.)

## **SWEDEN**

The Swedish Armed Forces have worked to raise awareness and increase competence concerning working with UNSCR 1325 and to make use of its content when defining operational tasks. In the Swedish PRT in Mazar-e Sharif the knowledge of UNSCR 1325 was relatively high among the personnel, and they had received pre-deployment training of UNSCR 1325 and 1820. The training also included issues such as interacting with men and women in Afghanistan. The Commander and the Chief of Staff were supportive of the UNSCR 1325, and the PRT has established a network for reaching local women and women’s organizations. This project was started by the Commander informing the Afghan governors of their plans, and it was relatively well received by the Afghan authorities. The study also identified some examples of active support to women in public positions, e.g. contacts with the female members at the Provincial Council. In addition the PRT was protecting

a woman who was a head of a local human rights organization, because she and her family were threatened. (Olsson et al. 2009, 98-102.)

Women constituted 10% of the staff in the PRT, but the units with the most direct contacts to the Afghan society were almost entirely male. At the leadership level there was a strong commitment to prevent sexual harassment within the PRT's personnel. In order not to lose competent personnel, creating a good working environment is essential; as a survey conducted by the Swedish Armed Forces has shown, the problems in the working atmosphere affect particularly women and they are more likely to leave their jobs due to these kinds of problems than men. In PRT Mazar-e Sharif a network for female soldiers was also available, and the PRT was making a good use of both a gender field adviser and gender focal points. (Olsson et al. 2009, 100-102.)

As in the Norwegian PRT, the lack of female soldiers and interpreters restricted interactions with Afghan women – women not being a part of official structures are usually not able to approach male soldiers. The military teams followed a principle of letting the local women approach soldiers on their own initiative. A local female interpreter was employed to assist the gender field adviser, with a careful selection of candidates at the local university and the Commander asking for permission for the assignment from the women's family. (Olsson et al. 2009, 107-110.) Security considerations are essential when hiring local staff; the publication of Genderforce (2007, 34) illustrates an example where the Swedish forces employed a female interpreter and could not help her when she got harassed by her male colleague and needed to leave her job. Later in Sweden the MOT members who had formerly worked with the interpreter found out that she was murdered.

Apart from a few positive examples, more gender analysis would have been needed to guide the operational planning, and some units in the Swedish PRT expressed a wish to include a gender field adviser also in the operational planning in order to prevent any unintended effects of operations. For example, operations such as arrests of suspected insurgents and house searches require gender considerations: How to ensure the security of women in the household if the family head is arrested? How to address women and their personal belongings with respect during house searches, while ensuring that all possible hidden weapons are found? In addition, the research team recommends collecting sex-disaggregated data, such as identifying men's and women's patterns of mobility, division of labor, political standing, access to services and risks of being targeted by violence. (Olsson et al. 2009, 109.)

Genderforce (2007) – a joint project of the Swedish Armed Forces, the National Rescue Services Agency, the Swedish Police Service, the Swedish Women's Voluntary Defence Service, the Association of Military Officers in Sweden and the Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation – created a publication presenting lessons learned on working with the UNSCR 1325 in international missions. Sixteen Swedish persons with working background in international civilian or military operations were interviewed for the publication. Three of the interviewees had served in the ISAF-operation in Afghanistan, including one female soldier, the former leader of the Swedish contingent in Mazar-e Sharif and a training officer for the Swedish Civil-Military Cooperation Team<sup>14</sup> in Kabul. The

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<sup>14</sup> The Civil-Military Cooperation Team is intended to liaise between civilian organizations and the military; the team gathers information in the mission area and usually has more contacts to local population than other military units.

publication is primarily aimed at people who will take part in international assignments, and due to its practical value and discussion parts it can be used as training material.

The overall finding is that raising gender awareness is not only needed when training and working with the local authorities and individuals in post-conflict areas, but also in international missions. The personnel of international operations bring their personal and cultural attitudes with them, and according to Genderforce (2007) a strict code of conduct is needed, because sometimes it is easier to demand the following of rules than change individual attitudes. The international personnel have to be sensitive with their actions because inappropriate behavior only contributes to a bad reputation – for example, the female soldiers wearing bikinis in the Swedish camp in Afghanistan produced rumors of the Swedes having prostitutes at their barracks (Genderforce 2007, 38). The participation of women in policing and military operations is also highly advocated, because without female staff only half of the local population in the mission area can be reached – particularly in strongly gender-segregated societies, Afghanistan as a common example. Although Afghan women are quite invisible in the public, they have a great influence in raising the next generation. This is why their voices and visions of the future are needed for the long-term peace efforts.

The publication of Genderforce (2007, 33-34) shares the experiences of a female soldier who was taking part in the pilot project of the Swedish PRT in Afghanistan; in 2006 a female Military Observer Team (MOT Juliet) was set up as a part of the PRT. The tasks of this three-person team were contacting Afghan women, building up women's networks, monitoring the security situation and strengthening women's security in the area. A former member of MOT Juliet describes that finding contacts and winning the trust of local women was very time-consuming, because the local women found the military slightly intimidating, although they were very curious as well. However, Afghan women provided important information about women's situation and human rights in general, which was passed on to different information channels. The most concrete part of the work of MOT Juliet was visiting women's prisons and identifying all of the prisoners and asking them about their sentences and conditions in the prison. The conditions of prisons in general are poor in Afghanistan; torture, over-crowdedness and the lack of separate facilities for women have been reported (Larsson 2009).

MOT Juliet also patrolled in the area where a threatened female leader of a human rights organization lived, providing security for her. The interviewed Swedish female soldier sees that it is important to make women visible, e.g. just to drive around and show their presence. The 'bad example part' of this pilot project was that MOT Juliet's work was not continued in the same form after its three members left the mission, although new Swedish female soldiers took part in ISAF. The resources of the team were already low to begin with, because while a normal MOT had six members, MOT Juliet had only three and they also should have covered larger area. (Genderforce 2007, 33-34.) On the other hand, Olsson et al. (2009, 112) confirm that the Swedish PRT also had very positive experiences with mixed MOTs because both men and women could be addressed, which contributed to receiving multifaceted information. However, women should also be spoken to separately, because they often talk about different issues when men are present. Swedish CIMIC training officer Görgen Karlehav stresses source protection; all the information gained from the host population should be treated with care and the informants should not be put in any danger. He also mentions the international staff witnessing violence against women. When soldiers face or hear

about such situations, and taking action is not included in their mandate, they should at least convey the information to other actors who are authorized to address the matter. (Genderforce 2007, 37-38.)

## **NORDIC NGOS IN AFGHANISTAN AND SUPPORT FOR WOMEN'S ORGANIZATIONS**

Currently there are over 1 500 non-governmental organizations in Afghanistan, 300 of them (being) of foreign origin.<sup>15</sup> Compared to military activities the work of NGOs receives usually much less attention, but in a country where the state structures are weak, NGOs play an essential role in promoting peace and doing reconstruction work. There are huge differences in regard to the size, scope of activities and available resources between organizations active in Afghanistan, but NGOs are mainly funded by international donors, as fund-raising at the local level occurs rarely. The word of successful NGOs spreads fast among international donors, occasionally leading to a situation where an organization of a good reputation grows too fast. Hence, it could be said that sometimes less is more in terms of small-scale development programs. The common challenges NGOs face in Afghanistan include the local bureaucracy (e.g. Afghans working for foreign NGOs need working permits), corruption, security threats, and removing the projects' dependency on external aid and guaranteeing the Afghan ownership and continuity. (Pykälä 2011, 6-8.)

The engagement of Nordic NGOs in Afghanistan has a long history, as some organizations have been operating in the country for more than thirty years. Denmark, Norway and Sweden have an active civic involvement through their national Afghanistan committees, and also support many NGOs of national or Afghan origin. Currently there are eight Finnish NGOs in Afghanistan, and Finland and Iceland also provide support for other NGOs, some of which are of Nordic origin. The aim of this report is not to evaluate the work of Nordic NGOs, but to produce an overview of what kind of gender-related projects the Nordic NGOs have in Afghanistan and which Afghan women's organizations are supported by Nordic countries. Bauck et al. (2011, 8) note that several NGOs are pursuing very interesting and innovative gender strategies, but because the donor community does not usually require this kind of information in reporting, these strategies often remain unknown.

Working for and with Afghan women at the grass-roots level requires female staff members also in NGOs operating in Afghanistan. Employing local women may be challenging, however not impossible. (Bauck et al. 2011, 30.) In some Nordic organizations there seems to exist awareness of UNSCR 1325, and emphasis on women is present in the strategies of the most of the organizations. However, due to the lack of resources and available material, it is somewhat difficult to evaluate how well gender and UNSCR 1325 are mainstreamed in the work of Nordic NGOs. There seem to be a need for more critical and in-depth evaluations of the activities of NGO, especially with regard to organizations that have a long-term presence in the country.

### **DENMARK**

In 2010 Danish NGOs received a total of 44 million DKK (ca. 5,9 million €) for their work in Afghanistan. The largest Danish actors include the Danish Afghanistan Committee (DAC), the Danish Committee for Aid to Afghan Refugees (DACAAR), the Danish Assistance to Afghan Rehabilitation and Technical Training (DAARTT), the Danish Demining Group (DDG) and Mission East. Due to the lack of security in the Helmand province, the Danish NGOs operate

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<sup>15</sup> To see a listing of NGOs and international humanitarian organizations operating in Afghanistan, please refer to e.g. <http://afghanistan-analyst.org/ngo.aspx> (accessed 1.9.2011).

mostly in the more stable parts of the country. (Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs & Ministry of Defence 2011, 83-86.)

Among other projects, the DAC has contributed to the efforts of reducing maternal mortality, and according to the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the work has borne fruit in the Herat province where more women attend birth preparations now. DACAAR works mainly in two areas: water and sanitation, and rural development. The organization created a Gender Policy and Gender Action Plan in 2009 and recruited a gender advisor to strengthen the gender focus. Since 2005, DACAAR has been establishing Women's Resource Centers (WRC) that offer literacy courses and training in business planning and social organization for women. The WRCs create a safe environment for rural women to meet each other. So far there are 23 WRCs in the Herat, Faryab, Parwan and Laghman provinces. DACAAR works extensively with the relevant actors at the local level in order to create acceptance for the centers. (Bauck et al. 2011, 29.)<sup>16</sup>

Since 2007 Denmark has supported the Da Qanoon Ghustonky, an Afghan NGO that trains defence lawyers across the country to provide free legal aid mainly for women. The organization covers 17 provinces and also has mobile clinics to reach the remote areas in the country. Another organization funded by Denmark is Afghan Women's Network (AWN) that has member organizations in 29 provinces. AWN promotes women's participation in the Peace Jirga and elections through awareness raising and workshops, and trains new female MPs. (Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs & Ministry of Defence 2011, 77-79.)

## **FINLAND**

In 2010 the Finnish NGOs were supported with around 2 million € by the Finnish state. Currently there are eight Finnish NGOs involved with Afghanistan, including The Finnish Red Cross, KIOS (The Finnish NGO Foundation for Human Rights), The Women Journalists in Finland, and four Christian organizations. Finland gives support to Afghan Women's Network (AWN).

The Women Journalists in Finland has realized a training project for Afghan female journalists. The Learning Together-project (2009-2011) included training courses in Kabul that were planned according to the participants' needs. In August 2011 eight female journalists took part in the final seminar of the project in Helsinki. Operation Mobilisation, one of the Christian organizations working in Afghanistan, has supported health education for women in the province of Nangarhar. The project encouraged school teachers to provide health education, and around 800 women and mothers-to-be took part in lessons about hygiene, nutrition and safe home births. The organization also distributes nutrition supplements for malnourished children, and has established women's self-help groups in different villages. (Mäkinen 2010, 57-59.)

## **ICELAND**

Apparently there are no Icelandic NGOs in Afghanistan, but the country has supported NGO PARSА that helps women and children in vulnerable positions, namely widows, orphans and fatherless children.

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<sup>16</sup> For more information, see [www.dacaar.org](http://www.dacaar.org).

## **NORWAY**

The governmental support to Norwegian NGOs amounted to 134 million NOK (ca. 15,2 million €) in 2009, the local NGOs receiving an additional 10 million NOK (ca. 1,14 million €).<sup>17</sup> The main Norwegian actors are the Norwegian Afghanistan Committee (NAC), the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) and the Norwegian Church Aid (NCA), all of them having programs that focus on improving women's situation in Afghanistan.<sup>18</sup> Like Denmark and Finland, Norway is supporting Afghan Women's Network (AWN).

NAC has been present in Afghanistan already for three decades, and a separate women's committee forms a part of the organizational structure. The organization has two programs for training and deploying midwives in rural areas in the Kunar and Wardak provinces. An Additional Hospital Midwifery Program runs in Nangarhar. NAC also assist The Afghan Midwife Association (AMA) in building up its organizational capacity. Other programs of NAC worth of mentioning here are literacy and life skills training projects for women that had//with around 700 participants, who took part in a six-month basic literacy training. (NAC 2010, 15-21.)

NRC has been present in Afghanistan since 2002, and its engagement has been recently reviewed by Nordic Consulting Group (Lexow et al. 2011). NRC provides legal assistance, emergency and permanent housing, education and training for returnees, internally displaced persons, and vulnerable host communities. NRC is promoting women's access to justice through programs on gender-based violence and family law and inheritance matters. The NRC program Information Counselling and Legal Assistance in Afghanistan deals increasingly with family law and women's rights issues. The new Prevention and Response to Gender Based Violence project was launched in 2010, but according to the review team the project has been plagued with start-up difficulties. (Lexow et al. 2011, 22-24.)

## **SWEDEN**

The Swedish Committee for Afghanistan (SCA) has been working in Afghanistan since the early 1980's and is currently operating in 18 provinces. The organization is mainly funded by Sida, the budget for 2010-2013 being 233 million SEK (ca. 24 million €). SCA's work includes a health program with the training of community midwives and nurses, school health, capacity development in reproductive health and child health, and HIV/AIDS prevention. SCA also supports the institutional development of the Afghanistan Midwife Association. SCA has also participated in inter-organizational work on gender, establishing a Human rights and Gender Unit with four full-time staff members.

In addition, Sweden supports Women for Afghan Women and their Family Guidance Center project in Mazar-e Sharif.

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<sup>17</sup> Norad, [www.norad.no/en/Countries/Asia+and+Oceania/Afghanistan](http://www.norad.no/en/Countries/Asia+and+Oceania/Afghanistan) (accessed 4.9.2011).

<sup>18</sup> See also GENDER-agreements of the Norwegian Embassy in Kabul, [http://www.norway.org.af/News\\_and\\_events/development/agreements/agreements/](http://www.norway.org.af/News_and_events/development/agreements/agreements/) (accessed 17.6.2011).

## CONCLUSIONS

The work for advancing the objectives of UNSCR 1325 in the Nordic countries involves a wide range of actors, ranging from the diplomacy and the governmental agencies responsible for development cooperation to the institutions providing training for the personnel in international military and police missions. The role of research and Nordic non-governmental organizations is also not without significance in following up the progress of implementing the UNSCR 1325. All the relevant actors should be provided with adequate resources for working with UNSCR 1325, and more effective monitoring mechanisms are to be developed.

Regarding the Nordic activities in Afghanistan, despite the relatively strong investment in the country, the goals that Nordic countries are aiming at remain somewhat unclear. Hence, they should formulate clear and realistic goals in regard to gender activities in Afghanistan, and develop strategies to achieve them. This relates to the policy dialogue and development programs alike. The Joint Gender Action Initiative forms a good basis for strengthening Nordic cooperation and for more targeted activities in promoting gender equality and women's rights. The initiative enables Nordic countries to have a stronger voice on gender issues, and the distribution of responsibilities can relieve the workload for each country. However, it should be ensured that the initiative is developed further and does not remain at the level of general formulations.

In the field of development cooperation, considerations on gender have guided the Nordic countries significantly longer than e.g. in the area of military activities. However, the openness for UNSCR 1325 does not mean that its objectives are effectively integrated. For example, gender is understood as a cross-cutting issue for the Nordic development efforts, but how are the even-handed distribution of resources between men and women and women's participation guaranteed in different development programs? In the Nordic NGOs engaging in humanitarian work and development projects gender mainstreaming seems to be a surprisingly new phenomenon.

Research activities concerning Afghanistan and UNSCR 1325 should be encouraged. More critical research on Afghanistan is needed not only in order to guide Nordic and other international donors with their actions, but also to provide information of the actors themselves. The international community calls for transparency and efficiency from the Afghan side, but also the Nordic donors should carefully follow up where the allocated funds go to, what is done with them and what kind of impacts the projects have on the lives of Afghan women and men. The figures and numbers do not tell us about the quality of education and health programs, or about the changes in attitudes in relation to gender equality.

In the past years international military operations, including ISAF, have received a lot of attention in Nordic research projects. This is very important work, as the military has traditionally been a masculine space and the ideas of gender mainstreaming are quite new there. It should be emphasized that implementing UNSCR 1325 cannot be reduced to the mere representation of women in international operations. Currently Sweden seems to lead the way in gender mainstreaming and training on gender issues both in military and civilian crisis management, and is making good use of gender advisers and gender focal points in Afghanistan. However, with the ongoing and future research projects in mind, police and the justice sector should receive more attention in the Afghan context. For example, there is no information of the efficiency of gender

mainstreaming in EUPOL or in the training of Afghan police forces. The development of the justice sector is however crucial when fighting against violence against women. In the long run, if and when the international troops will leave Afghanistan behind, the long-term development work and reconstruction process with international aid continues, and these efforts should be of interest to Nordic researchers.

The key recommendations include:

1. There is an apparent need for more critical research both on gender in Afghanistan and on the activities of the Nordic countries in promoting women's rights and gender equality. A joint Nordic research project could bring together the expertise on gender and Afghanistan of all the five countries, and the already existing networks could be made use of for the project, e.g. The Finnish 1325 Network has independent members from the academia and there is also a 1325 research network in Norway. The research topics could include e.g. the development of the police and justice sector in Afghanistan and/or the long-term development efforts and the qualitative dimensions of development programs.
2. The expertise and knowledge of UNSCR 1325 in the Nordic countries should be identified (cf. the mapping study of Solhjell in Norway). This would not only cover the institutions responsible for the implementation of UNSCR 1325, but also the persons who possess experience in working with the UNSCR 1325, e.g. Nordic gender advisers from international missions, civil servants, researchers, civil society activists etc. Locating knowledge would help the monitoring processes and research projects in the future.
3. The progress of Joint Gender Action Initiative of Nordic embassies in Kabul should be followed up by all the relevant Nordic actors involved with the UNSCR 1325.
4. The most important evaluator for the Nordic actions is the Afghan people. Even though Afghanistan is a challenging environment for promoting gender equality and women's rights due to the history of oppression of women and the lack of general security, gender issues should not get compromised. Ensuring women's participation in the peace process is one of the key objectives of UNSCR 1325, and in regard to this the Nordic countries among the entire international community should prove their commitment to UNSCR 1325.

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